Witnessing Whiteness

Hauerwas *&* Cone and the Challenge of Black Theology for Postliberal Ecclesiology

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Dedicated to Mojo

Preface

In November of 2014 I submitted a proposal for a dissertation on James Cone and Stanley Hauerwas that did not contain the word "race." I did not talk about racism, blackness, or whiteness. I was interested in the relationship between the theological concepts of "church" and "world" and the implications that particular configurations of this relationship hold for ordinary church practices. The project argued that current political theology and Christian ethical disputes pivot on the concept of church and world, and it proposed to move beyond the stale debates that dominated the discourse and generate a productive ecclesiology attune to the failures of the past while informing reimagined church practices. I identified Cone and Hauerwas as not only (arguably) the most prominent American Protestant theological ethicists of the latter half of the 20th century, but the most significant representatives of the two dominant strands of American Protestant Christian ethics post-Niebuhr: the Traditionalist/Postliberal strand and the Liberationist. Their ostensibly oppositional conceptions of the relationship between church and world, therefore, provided a framework for analytical, critical, and constructive ecclesiological work. Yet, no part of my 2,000 word proposal featuring the founder of black liberation theology ever approached the topic of race as ingredient to an ecclesiology of the American church.

Ten days later a grand jury in Ferguson, Missouri failed to indict white police officer Darren Wilson in the shooting death of black teenager Michael Brown. This sparked nation-wide controversy and protests that only grew in intensity following the high profile deaths of unarmed African Americans like Eric Garner, Walter Scott, Samuel DuBose, and Sandra Bland, among many others, at the hands of law enforcement. A national movement grew, taking the name Black Lives Matter and developing a new racial consciousness that some called a new civil rights movement. White theologians were slow to respond, and floundered in their responses—or lack of responses—to a fraught situation.

In the spring of 2015 a research project of over three years resulted in the publication of *Kingdom Politics*, which I co-wrote with my research partner Sam Speers. Over the course of our research into the political practices of five congregations we kept returning to our experiences at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, the home of Martin Luther King, Jr. From the rather sectarian presuppositions with which I began this project, I had emerged,

through observation of this church and conversation with church leaders, to gain greater appreciation for the ways faith and politics blended seamlessly in the life and mission of this congregation. The history of this church as a distinctly black church—and therefore its necessity of political involvement from its very inception as the community center of its black neighborhood—contextualized my abstract conception of "church" and "world" in ways that made me aware of the racially-coded character of my theological presuppositions.

Later, that summer, I sat on the front porch of my neighbor's house, drinking sweet tea in the summer evening heat and listening as he recalled stories of his civil rights efforts in the 1950s. I had moved across the street from Eugene Williams, a local civil rights hero who along with his wife had helped to integrate the neighborhood in 1957 and was instrumental in desegregating the Charlottesville School System. He lamented how the lack of support from local white congregations in these new anti-racism efforts mirrored their absence 60 years ago.

Later that fall, I sat in my Evangelical, charismatic church worship service and listened as the white pastor of our congregation—one of the most ethnically integrated congregations in the city—called white Christians (not only those who lived on the wrong side of the civil rights struggles in the 50s and 60s, but those of us born well after the Voting Rights and Civil Rights Acts) to repent of our collective sins of slavery, segregation, and racism.

In light of these experiences, it became increasingly difficult to think of church and world in the abstract terms with which I had set out. Even if I attempted to link these theoretical concepts to actual church practices, my analysis would still remain aloof from the concrete realities that a large portion of church members and public citizens face from America's original sin. And, thus, far too slowly I came to realize that the story of the church in America is really the story of race. And the conceptual configuration of the relationship of the church (or churches) to the world (or publics existing outside of and overlapping the ecclesial institution) is determined by the story of race and racism in the American church.

As I turned back to my two theological interlocutors, I noticed for the first time the hesitancy of Hauerwas to write about race—and the significance of the reasons he offers for not doing so. I not only began to think about the significance of a theological ethicist like Hauerwas avoiding this issue, but also the ways this reticence might shape the theologies of other white scholars. Hauerwas and Cone, thus, remained prominent thinkers in two important strands of Protestant ethics and approaches to ecclesiology for me. But perhaps more importantly Hauerwas became one of the most prominent representatives of the tendency among many white Traditionalist theologians to avoid an issue that certainly guides their theologies like a subaquatic rudder shifting unnoticed beneath the surface of their work. I realized, as my research into Hauerwas grew, that I had done the same thing I was beginning to accuse him of

doing—evading any dealings with race and failing to see the integral role race must play in any account of ecclesiology in the American context.

If Hauerwas did not suffer from colorblindness, his elision of the issue had the same effect. Yet, I do know that I did. This explained why for years I had resisted the systemic racial reasons offered to me for social problems like poverty. Growing up, I remember my extended family and friends using the n-word—and I'm sure I did too. I went to a small town high school where the lunchroom remained self-segregated by race, and my church was almost completely white. I remember my discomfort in realizing that I was the only white student going to summer camp with the high school basketball team. I recall laughing at racist jokes and concluding that the homeless black folks I served dinner to at the local soup kitchen with my all-white youth group must be homeless simply because they were lazy. Thus, what began as a straight-forward comparative ecclesiologies project developed into one that identifies the common ground of Cone's and Hauerwas's ecclesiologies—the shared concepts and commitments—as the material from which to construct an argument for racial reconciliation. This dissertation draws on these shared ecclesiological resources to argue for the church as a site of costly racial reconciliation.

This dissertation is also an immensely personal project—an investigation into the reasons for and ways to overcome this elision, this inability to see the effects of my own color. It is an act of education, of reflection, even confession. I am writing this dissertation about this topic because James Cone told me to do so. He said that he wanted white theologians to write about race and white supremacy, and that if we did, he would tell us when we got it wrong. I therefore humbly submit this project not only to my committee, but also to Cone, open to critique and correction, as a humble offering in the hopes of furthering the cause to which he has devoted his life.

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Abbreviations

(For books by Cone and Hauerwas that will be referenced often in this dissertation I will use the following abbreviations after their first citation.)

James Cone Works

BTBP	*Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969).
BTL	*A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970).
SB	*The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).
GO	*God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).
FMP	*For My People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984).
MSLB	*My Soul Looks Back* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).
MMA	*Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).
ST	*Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986).
CLT	*The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

Stanley Hauerwas Works

VV	*Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1974).
TT	*Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977).
CC	*A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
PK	*The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).
CET	*Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1988).
WW	*Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).
STT	*Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).
BH	*A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Postmodernity, and America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000).
HR	*The Hauerwas Reader*, eds. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

PTF   *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004).

CDR   *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversation Between a Radical Democrat and a Christian,* with Romand Coles (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008).

HC   *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010).

ATE   *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013).

Abstract

This dissertation argues for racial reconciliation as an integral matter of political ecclesiology. Accounts of the church, the church's politics, or its public witness that fail to address the ways the church has been shaped and shapes the world by this history of racial harm risks offering incomplete, disordered, untrue, and harmful assessments and prescriptions. Drawing on the common resources of Stanley Hauerwas and James Cone, I propose a model of costly reconciliation that attends to the complexities of reconciliation noted above, yet locates that process of reconciliation within the church community. This dissertation appeals to white theologians like Hauerwas to suggest that blindnesses to our own whiteness inflect the character of our theology and ecclesiology and train us to either avoid the issue of race or seek a cheap form of reconciliation that projects our selves too easily onto others. This dissertation contends that white Christian avoidance of the difficulty of race including the promulgation of a culture of colorblindness are strategies of abstraction that only enable and perpetuate white supremacy. Colorblindness not only signals the pretense of white people that they "do not see color" and occludes the realities of race behind a veil of universality; it is the projection of white people's uninterrogated whiteness universally onto other particular bodies, persons, and communities. Only sustained and critical attention to our whiteness will permit the type of reconciliation that seeks to repair not only relationships, but also the power structures that oppress those perceived to have color. To those on the other side, skeptical of calls for racial reconciliation, it argues for a costly and chastened form of reconciliation consistent with the liberatory aims of black theology, while recognizing the difficulty of such work. To do this it turns to the church, identified with the wounded Body of Christ, as the site suited for practices of racial reconciliation.

In order to make this ecclesial context and argument more concrete Part I offers a close reading of the ecclesiologies of the two most prominent representatives of these threads: Stanley Hauerwas and James Cone. I argue that both theologians draw on the same underlying conceptual themes to shape their visions: the role of story in the formation and mission of the church, the particularity with which the church understands its identity and mission, and the concreteness of its attention to reality and practice in the world. I submit these three sources as resources for the church to better attend to the racial realities of our

time. Part II then analyzes these three resources through a critical assessment of Hauerwas's evasion of race and Cone's proposal for racial reconciliation: that whites can "become black" by siding with the oppressed. I contend that any ecclesiology that takes whiteness and racism seriously and offers any adequate and costly practice of reconciliation must be an embodied ecclesiology that understands the church as the wounded Body of Christ, whose flesh bears the marks of a long history of racial violence. I then argue that an understanding of reconciliation as a kind of conversion is only capable of addressing these fleshly realities and promoting healthy practices of reconciliation, while still maintaining an appropriately tempered outlook on what reconciliation is possible in the wounded Body on this side of the eschaton. Hauerwas and Cone's relentless attention to concrete reality (when they are at their best) and the particular narrative formation of community, identity, and mission provide the resources necessary to sustain a robust vision and practice of ecclesial racial reconciliation. The dissertation concludes with a proposal for practices of memory, confession, and hospitality as essential ecclesial practices for a conversion model of racial reconciliation.

Part i. Avoiding Race | *The White Problem in Christian America*

Chapter One | *Political Ecclesiology & Racial Formation*

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion.[1]

Prologue

In the Gospel of John, Jesus ventures into the "ghetto" of Samaria. The Samaritans were a people of mixed ethnic and religious identity: the descendants of the Jews who were allowed to stay behind during Israel's exile and intermarried with their Assyrian conquerors as well as the Arab colonists that were relocated into Samaria.[2] They built a temple at Mount Gerizim, but when the Hebrew exiles returned from Babylon and rebuilt their temple in Jerusalem, they also destroyed the Samaritan one.[3] Religious outcasts, the Samaritans continued to worship on the "wrong" mountain. Not fully Arab and not fully Jew, in the eyes of Israel they were ethnically inferior. The longstanding hostility between the two peoples reached its height around the time of Jesus. Earlier, in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had to reprimand his disciples for wanting to bring down fire on Samaritan villages.[4]

"Jews do not associate with Samaritans," John tells his readers, so the fact that this Jewish Rabbi then requests a drink from a Samaritan woman at a well would strike John's readers as

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[1] Amos 6:21. *New American Standard Bible* version (all scripture references will be from the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) unless otherwise noted).

[2] See 2 Kings 17:24-41.

[3] Ezra 4:6-24. This is noted in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 165.

[4] Luke 9:51-56. The following commentaries shaped my exegesis of this passage: Gail R. O'Day, *Gospel of John: The New Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) and Gerard Sloyan, *John: Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1988).

[5] This pericope comes from John 4:3-24. I have quoted verse 9 here.

[6] O'Day, 561. The *New International Version* notes this alternate translation.

[7] Ephesians 2:12.

exceedingly unusual.[5] When translated more specifically, John's observation in verse 9 reads, "Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans." Alternate translations of John are even more specific: "Jews do not use the same vessels as Samaritans."[6] Jews were forbidden from touching the same utensils, dishes, or well buckets as Samaritans. Jesus, who was supposed to use the "Jews only" well, violates these customs of segregation, these separate-but-equal requirements.

With one simple action, Jesus breaks through an ethnic dividing wall that had been in place for nearly 500 years. The Apostle Paul picks up on this theme of ethnic reconciliation in much of his epistolary writing to the Gentile Christians. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul focuses explicitly on Jewish–Gentile relations, admonishing the Gentiles, "Remember that at one time you were separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel."[7] But the work of Christ has "made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in his flesh the enmity" between them.[8] Christ has reconciled them, forging one family, one citizenship out of the two groups.[9] The broken and wounded flesh of Christ creates a new body out of two disparate bodies, fusing their multichromatic fleshes into one flesh, and creates a new temple out of this new community–this new body.[10] Similarly, in John 4, Jesus says that the time has come for these two bodies–Jews and Samaritans–to worship together as one body. The woman asks him: "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus replies that a time is coming when Jews and Samaritans will not worship here or Jerusalem. "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."[11]

Worship, for both groups, was tethered to ethnicity. These two ethnic groups, Jews and Samaritans, did not share the same houses of worship. Despite living in such close proximity, their worship hours were the most segregated hours of their weeks. Yet Jesus points to worship as the way toward ethnic and racial reconciliation. Those whose lives of worship are now divided along racial lines will one day worship together in spirit and truth. And it is through this worship that the two groups will be reconciled, remade into one temple, one Body.

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[5] This pericope comes from John 4:3-24. I have quoted verse 9 here.
[6] O'Day, 561. The *New International Version* notes this alternate translation.
[7] Ephesians 2:12.
[8] Ephesians 2:14-15.
[9] Drawing from Ephesians 2:16, 19, 15.
[10] Ephesians 2:21.
[11] John 4:20-24.

It was during a moment of worship that the U.S. recently witnessed an act of profound racial violence. While their eyes were closed in prayer, in the basement of Mother Emmanuel A.M.E., nine African Americans at Bible study were gunned down by a white supremacist hoping to start a race war. "When you get someone new to show up in the middle of the week to church, you are excited. You think, this is our guest and we are going to love on them while they are here," recalled survivor Shirrene Goss.[12] The weekly Bible study began promptly at 7:30. Dylann Roof, the guest, arrived forty-five minutes later and joined them around a couple of tables. "I researched black churches," Roof said in his confession. "It was political."[13] And this seems true, simply by the fact that Roof chose one of the most historically significant churches in the black freedom struggle; a church whose founder was executed for planning a slave revolt, a church that was rebuilt after being burnt to the ground by other white supremacists. Mother Emmanuel had always been a threat to the white status quo. Myra Thompson, who had just been approved for ordination by pastor Clementa Pinckney, led the lesson that night on Jesus' parable in Mark 4 of a farmer who scatters seed; some fall on hard ground, some on rocky soil, some among the thorns. Her lesson concluded shortly after nine. As twelve of the thirteen present bowed their heads for prayer, Roof reached into a satchel for his 45-caliber handgun.

Less than two days later Roof appeared, in black and white jailhouse garb, on a flat-screen monitor in a Charleston courtroom. The judge invited survivors and family members to make statements about the case or to Roof himself. Myra Thompson's husband, Anthony, stepped to the podium and told Roof that he forgave him. As Thompson later explained to journalists surprised by his actions, it was important to forgive as quickly as possible so that he could continue to live. Forgiveness, as he later explained, is like a Band-Aid that holds the edges of an open wound together long enough for the wound to heal. Though he cannot heal what happened to his wife, nor whatever is wrong with the man who killed her, Thompson said he must attend to "the wound inside himself." Journalist David Von Drehle recounts of that day in court: "Not every survivor was on board. For some it was too soon; for others, too simple." In fact, only two out of the nine families offered Roof such instant grace. "Even so, within 36 hours of the killings, and with pain racking their voices, family members stood in a small county courtroom to speak the language of forgiveness."[14]

As Drehle reflects on those sudden pardons, "They took the world by surprise," as well as some of the other families of the victims. For many, forgiveness was still a long ways off.

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[12] David Von Drehle with Jay Newton-Small and Maya Rhodan, "How Do You Forgive a Murder?" *Time* (November 23, 2015). www.time.com/time-magazine-charleston-shooting-cover-story. Most of the following account comes from this article.

[13] Ray Sanchez and Keith O'Shea, "Mass shooter Dylann Roof, with a laugh, confesses 'I did it,'" *CNN*, December 10, 2016. www.cnn.com/2016/12/09/us/dylann-roof-trial-charleston-video/index.html.

[14] Drehle, "How Do You Forgive a Murder?"

Where was the reckoning, the righteous anger, the room to grieve and count the loss? Even more, where was the repentance? As Vincent Lloyd wondered, "Does not the glee with which those quick professions of forgiveness were reported in the white media suggest just how politically and theologically impotent they must be?"[15] One family member worried that the opportunity for real change in the aftermath of the Charleston shooting has been "smothered in a blanket of forgiveness." Forgiveness can become an excuse to avoid difficult dialogue and action. "Complex beliefs were flattened and volcanic anguish neutralized as a way of avoiding the ugly implications of racist violence," says Rev. Waltrina Middleton, cousin of murdered DePayne Middleton Doctor. Forgiveness is a formula skewed in favor of the offender, the oppressor. Bernard Powers, a professor of history at the College of Charleston reflected on that day in court: "Forgiveness is a very complicated phenomenon. It's easy to say, 'Let's get over the past.' But you can't say that when the past is a part of who you are." [16]

Now, certainly, forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness does not require repentance and Dylann Roof infamously refused to repent for his actions. Yet, the complexities of forgiveness in this recent history—the Christian impulse toward forgiving those who wrong you on one side, and the concern of cheap, simple, and impotent forgiveness on the other—signal the same complexities for the broader task of reconciliation; in Lloyd's words, "a refusal of easy explanations."[17]

How do we seek reconciliation in the midst of a country once again burning with racial violence? The call to racial reconciliation is simultaneously a sign of hope and a reason for concern. For Christians the biblical and theological imperative is strong, yet attempts at reconciliation have often left minority groups devastated by the colonialist impulses, epistemological blindnesses, and hesitations of those in power. These two stories illustrate both the hope and difficulty of reconciliation. Though 2,000 years apart these illustrations suggest remarkably similar contexts of racial privilege and oppression, yet signal the continued complexities and dangers of race, religion, and reconciliation. Reconciliation will be achieved through the worshipping community of God, Jesus proclaims, yet it is this very worshipping community that has so often witnessed the devastating effects of our racial formation. Divided along ethnic lines in much the same way as the Jews and Gentiles in the first century, the American church today is both the victim and the perpetrator of racial violence. It would appear to be far from the ideal setting for processes of racial reconciliation.

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[15] Vincent Lloyd, "Introduction," *In the Shadow of Charleston: Politics, Religion, and White Supremacy* (*Syndicate Theology*, July 19, 2015), www.syndicate.network/symposia/theology/in-the-shadow-of-charleston.

[16] Drehle, "How Do You Forgive a Murder?"

[17] Lloyd, *In the Shadow of Charleston*.

M. Shawn Copeland is surely right that the actions of those Charleston families who so quickly forgave a white terrorist is a summons to all of us to "concrete actions that confront" racism–actions "for justice and truth."[18] Yet what are those concrete actions? Despite the apparent relative ease of grace and forgiveness we have witnessed capable of some, others find reconciliation impossible. Often those of us on the privileged, empowered, and oppressive side of the relationship long for a quick reconciliation without the painful and sacrificial work of reckoning with the past and repairing the future. Others recognize the sacrifice that has already been bled from those on the underside of oppression and know that a cheap reconciliation is no reconciliation at all. Racial reconciliation is more costly after Emmanuel. *This is our guest and we are going to love on them while they are here.* Emmanuel's embrace of reconciliation cost them nine lives.

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1 Thesis *&* Argument of the Dissertation

1.1 Thesis

In this dissertation I argue for racial reconciliation as an integral matter of political ecclesiology. Drawing on the common resources of Stanley Hauerwas and James Cone, I propose a model of costly reconciliation that attends to the complexities of reconciliation noted above, yet locates that process of reconciliation within the church community. This dissertation appeals to white theologians like Hauerwas to suggest that blindnesses to our own whiteness inflect the character of our theology and ecclesiology and train us to either avoid the issue of race or seek a cheap form of reconciliation that projects our selves too easily onto others. Only sustained and critical attention to our whiteness will permit the type of reconciliation that seeks to repair not only relationships, but also the power structures that oppress those perceived to have color. And to those skeptical of calls for racial reconciliation, it argues for a costly and chastened form of reconciliation consistent with the liberatory aims of black theology, while recognizing the difficulty of such work. To do this it turns to the church, identified with the wounded Body of Christ, as the site suited for practices of racial reconciliation.

1.2 Contours of the Argument

As I noted in the preface, I originally planned to address the configuration of church and world in the thought of representatives of the two most prominent threads in Christian ethics today. I contended, and still do, that current political theology and Christian ethics disputes pivot on the relationship of church and world. However, I quickly discovered that one cannot adequately address the church's relationship with the world, its political and missional

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[18] M. Shawn Copeland, "Overcoming Christianity's Lingering Complicity," *In the Shadow of Charleston: Politics, Religion, and White Supremacy* (*Syndicate Theology*, July 19, 2015).

ecclesiology, without reckoning with the church's own originary brokenness: its broken mission and witness, failure of responsibility, disoriented politics, and relationship of hostility with or isolation from the world. This means that one cannot do ecclesiology without closely examining the role of race. The church's original debates and disagreements were over Gentile inclusion, over becoming a multi-ethic community.[19] And this primal division has inflicted the church, and the church has inflicted it on the world, ever since. Therefore, accounts of the church, the church's politics or public witness, or the church's engagement with society, culture, and the world that fail to address the ways the church is shaped by this sordid history of racial relations risk offering incomplete, disordered, untrue, and harmful assessments and prescriptions.

This dissertation contends that white Christian avoidance of the difficulty of race, including the promulgation of a culture of colorblindness, are strategies of abstraction that only enable and perpetuate white supremacy. Colorblindness not only signals the pretense of (mostly white) people that they "do not see color" and hides the realities of race behind a veil of universality. More specifically, colorblindness hides white people from seeing that they also have a color. Colorblindness, therefore, is the projection of white people's uninterrogated whiteness universally onto other particular bodies, persons, and communities. It permits white people to refuse awareness of our own racial formation, that is, from understanding the ways in which whiteness infiltrates and inflects the whole of our lives—our social networks, political positions, religious beliefs, and postures toward those with different skin tones.[20] White Christians and theologians often fail to understand the ways whiteness narrows our vision, shields us from social and theological wounds, and renders invisible other particular bodies.

Any attempts at reconciliation must, therefore, contest strategies of and tendencies toward abstraction, and instead attend to the concrete realities of racialized life in an era of colorblindness. For Christians, this means locating reconciliation in practices of the concrete embodiment of Christ the Reconciler—in the Body of Christ, the church. But this also means recognizing that the Body of Christ is wounded and scarred. The church has not only ignored racism and white supremacy, but itself inflicts racial damage. It is only through concrete practices of remembrance, repentance, and repair that reconciliation will be possible. Stanley Hauerwas and James Cone will serve as interlocutors throughout this argument, and I will say more about that in the next section. But for now, Hauerwas offers a prominent example of the white strategies of avoidance I noted above—theological and ecclesiological. And despite his and Cone's adoption of a narrative structure to theology, as well as rejection of universal

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[19] Acts 15:1-35.

[20] Racial formation is a termed coined by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States, from the 1960s to the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 1994), and employed by M. Shawn Copeland critically. For more on racial formation see chapter five.

rationality and abstract ethics, both open the door for abstractions that veer away from the embodied realities of race and racial oppression. Appealing to their better ecclesiological insights, I argue for an ecclesially-based process of racial reconciliation, a process of deep and costly racial conversion.

This argument takes place within the broader context of ecclesial formation. I investigate the ways white Christians have been theologically formed to think about, engage, or avoid issues of race in and by our faith communities and theological communities. I then propose the nascent patterns of an alternative ecclesial formation, one that engages with the issues, history, and complicity with race and racism by seeking to address some of the complicated aspects of this task and searching for new church practices to generate a deep and costly racial reconciliation. In calling for formative practices of racial reconciliation, I am suggesting the formation of a people—a polity. Here the work of Stanley Hauerwas to conceptualize the church as a polis is instructive. It is a polis oriented by who or what it worships, as all political communities are, as Augustine tells us.[21] The church on the way of reconciliation is therefore a polis ordered by its common commitment to the God of the oppressed, the God who calls people of all tribes, nations, and tongues together.[22] And it worships a God who desires the dividing wall that separates and stratifies according to race and ethnicity to be torn down, while also not negating difference.

The dissertation attempts to insert the issue of race into the center of the field of ecclesiology, especially for white ecclesiologists that tend to neglect it. As evident from its troubled ethnic beginnings, much about the church's practices, liturgy, mission, witness, and politics pivot on the church's division and hostility along ethnic lines. What is most striking considering the perpetual significance of this issue is its lack of treatment both in academic ecclesiology and in the practice of churches. Even in this moment of "racial awakening" that some are calling a new civil rights movement, the silence of white churches and white theologians is deafening. Yet, as Toni Morrison says, "invisible things are not necessarily 'not there.'"[23] Some absences

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[21] Arguing against the established concept of a *polis* as a community bound by only justice, Augustine claims that "a 'people' is an assembled multitude of rational creatures bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their loves. In this case, if we are to discover the character of any people, we have only to examine what it loves" (*The City of God*, Book XIX, chapter 24, ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Commenting on Augustine, James K. A. Smith adds, "Our ultimate love is what defines us, what makes us the kind of people we are. In short, it is what we worship" (*Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: MI, 2009), 87).

[22] Revelation 7:9.

[23] Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *The Black Feminist Reader*, ed. Joy James & T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 34.

signal; some evasions call attention to themselves. The silence of so many points to an often invisible and implicit racism masquerading as colorblindness.

2 Church & Race in Christian Ethics and Political Theology

In order to make this silence all the more audible, and to make these mistakes and evasions concrete, I will narrow the focus of this work to two theologians, Stanley Hauerwas and James Cone. In this section I will outline the ways in which my focus on these two thinkers allows me to intervene within the larger fields of Christian ethics and political theology and make proposals for how to better address crippling omissions, tensions, and impasses in these areas. That is, I will offer an account of the state of the field and the crucial questions this dissertation addresses and aims it seeks. In section three of this opening chapter I will offer an account of the state of the church, and cultural trends more broadly, in relation to changing racial demographics and dynamics. I will provide the context for my proposal for reconciliation by addressing the challenges of whiteness and the ways whiteness obscures efforts to concretely and constructively attend to racial wounds. Section four more directly addresses the complexities and difficulties of racial reconciliation by assessing recent criticisms of the project of racial reconciliation. After charting the landscape of this dissertation, academically in section two and practically in sections three and four, the final section five briefly comments on the methodology this dissertation employs in order to make its arguments and proposals.

2.1 Tradition and Liberation in Christian Ethics

2.1.1 A Genealogy of Division

Cone and Hauerwas have not often been treated together in the same scholarly work. Yet I have chosen these two to help distill the arguments and narrative of this dissertation for several reasons that help to clarify the contributions this dissertation proposes to make to these broader fields of Christian ethics and political theology, as well as the current theological conversation about race and white supremacy. I will appeal to the importance of Hauerwas and Cone to highlight the current state of these fields as well as the interventions I hope to make within them. These two theologians best represent the two most significant contemporary threads of Christian ethics and political theology, and have done so for the past half-century. These threads may go by a number of different names that would all denote slightly different yet overlapping circles of scholars, methods, and aims. I will identify these threads as post-liberalism (though this also references a scholarly group or movement that has been called the New Traditionalists[24] or neo-Anabaptists,[25] with slight modifications) and

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[24] Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[25] Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

liberation theology (including feminism, Latin American liberation, queer theology, and of course most significant for this project, black liberation theology.)[26] I contend that these threads have maintained dominance in the field for the past fifty years. At the turn of the 20th century, as Roman Catholics had made a shift to the social encyclicals, Protestant theologians in America also began connecting Evangelical fervor to social transformation. Social Gospel theologians, exemplified best by Walter Rauschenbush, a Baptist pastor in Hell's Kitchen, New York, envisioned a process of "Christianizing the social order" to "redeem the permanent institutions of human society from their inherited guilt of oppression and extortion."[27] These aims were short-lived, however, undercut by forceful critiques from the Christian Realists. This theological paradigm is exemplified best in the American context by the Niebuhr brothers, who, acknowledging the futility of attempting to convert a social order irrevocably mired in sin—a perpetually "immoral society"—held a more chastened expectation for the approximations of love and transformation that Christians could achieve in the world.[28] This

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[26] A note on categorizing these threads. First for Hauerwas: The label New Traditionalist connotes both an inheritance of Roman Catholicism and a debt to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre on the concept of "tradition." Stout includes scholars like MacIntyre, John Milbank, and Hauerwas in this group. Neo-Anabaptist signals less the emphasis on "tradition" and more a focus on the distinctive "witness" of the church and an understanding of the church's radical separation from the world. Hunter focuses most specifically on Yoder and Hauerwas when he employs the term. Postliberal best signals the genealogy of this mode of theological thought, invoking the Yale School of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, and focuses more exclusively on Hauerwas as their inheritor both prior to and in conjunction with his partnerships with MacIntyre and Yoder. For Cone: liberation theology signals the broad scholarly grouping that found itself dissatisfied with the quietism and gradualism of Realism and coupled itself to actual movements of resistance and opposition to empire and oppression. According to Dwight Hopkins, Cone's 1969 *Black Theology and Black Power* was the very first book written in the world on liberation theology (*Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 4). Though it was contextual and particularly focused on the situation of African Americans in the U.S., Cone's book birthed the larger movement. Cone's focus began exclusively with a focus on the liberation of African Americans—and even within that a strongly masculine tone. Liberation theologies in Latin America, feminism, and queer theologies began simultaneously, though in many ways independently. While they maintained similar structures, themes, and methodologies, they did not interact or integrate initially. However, in his later works, Cone has extended his vision to include other liberation theologies, especially at the prodding of black womanist theologians.

[27] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1917), 5. See also the following works by Rauschenbusch: *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1907), *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1912). Many consider Washington Gladden the founding father of the Social Gospel. His 1877 book, *The Christian Way: Whither It Leads and How to Go On*, preceded Rauschenbusch by several years.

[28] See especially, Reinhold Niebuhr: *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2002, orig. 1932); *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943); *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944); and *The Irony of American History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952). The best consolidated collection of Reinhold Niebuhr's works is *Reinhold Niebuhr: Major Works on Religion and Politics: Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, Moral*

expectation entailed measures of proximate justice achieved through morally ambiguous political action. Yet shortly after mid-century, in the wake of U.S. imperial aspirations abroad and growing resistance and justice movements as home, this Realist theology generated two key responses signaling, what Luke Bretherton calls, a "seismic shift" in Christian ethics.[29]

Christian liberationists who were unsatisfied with the Realists' gradualism recalibrated the Realist paradigm toward a more activist posture, underscoring the overcoming of oppression for the poor and marginalized as the core mission of Christianity. Underscoring a deficient call to action within the Realist's realism, as well as its coupling to American democracy,[30] liberation theologians turned to communities of resistance as the site for theological generation and issued a call similarly tethered to social and political expediency, yet promoting a more hopeful and grassroots message of human flourishing.[31] For these theologians, Christian theology was in service of liberating the poor and oppressed from the yokes of oppression and injustice. The gospel is the good news of liberation to the poor and

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Man and Immoral Society, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, The Irony of American History, Other Writings [Writings on Current Events 1928-1967, Prayers, Sermons and Lectures on Faith and Belief], ed. by Elisabeth Sifton (New York: Library of America/Literary Classics of the United States, 2016). For H. Richard Niebuhr see especially: T*he Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1929), *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952, orig. 1937); *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951); and *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1963).

[29] Luke Bretherton writes, "Black Liberation Theology heralded a seismic shift in Protestant social ethics and the use of Christian Realism as a dominant framework for thinking about political and social questions. From Cone's work onwards, liberationist paradigms, of one sort or another, because increasingly normative in North American liberal Protestant circles and determinative points of reference and critique in others" (Bretherton, "Exorcising Democracy: The Theo-Political Challenge of Black Power," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* vol. 38 no.1 (2018), forthcoming).

[30] Reinhold Niebuhr wrote in *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness,* "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary" (xxxii).

[31] Though originating with Black Liberation Theology, liberation theologies and ethics expanded quickly in diversity and global reach. This included Latin American liberation theologies of the poor. The most prominent of these is Gustavo Gutierrez. See especially his groundbreaking *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988, orig. 1973). For a more comprehensive historical picture see: Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987) and Miguel A. De La Torre, *Handbook on U.S. Theologies of Liberation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004). It also included feminist theologies, beginning with the work of Mary Daly, especially *The Church and the Second Sex* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), as well Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza who founded the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. More recently is the emergence of Queer Theologies, see especially the early works of John Michael Clark and Marcella Althaus-Reid, and Womanist Theology, pioneered by Dolores Williams, Alice Walker, Katie Canon, and Jacquelyn Grant. This dissertation will appeal to key works specifically in Black Liberation Theology throughout.

oppressed, and the Christian community exists only insofar as it works actively to secure this liberation.

Likewise, the postliberals attempted to correct for what they saw as an accommodation to the culture of liberalism and its fragmentary pretensions to universality and individualist, along with a thin Christology and sense of community in the Realists. They also countered with a strong communitarian commitment, especially in terms of epistemology to the communal-dependence of experience and thought, a cultural-linguistic understanding of tradition. Postliberalism highlights the community as a coherent and integrated sociality constituted by its own distinctive practices, and funded by particular patterns of language use that grant the community a way of interpreting its foundational narrative into those practices.[32] For them, this entailed a high ecclesiology that imagined politics as located first within the church community. In the words of George Lindbeck, the church community is "a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought," he argues. "It is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals . . . and just as a culture has both cognitive and behavioral dimensions, so it is also in the case of a religious tradition."[33]

Brian Bantum helpfully describes the two threads as two projects of theological and ecclesiological reclamation within ethics and political theology. He claims, "Contemporary theological projects have either sought to reassert the value of the dark body, the native or ethnic body, the female body, *or* reclaim the intellectual proclamations of a 'tradition' that

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[32] At its most insular and bounded, this is an insistence that all meaning is contingent upon a community's convention without any correspondence to an external or empirical (read "natural") law or truth. In ways important to this dissertation, postliberal hermeneutics help to identify the socially constructed and particular character moral claims. For a thorough treatment of postliberal hermeneutics see Mark Randall James, "The Beginning of Wisdom: On the Postliberal Interpretation of Scripture" *Modern Theology* vol. 33 no. 1 (January 2017) 9-30, as well as that entire issue which is dedicated to postliberalism.

[33] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 168. As another prime example of the foundation of postliberalism see also Hans Frei, T*he Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974). For account of this movement see William C. Placher, "Postliberal Theology" in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell Publishing, 1997) and George Hunsinger, "Postliberal Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a critical overview of this history see James M. Gustafson, "Just what is 'postliberal' theology" *Christian Century* vol. 116 no. 10 (1999): 353-355 and Paul Dehart, *The Trial of Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

had been seemingly abandoned."[34] His categories correspond to the two threads I invoked above. Postliberalism, an important representative of the "tradition" paradigm, is a return to or retrieval of what came before liberalism, namely, tradition, orthodoxy, and community (and for Hauerwas practices and virtue as well). Liberation theology seeks to retrieve the embodied and prophetic characteristics of the gospel that have slipped out amid the persistence of Docetic tendencies in western, individualized conceptions of the gospel.[35] Yet Bantum quickly identifies the problematic tendencies of these reclamation projects, arguing, "Consequently, theology (and the church) exhibits two related and perhaps necessary, but distinctly problematic, tendencies to the modern condition: disembodiment of ideas or an idealization of a body."[36] The "tradition" paradigm becomes a process of abstraction, he worries, that "deifies the intellect (and certain bodies) and dehumanizes those bodies that cannot enter into the salvific dialogue of the transcendent." The "body" paradigm, on the other hand, glorifies "the lived experience of particular peoples that idealizes their own image" within the body of Christ.[37] Importantly, these are two paradigms of theological formation (ideas versus bodies) that have also influenced polarized developments within the church as well. In fact, he contends that these two threads have "marked the theological trajectories before the contemporary church."[38] The church then is left with the seemingly exclusive pastoral options of focusing on bodies or minds, or souls depending on the Evangelical character of the community. With this historical and theological context in mind, this dissertation aims to address three particular tensions within these fields: the church/world impasse in political theology more broadly, the evasion of race in white postliberal and communitarian ethics, and the role of the church and reconciliation in liberation theologies.

2.1.2 Church and World

This division observed by Bantum corresponds to divergent ways of envisioning the relationship of church and world. As I mentioned, this distinction between a bounded or porous relationship between church and world drives, chastens, or shapes the contours of much work within the fields of Christian ethics and political theology.[39] As Baptist theologian

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[34] Brian Bantum, *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 1-2.

[35] It is interesting that postliberalism and the liberation theology of James Cone both owe a debt to Karl Barth and the primogenitor of their particular approaches.

[36] Bantum, 2. Bantum identifies James Cone and John Milbank as the best representatives of these trajectories. This work will focus on Cone and Stanley Hauerwas as representatives. I believe that Hauerwas's work has more contemporary influence—especially within church leadership—and more staying power, as well as offers a more nuanced and interesting perspective than Milbank.

[37] Bantum, 7.

[38] Bantum, 3.

[39] This theme runs throughout political theology, often indirectly and articulated in various forms: from church and culture to church and state to sanctification and sin and others. One of the signature volumes on this topic is H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. In most political theology written in

James McClendon put it even more comprehensively, "the church-world relation is intrinsic to Christian existence."[40] This has been the case throughout the history of these fields, with the Social Gospel, Christian Realism, liberation theologies, and postliberalism all positing different accounts of how church and world interact. In many ways this issue imposes an impasse in dialogue, in other ways a prism that identifies the "group" to which a scholar belongs. In Bantum's terms, the tradition paradigm, into which I will include Hauerwas and postliberalism more generally, identifies a strong boundary between church and world. I will deal with this issue later in this project, however it is important to identify here that this does not result in sectarianism as some argue, but it does refuse to consider the ways external and cultural influences and "narratives" affect the church as a distinctive culture founded and guided by a more or less singular Christian narrative. The church influences the world through its witness—not through direct political actions or other means that may compromise this witness—but the world, ideally, does not influence the church. The body paradigm, into which I would place liberation theologies, conceives of a porous boundary between church and world. The same bodies exist in both spaces simultaneously, so the church cannot help but possess a "worldly" character. Cone represents this claim well in his ecclesiology, which will be addressed in chapter four.

A key consequence of this division, and a point at which I hope this dissertation intervenes, is that the bounded ecclesial vision of the traditionalists/postliberals has often blinded them to the multichromatic and racial dimensions of the church. The centripetal attention and focus on a unifying story holding the community together often ignores bodily difference and the ways that bodily and racial formation—both from within church and from "outside" culture—impact the formative character of the church community and its witness. Likewise, the porous

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the past quarter century, Hauerwas and Yoder are posited as vanguards of the sectarian side of the equation, with some of their best direct opposition coming from Kathryn Tanner, Mary McClintock Fulkerson, James Hunter, Charles Mathewes, and Jeffrey Stout. James Cone also has much to say on the topic of church and world, and I will address his thought later in this dissertation. From my perspective, one of the best and most nuanced (even if shifting) accounts of the relationship between church and world is found in the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and I treat that issue in my essay, "The Incarnational Church: Bonhoeffer's Political Ecclesiology of Transformation" in *A Spoke in the Wheel: The Political in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,* ed. Kirsten Busch Nielson, Ralf K. Wustenberg, & Jens Zimmermann (Munich, Germany: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2013). Also, a broader yet direct treatment of this division is found in the work of Johann Baptist Metz, see especially his *Theology of the World* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969). While this issue was an initial driving force for this project and now remains in its framing, I hope to return to the topic more directly in future work.

[40] James McClendon, *Ethics: Systematic Theology* vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 230. In ways that prefigure the turn to practices later in this dissertation, McClendon, a close friend of Hauerwas's before his death, intervenes in this classic church/world dichotomy with the concept of "practices," suggesting that since Christians share in the common practices of the church as well as common practices with neighbors, it is precisely through shared practices that "Christian ways can overflow into the wider society" (*Ethics*, 235).

boundaries of the liberation theologians tend to understate church distinctives and the unifying elements of Christian community. In placing liberation of the oppressed as the encompassing ideal and mission of Christianity, the empirical community and institution of the church is depreciated in relation to other activist communities. Faithfulness is identified with activism, and that is often found more effectively in the "world" rather than in the church. This is certainly true, though the broader threads of connection and implications of the gospel are muddied in a totalizing emphasis on the effectiveness of activism.

2.1.3 The Other and the Body in Communitarian Ethics
In addition to pointing past the church/world impasse in political theology more broadly through attention to the racial dynamics of the church community, I also hope to contribute more specifically to postliberal, traditionalist, and communitarian ethics. In many ways, this dissertation is a work in Hauerwasian ethics—employing Hauerwas to uncover lacunae in his own theological project. On a rhetorical and conceptual register, this means that I will often use a Hauerwasian grammar and will frame points in Hauerwasian terms. On a deeper argumentative register, this means I will argue that race ought to play a larger and more crucial part of Hauerwas's account of the church, as well as those of Hauerwasian followers. One bold aim is to convince Hauerwas supporters—and perhaps the man himself—that Cone and black liberation theology has a lot in common and has much to offer this project. In other words, it aims to demonstrate to Hauerwasians the importance of engaging with theologians like James Cone, who often trade in the same crucial concepts and goals. More generally, race has never enjoyed a prominent role in traditionalist and communitarian ethics, and postliberalism does not often engage with black theology or liberation theology, despite ostensible conceptual connections between them.[41] And, again, I believe this omission renders much of postliberal, traditionalist, and communitarian theology insufficient to its own ends.

In response to the communitarians and traditionalists, I hope to draw attention to the crucial role of bodily difference within their emphasis on the church, by pulling together two significant developments within the field. The first of course, spearheaded by the work of Stanley Hauerwas, who then helped to propel the work of John Howard Yoder into prominence, was the recovery of the church as the prism through which Christian ethical work was reflected.[42] Hauerwas entered into the field typically described as Christian social

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[41] These include like concepts like story-telling and communal particularity, that I will address later in this dissertation..

[42] Hauerwas, on the importance of Yoder for his own work, "Remembering John Howard Yoder," *First Things* (April 1998), www.firstthings.com/article/1998/04/004-remembering-john-howard-yoder. For key works of Yoder see especially *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), and *For the Nations: Essays Evangelical and Public* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997).

ethics, and in this communitarian turn in ethics, redirected its attention to the church as its own "social ethic." Hauerwas was concerned that, under the influence of Christian Realism and now Liberation Theologies of various flavors, the field of ethics had been captivated for too long with resolving social problems which had mitigated the significance of its distinctive theological quality and instead, allowed itself to be instrumentalized in service of questions it was never intended to ask. The church's distinctive witness was lost as a crucial element of Christian ethics, as the field bonded itself to the agenda of liberalism. And as Bantum noted, Hauerwas and Yoder and their disciples have been engaged in a project of recovery over the past several decades. Despite the weight of criticisms that this communitarian emphasis has engendered, they successfully posited the church into the center of the field; meaning that most everyone who now does work in Christian ethics must attend to the reality of the church or explain why they will not do so. In recent years, this "ecclesial turn" has birthed the ecclesiology and ethnography sub-field.[43] Perceiving an omission in the work of Hauerwas and others of empirical research on the church, ethicists and theologians began employing anthropological methodologies to attend to the church as a productive site for theological reflection rather than merely a site for application. This paralleled a similar materialist turn in philosophy and theology more broadly. As one of the leaders of this ethnographic turn, Nicholas Healy, observes, "Over the last decade or so there have been signs of a shift away from the highly systematic and ideal ecclesiologies of the twentieth century. Increasingly, theologians have turned their attention to the concrete church, to its activities and distinctive functions. A key element of many of the new ecclesiologies is a focus on the practices of the church."[44]

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[43] This turn to the concreteness of the church was ironically instigated mid-century by James Gustafson, one of Hauerwas's sharpest early critics. In *Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, Gustafson lamented that the human dimension of the church had been neglected in most ecclesiologies from the twentieth century and theological attention to the "social nature of the Christian community" was rare (*Treasure in Earthen Vessels: The Church as a Human Community* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 1). He commended employing tools of social analysis to the study of the church. Let's say that Hauerwas did not exactly do this, but his focus on the moral shape of the church's liturgical practices have propelled a nuanced ecclesiology into the later decades of the century. The ecclesiological suggestions of Gustafson (as well as Friedrich Schleiermacher as I will later note) more directly influenced the ethnographic turn in theology which would allow one of its proponents, Nicholas Healy to say forty years later, "Ecclesiology is not a doctrinal theory that can be worked out without close attention to the concrete life of the church" (*Church, World, and the Christian Life*: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 50). For treatments of this ethnographic turn see *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Christian Scharen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012) and *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012).
[44] Nicholas Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* Vol. 5 No. 3 November 2003.

The second significant development has been the concept of the "other" in Christian ethics. Christian ethics has always dealt with the treatment of others, classically understood as the neighbor or the "least of these," but as Richard Miller says, the field of ethics has only recently discovered "otherness."[45] When the concept is dealt with by white ethicists, white bodies were still assumed to be normative and those with different bodies/colors are deemed "other."[46] An aversion to confronting the racism inherent in much of white theology—that is, the ways in which white privilege or even white supremacy inflects the analysis, critical concepts, and constructive prescriptions of white theology—shapes the production of that theology itself, and perhaps also its faithfulness to the inclusive, liberatory dimensions of the gospel. This new encounter with the "other" juxtaposed with a refusal to interrogate the deeper underpinnings of whiteness that inflect this encounter is a ripe point for theological reflection.

This dissertation attempts to bring these two developments into sharper relief, as well as bring them together by juxtaposing Hauerwas and Cone and identifying the shared conceptual resources they offer. A communitarian and narrative focus ought to bring sharper focus to the differently-bodied nature of communities. Most ethicists still struggle to account for the difficulties of inter-cultural relationship—what to do with the "other" and how to deal with the tensions between intimacy and alterity. Following Kant, ethics has typically understood that our moral lives are held together by dual forces; we owe both love and respect to one another, which means in Kant's terms, "the principle of mutual love admonishes people to constantly come nearer to each other; that of respect which they owe each other, to keep themselves at a distance from one another."[47] Yet as Miller says, encounter the other within and across communities demands that one also account for one's self and one's actions toward that other; "alterity requires a reckoning" and that reckoning is necessarily a reckoning primarily with ourselves.[48] One contribution of this dissertation will be advancing beyond Hauerwas and Cone to post-colonial pastoral care to guide the practical features of encountering and developing relationships with others.

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[45] Richard B. Miller, *Friends and Other Strangers: Studies in Religion, Ethics, and Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 2.

[46] While there have been wonderful contributions to the themes of race, racial reconciliation, and whiteness by many scholars of color in this area, only recently are we beginning to see more of an awakening by white ethicists and political theologians. This is truer in ethics than political theology—to the degree that one can separate these disciplines. Christian ethicists, even white ones, tend to draw on the civil rights movement more than the Black Power movement or even Black Liberation Theology in their work. The Christian and even evangelistic overtones of the civil rights movement tend to be much more palatable to white scholars than the other movements of black liberation.

[47] Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*; cited in Miller, 1.

[48] Miller, 3.

2.1.4 The Church in Liberation Theologies

While this dissertation is primarily directed to those in the traditionalist, post-liberal, and neo-Anabaptist camps, I also hope it highlights something important but underrepresented in the body/liberation strand, as well as scholars writing about theology and race. This is the particularity of the church. Since this is a dissertation in the field of political ecclesiology, and the contemporary theological impasse between traditionalists and liberationists has consequences for the church, it is important that *both* interlocutors are theologians of the church. This is not a controversial claim for Hauerwas who is widely considered the most prominent thinker for ecclesiology (whether one agrees with him or not). He has effectively set the terms for contemporary political theology by inserting the church squarely into the middle of most debates. Most work in political theology now has to take the concept of the church seriously largely due to the forceful work of Hauerwas. While liberation theology, especially that of Cone, accentuates the importance of communal particularity, often the content of this particularity remains ambiguous. Important exceptions to this are Bantum and Willie Jennings (and I will argue Cone as well), all of whom even when they criticize the racial failures of Christianity do so in the hopes of redeeming the church's mission.[49] Still, in finding God's work wherever two or three are gathered in protest, most liberationists identify a too-narrow vision of the gospel. In the case of black theology this is more complicated. Cone student and pastor Raphael Warnock points to a severance between black theology and the black church, and crucial works of ecclesiology are often eclipsed by works attending more directly to liberation or critical race theory—see for example, the prominence of Cone's early writing on Black Power and liberation against his often-overlooked ecclesiological work, *For My People*.[50]

It will be here that I turn to Cone and argue that he is an ecclesial theologian who holds important resources to refocus the conversation on theology and race back onto the church—both critically and constructively—and promote a vision of reconciliation. Cone's work was both developed with and from his experience in the African American church, and remains a work directed toward informing the life of the Christian community. As we will observe, his conception of what constitutes the being, life, and mission of the church differs from Hauerwas's; yet, his project of liberation necessarily entails the Christian community formed by the key stories that make such a community possible. The ecclesiological commitments of both theologians only reinforce why both are essential conversation partners for a project like this. And the commitment of both to moral formation and reconciliation position the recovery of reconciliation as an important challenge for liberation theologies. Cone insists on

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[49] Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

[50] For an important account of the interaction between piety and prophetic politics in the black church see the work of a student of James Cone, Raphael Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

the importance of reconciliation as a theological and practical concept, and this dissertation proposes a costly and deep form of reconciliation as an essential part of liberation against those who contest its possibility.

2.1.5 Cone and Hauerwas and Race

Finally, one final word about these two interlocutors. I have also chosen these Cone and Hauerwas specifically because of their vast differences when it comes to addressing race. Both Hauerwas and Cone began their careers in the year after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Most know that Cone's career began with the landmark text *Black Theology and Black Power* published in 1969. Fewer know that Hauerwas also began his career with a first article on Black Power, in the same year. While Cone's book launched him into a career effectively founding the field of black theology, Hauerwas did not return to the issue of race for twenty-five years, and then only sparingly. It has never been a significant part of his work. While I have chosen Cone because he is the most pivotal and foundational theologian on race, I have chosen Hauerwas because he is very visibly not. It is interesting that the foremost thinker on the topic of the church has failed to include race—perhaps the single most challenging issue for the church and its witness—in his ecclesiology. The reasons Hauerwas offers for this evasion say even more about why this is such an important issue and provide insights into why many white theologians fail to adequately engage in discussions of race. I have also observed important continuities between the two. Little scholarly work has been written that attends to these two together or offers a comparative analysis of any aspect of their work.[51] I hope that by placing them in dialogue within this project, these hidden convergences will fruitfully illuminate ways in which white theology and the white church has abetted white supremacy and also ways to overcome these hegemonic tendencies and engage in the difficult work of reconciliation.

2.2 Goals of the Project

In sum, this project has six concrete goals. 1) The first is to demonstrate how white traditionalist/postliberal ethics and (primarily non-white) liberation ethics have mutually beneficial resources for attending to issues of social ethics, ecclesiology, and race. Thinking about race, not only as a theological issue (which generates some problems of abstraction as we will see), but as an ecclesiological issue through the frameworks of these two thinkers holds promise for fruitful dialogue and any normative proposals for addressing racism, white supremacy, and hopes for reconciliation. 2) Second, I want to suggest to white theologians prone to avoid issues of race that listening to black liberation theologies may help them to

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[51] The only work I have come across is a dissertation by Michael Duffy at the University of Virginia in 1993, "What Kind of Community?: Stanley Hauerwas and James Cone on the Christian Communal Life," in which he compared the character of each theologian's vision of community.

identify resources within their own traditions to equip them to constructively attend to race, racism, and whiteness. Evasion of addressing race within whatever theological disciplines one finds oneself is negligence. I want to identify those sources and demonstrate how they can be deployed critically and constructively for this end. 3) The next goal is to stake out a middle position between the two dominant responses to the problem of racism and white supremacy—a pretension to "colorblindness" on one end (primarily by white theologians and Christians), and a rejection of the project of "reconciliation" on the other (by both black and some white theologians and Christians). 4) Fourth, and most broadly, I hope to address the overarching issue of the relation between church and world and demonstrate how this issue cannot be addressed (in the American context) apart from attending also to race. This means that theologically addressing race necessarily means ecclesiologically addressing race as well. That is, the church's history of racism poses particular challenges for those who trade in a church/world dichotomy. In addition, 5) this dissertation intervenes in the conversation about "tradition," and the issue of entering into another's tradition. MacIntyre, Stout, and others have debated this issue, and the methodology of inter-tradition engagement. I want to trouble that debate, specifically about the difficulties of engaging cross-cultural traditions, but even more broadly, to raise the question of whether "tradition" is even a helpful way to talk about inter- religious, cultural, narrative engagement.

Finally, on a practical level, 6) this dissertation aims to offer concrete means for churches to engage in practices of racial reconciliation via the conceptual apparatuses of Cone and Hauerwas. I hope that this work has implications in churches directly. I will offer analyses of what constitutes the church, where the church has failed in its mission, and how churches can better address these sins and shortcomings. I will also attend to particular church practices with practical suggestions for moving toward reconciliation. I believe that this theoretical and practical ecclesiological work will be beneficial for church leaders. This does not mean that the practices I identify in the final chapter are universally transferrable to any ecclesial context. By no means. But I hope that they can inspire the imagination of new and creative practices consistent with the context in which a faith community finds itself.

2.3 Disclaimers

Finally, a few opening disclaimers. First, this project is not a work in critical race theory. I come at this issue as a political theologian who realized that one cannot do political theology well without addressing race. It is therefore primarily a work in the fields of political theology and Christian ethics, and even more specifically political ecclesiology and ecclesial formation. I am primarily concerned with the church, and how the church addresses the racism within its own walls and attempts to be a witness of reconciliation to the racism of society more generally while also recognizing and repenting of its complicity in structures of racism and white supremacy. My aim to is demonstrate why race is an essential, though often overlooked,

matter for political theology, and reconciliation ought to be a primary goal and practice of churches. This is why I remained focused on the work of James Cone. Black Theology has developed in many ways beyond Cone, while acknowledging its debt to him, especially in the direction of critical theory. This is an important development that deserves much attention, but this field largely does not address the church nor direct its work to the betterment of the church. Cone is a church theologian, as I hope to display, poses a particular challenge for white church members and white theologians doing work in ecclesiology and political theology. Second, this dissertation focus exclusively on white racism against blacks and on black/white reconciliation. To be sure, there exist general and unique patterns to all multi-ethnic and interracial relationships, each with its own particular histories of interaction, particular systemic qualities, and particular abuses. This dissertation is already too long, so it will be best to focus on one dimension of the broad and complicated history of whiteness and the racism of the white church in America. Finally, this project is not directed primarily to evaluate the ecclesiologies of Hauerwas and Cone, nor to critically analyze the ways their ecclesiologies reconfigure the relationship between church and race—though I will certainly do that. While it includes critical elements, my aim is more constructive in nature. This project is primarily to allow Hauerwas and Cone to help us rediscover and reimagine the church as a place of racial reconciliation.

3 The White Problem in America

It is customary in dissertations to include an assessment of the "state of the field" that explains how the project fits into an established academic field or makes an academic contribution. For a project like this, I believe it is also necessary to address the *state of the culture* and *state of the church.* I will oscillate between cultural and ecclesial trends, which often are the same, since few other cultural issues are as tethered to the church. That is, the church mirrors the same racial distortions and fragmentations that one can see in society at large. More significantly, the church is integral to the origins of racism and if data are correct—as we will see—is integral to funding its continued power. Therefore when we ask about the problem of race and white supremacy in American, we are necessarily asking about the role of the church. We must ask: What has happened to bring us to this point? What cultural or theological shifts are taking place that frame, constrain, and propel a work like this, and against which my argument stands? The remainder of this opening chapter is devoted to this matter, tracing a brief outline of the current cultural "state of the question."

I will begin by outlining the contours of current cultural and ecclesial trends. Section 3.1 will address the language used by cultural commentators to describe our current state of racial demographics and cultural trends. After this descriptive section, I will offer several deeper layers of theoretical analysis to uncover the ways whiteness is working within these trends.

James Cone insists that social analysis is necessary to reveal the inner workings and implications of faith within church communities.[52] Following him, I will attempt to provide a deep analysis of whiteness by filtering the analysis of this landscape in 3.1 through the analytical concepts of legitimation crisis and colorblindness, attending specifically to uninterrogated whiteness and white fragility as integral elements of colorblindness in the rest of Section 3, in order to reveal the complexity and difficulty in disentangling the power of whiteness on social and ecclesial life. After uncovering the depth and complexity of the problem of whiteness through this social analysis, in section four I will further examine the problem with conventional methods and theories of racial reconciliation.

3.1 The End of White Christian America?
In the 1950s James Baldwin contended that the Negro problem in American cannot be discussed coherently without bearing in mind its context: the history, traditions, customs, and moral assumptions and preoccupations of the country. Because it is so thoroughly embedded within the social fabric of the nation, he says "no one in America escapes the effects [of race] and everyone in American bears some responsibility for it."[53] While I confess that I will not be able to provide as comprehensive a social analysis as Baldwin might wish, I concur that it is important to understand the recent currents that have shaped the contours of our racialized state.[54] Contextualizing my analysis and argument in this way will help to clarify the moves I make in the following chapters, and will establish the urgency and gravity of the problem we face.

Many events in the past few years have triggered the volatile racial climate in which we now live. The election of our first black President, a growing visibility of racialized police violence, a new movement for racial justice and backlash against it, increasing wealth disparities between races, and a growing perception gap between the problems encountered by different racial groups in the U.S. all contribute to our contemporary situation. One of the most illuminating events occurred during the later stages of my writing this project. CNN correspondent Van Jones famously called election of Donald Trump as President, "A whitelash against a changing country."

Uncovering what he meant by this claim—Why is there a whitelash? What is changing?—
will be helpful in setting the stage for the theological arguments that follow. The election of Trump, fueled by many whites who felt disenfranchised by a growing plurality in American and increasingly intense focus on minority rights, may signal the strength of the hegemonic

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[52] Cone, "Christian Faith and Political Praxis," *Encounter* (1982), 136.

[53] James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 8 (hereafter *Notes*).

[54] The long history of racism in the U.S. is well documented. I will focus here on recent trends as they bear considerably on the particular forms of white supremacy we now experience.

dominance of white supremacy.[55] It is important to note that this "disenfranchised" group peering longingly back to the monochromatic 50s and 60s is comprised of a significant homogeneity in racial, cultural, and religious identities. That is, a map of the religious identity of many U.S. counties (white Evangelical) is a primary predictor of the counties who voted overwhelmingly for Trump.[56] Yet, just before the election, in the summer of 2016, data analyst Robert Jones published a book counter-intuitively titled, *The End of White Christian America*.[57] What Robert Jones has termed "White Christian America" includes both mainline Protestants and Evangelicals, and points to their positions of social and political power through the history of the U.S., but particularly in their mutual hopes that the 20th century would be a "Christian Century." Jones describes the White Christian America of the mid-century as follows: "June Cleaver was its mother, Andy Griffith was its sheriff, Normal Rockwell was its artist, and Billy Graham and Normal Vincent Peale were its ministers."[58] While mainline Protestants enjoyed tremendous influence in the first half of the century, as their position (and membership) weakened, Evangelicals have positioned themselves to become the new face of White Christian America since the 1970s. Yet, both groups have grown at ease in their own culturally constructed Zion, reclining on their "beds of ivory" while

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[55] See Nate Cohn, "Why Trump Won: Working Class Whites," *New York Times*, Nov. 9, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/11/10/upshot/why-trump-won-working-class-whites; and Derek Thompson, "Donald Trump and the Twilight of White America," *The Atlantic*, May 13, 2016, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/donald-trump-and-the-twilight-of-white-america. From a statistical perspective, according to Pew Research, "Among whites, Trump won an overwhelming share of those without a college degree; and among white college graduates – a group that many identified as key for a potential Clinton victory – Trump outperformed Clinton by a narrow 4-point margin. Trump's margin among whites without a college degree is the largest among any candidate in exit polls since 1980. Two-thirds (67%) of non-college whites backed Trump, compared with just 28% who supported Clinton, resulting in a 39-point advantage for Trump among this group" http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/. For a picture of the working class whites that came to Trump's support in large numbers many have pointed to the work of J. D. Vance in *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (New York: Harper Publishing, 2016) and Nancy Isenberg, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Viking Press, 2016). See also, Joshua Rothman, "The Lives of Poor White People," *The New Yorker*, September 12, 2016, www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-lives-of-poor-white-people; and Alec MacGillis, "The Original Underclass: The Despair of Poor White Americans," *The Atlantic*, September 2016, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/the-original-underclass.

[56] Robert P. Jones, "The Rage of White Christian America," *New York Times*, Nov. 10, 2016.

[57] Robert P. Jones, The End of White Christian America (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016). The percentage of U. S. citizens who identify as white and Christian has now dropped below 50% (Jones, *New York Times*).

[58] Jones, 38-39. This certainly does not mean that mainliners and Evangelicals presented a united front. Jones' notes how Evangelicals began to directly challenge mainline dominance by mid-century, setting up rival institutions, the National Association of Evangelicals as a challenge to the Federal Council of Churches, theological schools, Fuller Theological Seminary and Union, and journals, *Christianity Today* and *The Christian Century* (36).

failing to grieve (or even see) the "ruin" that their cultural power has wrought on other corners of the church.[59]

White Christians, especially conservative and Evangelical Christians, centralized political power in the 1980s with the rise of the Religious Right and Moral Majority. Historian Randall Balmer has argued that though these groups proclaim pro-life issues as their organizing cry, it was race, and specifically segregation, that functioned as their primary motivator.[60] This movement began in the 1960s with the so-called "Southern Strategy" of the Republican Party to highlight anti-civil rights issues to garner favor among southern voters, was consolidated with the rise of the Religious Right motivated by the disappointment of white Evangelicals in the presidency of Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter, and reached its zenith with the growth of the Tea Party and populist rise of Donald Trump, supported by key Evangelical and "Alt-Right" leaders. One of the best examples of the underlying racist motivation of these movements was conservative efforts to simultaneously claim that the election of Barack Obama signaled America's entry into a "post-racial" era, while relentlessly questioning the president's religious and national legitimacy.[61] NAACP leader and pastor William J. Barber, famous for igniting the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, observes that the recent events that have brought race to the national forefront are only the most discernible symptoms of a larger social and political movement to maintain white supremacy in response to Obama. He recalls that the "Southern Strategy" birthed the "colorblind" model of racism that hides within invisible and "post-racial" structural components today. He notes that Richard Nixon's Republican Party did not employ the direct racist language of the segregationists. Rather, they appealed to more nuanced, dog whistle terms for those with ears to hear—terms like the need for "law and order" and the waste of "entitlement programs," as well as buzz words like "fiscal responsibility," "big government," "states' rights," and the

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[59] Amos 6:1, also referencing vv. 4 and 6.

[60] Randall Balmer "The Real Origins of the Religious Right," *Politico*, May 27, 2014 www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins. Balmer writes: "It wasn't until 1979—a full six years after *Roe*—that Evangelical leaders, at the behest of conservative activist Paul Weyrich, seized on abortion not for moral reasons, but as a rallying-cry to deny President Jimmy Carter a second term. Why? Because the anti-abortion crusade was more palatable than the religious right's real motive: protecting segregated schools."

[61] In 2012 a PRRI survey revealed the one in four Americans believed that the president, who had been in office already for four years, was a Muslim, and a 2010 CNN poll found that the same number doubted his U.S. citizenship (the "birther" controversy initiated and promulgated by Obama's successor) (Jones, 81). Jones' notes how the *New York Times* concluded that "it is inconceivable that this campaign to portray Mr. Obama as the insidious 'other' would have been conducted against a white president" (Jones, 82, citing "A Certificate of Embarrassment," *New York Times*, April 28, 2011).

"undeserving poor."[62] In this way, "The Southern Strategy protected white power while appearing to be color-blind."[63] Its proponents, and those that propel it still today, he says, are "skilled in the mechanics of defending institutionalized racism without using the language of race."[64] On a deeper rhetorical level, Barber claims that "By using such abstractions, extremists were able to commit" what he calls "attention violence"—that is, manipulating people by distracting them from the concrete consequences of policies by employing language that appeals to their values.[65] Barber, here, offers a keen insight, that colorblindness and the use of abstraction go hand in hand to blind (mostly white) people, not to actual color, but to the concrete effects that white power has on social, political, and religious institutions and structures.

This history and these examples, as well as their lingering endurance in social and political life, point to what Jones has called a "racial perception gap," where whites and blacks see and comprehend the same events or realities in vastly different ways. For example, in a 2014 survey, only 14% of blacks said they believe that blacks and other minorities receive equal treatment as whites in the criminal justice system, whereas 47% of whites do. And this discrepancy has remained consistent over the past twenty years. This has become most apparent when evaluating reactions to the numerous videos of white police violence against unarmed black people. Whereas almost three quarters of blacks see these incidents as part of a broader pattern of abuse and inequality, less than half of whites do.[66]

Jones suggests that three factors contribute to this perception gap. The first is segregated neighborhoods, due to formal systems of segregation like housing codes and ordinances as well as informal desires for homogeneity. The result, Jones claims, is that whites live primarily in neighborhoods insulated from the difficulties facing many African Americans.[67] The second factor is homogenous social networks; most white Americans don't have a close relationship with a single person of color. Specifically, the "core social networks" of whites are 91% white, while three quarters of white Americans have a completely white social network. The statistics are worse for white Christians. Many whites have trouble understanding the anger of African Americans over events in Ferguson or Baltimore or the election of Donald Trump because they live in neighborhoods and exist in social networks insulated from the

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[62] William J. Barber II, *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement*, with Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove (Boston: Beacon Press, 2016); these items come from pp. 54, 63, 68, and 120.
[63] Barber, 54.
[64] Barber, 63.
[65] Barber, 120.
[66] Jones, 153-154.
[67] A PRRI survey from 2012 found that whites are 20% less likely to report experiencing a range of challenges in their neighborhoods (Jones, 157).

consequences of those events. They have no one close to them able to challenge their perspectives. Third, Jones notes the lack of civic institutions poised to overcome these gaps and nurture relationships between races.[68] (This does not mean that integration is the solution to racial problems, as I will address occasionally throughout this dissertation. But it does mean that opportunities for mutual understanding are a key ingredient to healing.) Here Jones points to the failure of the corporate sector, public school system, and notably, the segregated character of churches. Almost nine in ten American congregations are single race, that is, made up of an overwhelming majority of members of one race.[69] Despite the work of the civil rights movement, the claims of H. Richard Niebuhr in his 1929 *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* still ring true: American churches have accepted "the accommodation of Christianity to the caste-system of human society" and have "draw[n] the color line in the church of God."[70] There is a long history and many reasons for this segregation, dating back to the church's role in and justification of colonialism before the birth of the nation. While I will occasionally attend to the racial logics of white Euro-American theology, especially as it relates to the work of Hauerwas, and therefore the ways that churches have perpetuated racism, I will not devote a large section to this analysis. This would reach beyond the bounds and focus of this project and has been undertaken thoroughly elsewhere by theologians like Willie Jennings and J. Kameron Carter (I especially recommend Jennings' *The Christian Imagination*, in this regard.)

The effects of these cultural patterns are exacerbated by fears of the declining influence of (white) religion. The decline in religious affiliation and church membership in the U.S. is well-documented and does not need to be repeated at length here. Still, it is worth noting that this decline is most notable, significantly, in white Protestant decline. In 1993 51% of Americans self-identified as white Protestant; and that figure had fallen to 32% by 2014. During that same period, the percentage of black Protestants held steady at around 10%.[71] When this reality is coupled with dramatic ethnic demographic changes (the U.S. Census Bureau predicting that by 2042 the U.S. will no longer be a majority-white nation, and that year keeps dropping with every prediction), many whites, and especially white Christians have begun to feel a sharp sense of dislocation, leading to a nostalgic longing for the glory days of

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[68] See this material on the sources of the racial perception gap (Jones, 155-166).

[69] Sociologists identify a single-race church as one with over 80% of its membership consisting of a single racial group (166). Only 8 percent of US congregations are racially "mixed," meaning they have at least a 20% minority demographic in its membership (John Dart, "Hues in the Pews: Racially Mixed Churches an Elusive Goal," *Christian Century* (2001): 6.) That is the low number in multiple surveys of this phenomenon. Using the same measure a 2010 Faith Communities Survey discovered less than 14% of congregations are racially mixed. (Cited in Josh Chen, "Minority-Dominant Spaces, Reflexive Vulnerability, and Blended Integration," unpublished essay draft. I thank Josh for permission to use.)

[70] H. Richard Niebuhr, The *Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith Publishing, 1987), 6, quoted in Jones, 164.

[71] Jones, 51.

power they enjoyed in the past.[72] This is remarkably evidenced in the fact that more than six in ten white Christians believe American culture and way of life has changed for the worse since the 1950s.[73]

The fears and anxieties felt by many white Americans sensing this loss of privilege, power, and familiarity have resulted in serious entrenchment, a psychology of *ressentiment* grounded in a lost sense of entitlement, James Hunter says.[74] Jones notes how "this anxious minority swarmed to the polls to elect as president the candidate who promised to 'make America great again'" and predicts that despite its imminent death, "White Christian America will be survived by significant numbers of its descendants."[75] Jones calls their attempts to hold onto power at all costs "defensive offensives" in which an enclaved community recasts itself as a victimized minority and organizes to preserve its particular social, moral, and cultural values.[76] The changing realities signaling the death of White Christian America have triggered the "whitelash" of the election of Donald Trump. As Robert Jones puts it, "The waning numbers of white Christians in the country today may not have time on their side, but as the sun is slowly setting on the cultural world of white Christian America, they've managed, at least in this election, to rage against the dying of the light."[77]

Thus, the landscape of our segregated society and radically fragmented perceptions of reality fueled by the long domination of White Christian America have set the stage for the last gasps of this dying hegemon. The social and political stronghold of White Christianity is weakening. But its death does not come as a whimper.

3.2 The Legitimation Crisis of Whiteness

The preceding cultural description now needs a more specific analytic frame. One way to make sense of these current cultural and ecclesial trends is in terms of a legitimation crisis of

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[72] Jones, 41, citing Sam Roberts, "Minorities in U.S. Set to be Majority by 2042," *New York Times*, August 14, 2008.

[73] Jones, 87.

[74] James Hunter identified this phenomenon as *ressentiment*, a form of political psychology based upon a "narrative of injury, or at least perceived injury; a strong belief that one has been or is being wronged" and rooted in a sense of entitlement. (*To Change the World*, 107). Hunter claims that this has become the defining characteristic the politics of modern cultures. He employs the term to challenge the perceived loss of power, and subsequent turn to direct politics, of the religious right and religious left.

[75] Jones, *New York Times*; Jones, 43.

[76] Jones, 44. A survey from Jones' PRRI organization discovered that white Evangelicals are the only religious group in American who believe that Christians face more discrimination in America than Muslims (Emma Green, "White Evangelicals Believe They Face More Discrimination Than Muslims," *The Atlantic* March 10, 2017, www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/perceptions-discrimination-muslims-christians.

[77] Jones, *New York Times*.

whiteness. This is how Melvin Rogers describes this "whitelash." He writes, "The Trump victory makes clear that a sizeable segment of the population rejects an American future that is more diverse, more inclusive, and potentially more equal. It rejects, in other words, precisely the vision to which Black Lives Matter gave expression."[78] This "whitelash" is an attempt by white Americans to address what they too perceive as a cultural "legitimation crisis." By this he means, "They can no longer trust their racial identity to secure for them the entitlements (including economic ones) that it previously had." The recent attention to race brought about through Obama's presidency, the growing Black Lives Matter movement, and increase in protest and resistance is seen as a loss of primacy, privilege, and prestige. In this way, Rogers helpfully invokes a concept that will more fully develop the phenomenon we are currently experiencing.

The concept of legitimation crisis originates with Max Weber and his work on 'legitimate domination,'[79] though for my purposes I will attend to later inflections of the concept in the work of Jurgen Habermas. Habermas claims that all social systems and institutions have need to justify the norms they employ or demand in order to accomplish the integration of any social or political order. This process of legitimation 'explains' the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to the social meaning it prescribes, in a sense, justifying the institutional order by granting normative dignity to its practical imperatives.[80] In other words, it explains why a member of some collective or system should perform a particular action as well as explaining why things are what they are within any system—and here Habermas refers primarily to cultural, economic, and political systems and institutions. However, when "the legitimating system does not succeed in maintaining the requisite level of mass loyalty" among its constituents, participants, subjects, or citizens, Habermas claims, it falls into a form of identity crisis he calls a 'legitimation crisis.'[81] "Crises arise", he asserts, "when the structure of a social system allows fewer possibilities for problem solving than are necessary for the continued existence of the system."[82] According to Habermas, when problems outstretch all available resources to solves these problems, a crisis ensues.

All cultures are internalized symbolic universes, what he defines as "world maintaining interpretive systems."[83] As symbolic and normative realities, these systems need to have an

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[78] Melvin Rogers, "White Supremacy, Fear and the Crisis of Legitimation," *Public Seminar*, January 1, 2017, www.publicseminar.org/2017/01/white-supremacy-fear-and-the-crises-of-legitimation.

[79] See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1978) see especially Chapter 3, "The Types of Legitimate Domination;" *Basic Concepts in Sociology* (New York: Citadel Press, 1993); or *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1964) for treatments of this topic.

[80] Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 10, 93.

[81] Habermas, 46.

[82] Habermas, 2.

[83] Habermas, 121.

apparent relation to truth—or at least perceived truth (such as, the U.S. is a White Christian nation). When dramatic changes such as the impending loss of white majority status call this truth into question, a crisis of legitimacy occurs and those in power employ structures and mechanisms to maintain these symbolic universes.[84] Building on the work of Habermas, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman contend that when a symbolic universe breaks down in the midst of an especially potent legitimation crisis, those in power employ specific procedures of re-legitimation, or what they call 'conceptual machinery for universe maintenance.' When such situations arise, Berger and Luckman argue that "custodians of the 'official' definitions of reality" employ "repressive procedures" to shore up and re-concretize the universe.[85] They suggest that common 'conceptual machinery' of maintenance include mythology, theology, philosophy, and science—residing primarily on the discursive, symbolic level but occasionally taking coercive or violent means.[86]

The whitelash that Van Jones observed, the last gasps of White Christian America desperately trying to overcome its crisis of legitimacy, are the repressive measures designed to retain the old order of whiteness.[87] The use of conceptual machinery is even easier in our social media age as mythologies, philosophies (like the kind that influenced Dylann Roof), and certainly theologies can easily be deployed and disseminated to shape the social imaginaries of those hell-bent on maintaining control. As James Baldwin astutely observed, "[Old orders] have

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[84] Berger and Luckman define symbolic universes as "bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning [detached realms of reality] and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality" (Peter Berger & Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books), 94-95). Such 'universes' explain and justify institutional orders, creating a whole world of meaning in which a person, group, or nation finds itself (96). In other words, "it puts everything in its right place" until "the entire society now makes sense" (98, 103) by offering authoritative or traditional texts, explanatory cosmological narratives, compelling rules or structures of existence, or charismatic leaders. The symbolic universe provides the ultimate legitimation of the institutional order, a place within a cosmological and anthropological frame of reference. Symbolic universes legitimate institutions and roles within a system of order by locating them within a comprehensively meaningful and normative 'world.'

[85] Berger and Luckman, 107.

[86] Berger and Luckman, 113. System leaders typically apply conceptual machinery in two manners: therapeutically, ensuring that any deviant persons of ideals stay within institutional definitions of reality, or nihilistically, conceptually liquidating everything outside the universe and denying the reality of phenomena or interpretations that do not fit that universe (113-114).

[87] William Barber, in *The Third Reconstruction*, notes that this crisis has occurred before with devastating consequences. When those in power feel threatened, they tend to lash out in direct and nuanced ways that inflict harm on those most vulnerable. Barber cites, as a historical example, the threat to Southern white power during the years of Reconstruction. After nearly 30 years of Reconstruction, a period in which sixteen African Americans were elected to the U.S. Congress and more than six hundred blacks held offices in southern state legislatures (56), the 1890s brought this crisis to a climax and resulted in the overthrow of black politicians, codified segregation in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, as well as the prominence of the Klan's terrorism and rise in the number of lynchings (62).

always existed in relation to a force which they have to subdue. This subjugation is the key to their identity and the triumph and justification of their history, and it is also on this continued subjugation that their material well-being depends."[88] This machinery takes many obvious forms, like I mentioned above, but also more complicated and subtle forms. It works in the shadows, slightly adjusting public policies, shifting language, tightening institutions, redrawing voter districts, insinuating voter fraud to create imagined and structural resistance to any racial progress.[89] But the problem runs deeper.

3.3 The Problem of Colorblindness

In 1965 *Ebony* magazine published an issue with the title, "The White Problem in America." This issue contained an essay written by James Baldwin on white guilt, in which he wrote, "History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us."[90] History endures like an apparition haunting the structures and attitudes of the present. History does not go away, but simply morphs; it shape shifts from chattel slavery and the Middle Passage, to Jim Crow and festive lynchings, to housing codes and religious segregation, to a new middle passage from the inner city to the prison industrial complex and the new lynching tree of uncontrolled police violence on black bodies. The materials change but the goals, structures, and sins remain the same—just more difficult to perceive, confront, and conquer.

The assumption that Baldwin observed in *Notes of a Native Son*, that for blacks to become truly human and acceptable they must assimilate to whiteness, has taken another form.[91] In this age of professed colorblindness, African Americans are not "reduced to anonymity" unless they

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[88] Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 46 (hereafter *Name*).

[89] Melvin Rogers cites an example of one of these subtle narratives. He writes, "White supremacy creates a condition wherein the 'natural' or 'normal' status of black people easily mingles with traits of criminality in the minds of observing citizens and conditions their behavior toward black people, regardless of any observable nonthreatening conduct on display." This renders black bodies subject to arbitrary domination. Rogers insightfully recognizes that "Just as the logic of white supremacy involves valuing white lives more than others, it leads to the presumption that white Americans are thus (a) accurate when they describe the context in which they engage nonwhites as threatening and (b) are therefore legitimate in their display of force to extinguish the source of fear"[89]—and we might add, to maintain the cultural hegemony of their "universe." Rogers even calls this a legitimation of democracy; "white supremacy involves a distortion of democracy by treating the concerns of white Americans as the true and legitimate concerns of the polity and therefore the only concerns in need of redress." This tethers public life to whiteness rather than to the values of democracy: namely, equal regard, equal access, equal voice.

[90] The essay was titled, "The White Man's Guilt" For a contemporary commentary on this idea, see Eddie Glaude's *Time* essay, "James Baldwin and the Trap of Our History," August 18, 2016, www.time.com/4457112/james-baldwin-eddie-glaude.

[91] Baldwin, *Notes*, 45.

begin to look and act like whites. Rather, their identities, concerns, and bodies, their personalities and experiences have been rendered invisible by a whitewashed lens that does not want to "see color." This is not a condition of assimilation, but a professed toleration of differences as long as it does not require those in power to change their lifestyle. White supremacy doesn't require intentional racism, but only the willingness of those in power to benefit from the privilege afforded them by white supremacy. Colorblindness assumes that racism is an individual and intentional act. It has the advantage of appearing innocuous, even virtuous. It convinces us that the election of Obama initiated a "post-racial" era and people of all colors now have equal access, protection, and privilege. Yet this masks its true identity as a universe-maintaining machinery that renders unseen the structural and systemic controls that attempt to keep white supremacy cloaked. Dietrich Bonhoeffer used the term "fatal privilege" to refer to privileges that prohibit Christians from seeing that their positions rest on even deeper sets of insidious privileges.[92] White supremacy grants people with white skin a social and political advantage from the start, with or without our consent, while white people's "fatal privilege" allows most whites to assume the country's institutions are equally accessible and fair to all. The defeat of legalized discrimination means all is well.

In this "post-racial" context, prejudice is not often overt, but unreflective, hidden, "unwitting," and "ubiquitous." As Renee Leslie Hill observes, oppression is much more insidious and pervasive in the way it appears to be so ordinary, in "the subtle persistent messages that create the climate for violence to happen."[93] In this way the violence of racial oppression implicates even the most well-meaning people and keeps them oblivious to this reality. Expanding on the phenomenon of white enclaves that we saw in the work of Robert Jones, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva uncovers a "white habitus" that implicitly relies on "a set of primary networks and associations with other whites that reinforces the racial order by fostering racial solidarity among whites and negative affect toward racial 'others.'"[94] Yet, such attitudes can only be attributed to a truncated memory that doesn't account for the wound of 400 years of oppression. The aspiration of colorblindness "creates a necessary amnesia or unknowing around racialized systems, histories, and bodies," theologians Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Marcia Mount Shoop claim, and this system finds an easy home in communities shaped by whiteness.[95] White people are ferociously barricaded inside our

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[92] Reggie Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 130.

[93] Renee Leslie Hill, "Disrupted/Disruptive Movements: Black Theology and Black Power 1969/1999," in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James H. Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power ed. Dwight Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 144.

[94] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (New York: Rowman & Littfield, 2009), 16.

[95] Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Marcia Mount Shoop, *A Body Broken, A Body Betrayed: Race, Memory and Eucharist in White-Dominated Churches* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 33.

sanitized version of this history (and often our own gated neighborhoods). Colorblindness, in the words of Baldwin, is founded on white people's "necessity to find a lie more palatable than the truth,"[96] and therefore leaves uninterrogated the assumptions and histories that have caused us to arrive at our current situation.

And this pretension to "not see color" is surely a problem for all the reasons just provided. Yet, there is a more insidious dimension to colorblindness that often goes untreated in public discourse on the subject. Most often colorblindness is considered to be the act of not seeing the color of minority "others." But the aspect of colorblindness that I will more thoroughly analyze in this project is colorblindness as the act of whites not seeing their own color. This identifies the primary problem of colorblindness as not falsely believing that everyone stands on equal footing—though that is certainly a problem. Rather the problem of colorblindness is refusing to believe that whites also have a color and *all* white people benefit from the systems set in place by anti-black racism, regardless of class. In other words, colorblindness allows whiteness to camouflage itself. By preventing whites from seeing their own whiteness, whiteness obscures its public and personal effects. Calling this "white denial," Fulkerson and Mount Shoop explain, "Many whites tend to navigate the world with the 'I'm not a racist' mantra, all the while embodying unconscious racialized assumptions and biases that help form everything from neighborhoods to public and private policies, from gut reactions to people of color in intimate relationships. Privilege becomes obscured and affirmed by means of stories of the whence and the why of who we are and where we've been."[97] Even whites who are not this naïve and realize there are significant systemic social problems, often have difficulty connecting this explicitly to the sordid history of race, rather than simply class or some other social category. African Americans who suffer under the structural effects of racism know this is not true. "What is invisible to white Christians and their theologians is inescapable to black people," Cone says.[98] Yet because whites have a dominant hold on the narrative, whites define the terms of the conversation and limit the horizon of vision. "Most whites do not see the problem of race in America as a white problem," write sociologists Joe Feagin and Eileen O'Brien.[99] Colorblindness shields white people from seeing that they too have a color, and seeing the ways in which that color shapes their vision of the world and of others.

Colorblindness is therefore the problem of whiteness. It is blindness to our own racial formation—that is, the ways we have been conditioned as whites to accept unquestioningly the benefits of our whiteness. Even more specifically, this is fundamentally a problem of

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[96] Baldwin, *Notes*, 16.
[97] Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 6.
[98] *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 159 (hereafter *CLT*).
[99] Joe R. Feagin and Eileen O'Brien, *White Men on Race: Power, Privilege, and the Shaping of Cultural Consciousness* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 5.

universalizing, as I will examine shortly: projecting the particularity of whiteness universally onto the particularity of others because that particularity of whiteness is invisible within one's own epistemology. As Cone charges, White people "do not recognize the narrowness of their experience and the particularity of their theological expressions. They like to think of themselves as universal people."[100]

3.3.1 The Problem of Whiteness Unseen

Definitions of whiteness abound, but for my purposes it is helpfully described by Robin DiAngelo as a constellation of processes and practices that "include basic rights, values, beliefs, perspectives, and experiences purported to be commonly shared by all but which are actually only consistently afforded to white people."[101] "Dynamic, relational, and operating at all times on myriad levels," whiteness simultaneously trades in pretensions to universality while also actively othering those that are not seen as white. Ruth Frankenburg further delineates whiteness into three registers.[102] First whiteness "is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege" the reality of white privilege. Second, "it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which White people look at ourselves, at others, and society." This reflective dimension of whiteness drives the deceptiveness of colorblindness for white people. It allows us the privilege of abstracting from skin color—not seeing color, even our own—and assuming that our access and opportunity pervade universally. Third, it refers to a set of cultural practices, though due to its universalizing tendencies, these practices are usually unmarked and unnamed. All three of the registers come into play in the account of white evasion and racial harm I analyze in this dissertation.

With this in mind, Emilie Townes more accurately calls white appeals to colorblindness *uninterrogated whiteness*. She describes this as the avoidance of asking "how whiteness has been constructed and how it is maintained as a largely uninterrogated phenomenon of alleged neutrality, or worse of being the norm."[103] In short, it is a failure to examine the ways that whiteness determines the issues we address, the questions we asks, and the answers we derive from those questions. It is the privilege of ignorance that allows white people to avoid

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[100] *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 126 (hereafter GO).

[101] Robin DiAngelo, "White Fragility," *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, vol 3 (3), 2011, 56. The concept of being "white" came into existence, Jennifer Harvey argues, around 1680 as a term of self-identification, emerging out of the logical, social, and economic systems developed to exploit those with darker skin (Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 51). In this sense, whiteness was birthed through violence, was constituted by systems of violence (like slavery), and continues to imply complicity with systems of violence. Therefore, whiteness is not something that can ever be celebrated (52).

[102] Ruth Frankenburg, *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White women, race matters* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 1.

[103] Emilie Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 72 (hereafter *Womanist Ethics*).

addressing the ways that the particular opportunities, experiences, challenges, and successes afforded to people have been largely determined by one's racial location, and in the case of white folks, likely a privileged racial location. This is what Baldwin was able to perceive nearly fifty years ago, that "White America remains unable to believe that black America's grievances are real; they are unable to believe this because they cannot face what this fact says about themselves and their country."[104] This has been only truer in white reactions to Black Lives Matter protests and fears about the racist undercurrents of the Trump administration. But these reactions not only reveal the limited abilities of the privileged to empathize, but also suggest deeper political implications as well. Townes identifies the ways our limited epistemology contributes to the formation of harmful public policies.[105] When decision-makers do not realize that they have a socially-conditioned lens that allows them to see only a small portion of the world based on their experience and context—what she calls "unexamined particularity"—and then project this unseen particularism universally upon everyone's experience, then they make policies that do not account for the contexts—and struggles, inequalities, and obstacles—of others. One example of this can be found in former Senator John Danforth's book, *The Relevance of Religion*. Living outside of St. Louis and reflecting on the events in Ferguson, this long-time white, Christian politician and philanthropist laments the involvement of churches and faith-based groups in the protests outside police stations. Instead, he wishes churches would have taken a more "pastoral approach" rather than the "confrontational demand that individual police officers repent."[106] He says that only in situations of grave injustice are such tactics warranted; and with this he reveals his epistemological limits as someone who fails to understand the depth of injustice and urgency of those protesting injustice because it is not his body and life that are at risk.

While there are many factors that contribute to this lack of reflexivity among whites, and several that I have identified above, Townes helpfully identifies two deeper factors. The first is the impact of the Enlightenment focus on the autonomous individual. Our Enlightened rationality perceives of selves as self-asserting and self-determining, and therefore we accent personal responsibility over against an assessment of structural forces that inhibit this assertion. Second, on a theological level, Townes notes how our soteriological focus on the salvation of the individual soul reinforces this sociological attention to individualism and personal responsibility.[107] Together, these factors blind us to systemic conditions, as well as

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[104] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 165 (hereafter *Fire*).

[105] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 113. "We are often trapped in our unexamined particularities," she says. "My point is that this makes us dangerous when from this stance we then try to shape public policies that affect the nation and the world."

[106] John Danforth, *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics* (New York: Random House, 2015), 165.

[107] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 120-124.

corporate culpability for enabling those systemic issues, and contribute to the privilege of whites to avoid seeing the effects of whiteness.[108]

3.3.2 White Fragility

The most significant consequence of this element of colorblindness—the uninterrogated and unacknowledged character of whiteness—is what Robin DiAngelo coins as *white fragility*. White people in North America live in an environment that insulates them from race-based stress, and this privileged insulation builds white expectations for racial comfort and also lowers their ability to tolerate racial stress. Whites experience racial comfort in nearly every situation or context, and have unchallenged expectations to experience this comfort. When it is challenged, they often mistake comfort for safety—because they have never had to develop the nuance to know the difference—and claim that they don't feel safe when confronted with their own racial bias, or given information that challenges their racial assumptions. This is especially true when whites are confronted with accusations of racism in ways that do not maintain their comfort—i.e politely and rationally without emotion. Whites have not been trained or conditioned to adequately reason or discourse about matters of race and racism because we have been shielded from this challenge by the factors identified by Robert Jones above.

Robin DiAngelo identifies the resulting resistance to racial stress, to any interruption to what is racially familiar as white fragility.[109] This concept reflects the insight of James Cone that "It is not easy for whites to listen to a radical analysis of race because blackness is truly *Other* to them—creating a horrible, unspeakable fear."[110] This phenomenon occurs, DiAngelo claims, not only with anyone that would acknowledge a degree of racism, but also among those that claim not to be racists, especially those who claim some sort of colorblindness. DiAngelo defines "white fragility" formally as "a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves." These moves can include emotions such as fear, anger, and guilt, as well as behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. "At the same time that it is ubiquitous," she argues, "white superiority also remains unnamed and explicitly denied by most whites"—a state of racism without racists, as examined in a recent book by Bonilla-Silva.[111] DiAngelo calls this state of mind psychic freedom, or what I referred to above as the privilege of ignorance. This

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[108] I thank Ashleigh Elser, Joe Lenow, and Matt Elia for conversations that helped frame this issue and section.

[109] DiAngelo, 54-70. Thank you to Amy Canosa for first introducing me to this term.

[110] Cone, "Martin, Malcolm, and Black Theology" in *How Long This Road: Race, Religion, and the Legacy of C. Eric Lincoln* ed. Alton B. Pollard and Love Henry Whelchel, Jr. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 61.

[111] DiAngelo, 64. See Eduaro Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America* (New York: Rowman & Littfield, 2009).

is the belief that "race" exists in people of color, so whites never have to envision themselves as racialized subjects. They are free from carrying the burden of race. This allows whites to spend time and energy on other issues, and enervates the stamina to give sustained attention to an issue as charged and uncomfortable as race.[112]

And because whites have the privileged position of being able to choose when, how, and how much to address racism, when they are confronted with it, or when their advantage to make these choices is identified, it triggers confusion, defensiveness, fear, or just silence. This is often accompanied by claims of victimization, and these behaviors, in turn, simply reinstate white racial privilege. DiAngelo also labels white fragility a product of habitus, "a response or 'condition' produced and reproduced by the continual social and material advantages of the white structural position."[113] Triggers of white fragility can include not only direct challenges that one's behavior had a negative racial impact, but also include challenges to objectivity (that one's viewpoint is shaped by their whiteness), challenges to perceived equality (that access to a good is unequal between races), or challenges to white comfort (when people of color choose not to protect the racial feelings of white people). In these situations, and others, white people do not know how to respond in constructive ways because "whites have not had to build the cognitive or affective skills or develop the stamina that would allow for constructive engagement across racial divides."[114] And herein lies the paradox of the problem: As white objection to racism increases (racism is bad) so does white resistance to acknowledging their own complicity in racism (but I am not racist). It is this paradox that further evidences colorblindness and whiteness as wicked problems.

3.4 Whiteness as a Wicked Problem

In sum, thus far, I first described our context at the end of white Christian America, and the whitelash witnessed recently as the dying breath of this culture. On a deeper level, I analyzed the legitimation crisis of whiteness, where repressive measures are employed to maintain the old order universe of white supremacy. Then I layered on the general form of our country's shape-shifting racism, a pretension to colorblindness. Once we uncovered the more accurate— yet more grave—dimensions of uninterrogated whiteness and white fragility, the complexity of the problem mounts. Indeed, we are in a crisis of many forms.

Whiteness has an uncanny ability to morph, shape-shift, adapt, and mask its violence. Recall William Barber's insight that white power employs strategies of abstraction in order to commit its colorblind violence.[115] This makes it an especially difficult monster to catch, less to

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[112] DiAngelo, 63.
[113] DiAngelo, 58.
[114] DiAngelo, 57.
[115] Barber, 120.

eradicate.[116] As M. Shawn Copeland observes, "Racism is no mere problem to be solved; it is a way in which we define our reality, live the most intimate moments of our lives. Racism is not something *out-there* for us to solve or fix; racism is *in us,* sedimented in our consciousness."[117] One of the most significant symptoms of white supremacy is the need to deny that problems exist because of white supremacy. As someone once said of the devil, the greatest trick white supremacy ever pulled was convincing white people that it doesn't exist. Melvin Rogers contends that we must consider "the possibility that white supremacy generates far too many psychological, libidinal, cultural, political, and economic goods to be sufficiently destabilized or decentered." He continues:

> The goods, although not few in number, that seemingly come from a racially inclusive society that affirm the equal dignity of persons appear far too weak to create an ethical society that can find institutional and cultural support. Overcoming this impasse suggests, at a minimum, that tinkering within the existing structures of the United States or imagining that those structures would permit a radical transformation of values would simply not match the gravity of the problem.[118]

This suggests that racism and white supremacy in an age of colorblindness has reached the status of a "wicked problem"—and perhaps it always has been. Religious ethicist Willis Jenkins defines a wicked problem as a problem so complex that it allows for no determinate solution. Responses that assume there is some definite solution only obscure the fundamental character of the problem.[119] Jenkins uses the term to describe and encapsulate the gravity and shiftiness of climate change, as a problem that outstrips our capacities to determine an adequate solution. And I believe that the current climate of racism, with its invisible, colorblind, and fragile nature leading to a paralyzing fragility on the part of white people, imposes a similar character. Jenkins further describes wicked problems in the context of moral and religious traditions' attempts to address such problems. "Because traditions conserve stories and cultivate practices that interpret the meaning of life, new problems that appear to outstrip their practical competence pose a crisis of authority," he says. "The meaning carried by a tradition's way of life is jeopardized until its participants create a way to extend its interpretation to a new domain. When it finds itself incompetent to a changing context, religious traditions need reform projects capable of generating new possibilities of action that

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[116] "Whiteness is nothing but oppressive and false . . . Whiteness is the empty and, therefore, terrifying attempt to build an identity based on what one isn't and on whom one can hold back." (David Gilborn, "Educational Policy as an Act of White Supremacy: Whiteness, Critical Race Theory and Education Reform," *Journal of Education Policy* 20, no. 4 (July 2005), 488.

[117] Copeland, "Overcoming Christianity's Lingering Complicity," *In the Shadow of Charleston.*

[118] Melvin Rogers, "White Supremacy, Fear and the Crisis of Legitimation."

[119] Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 21. Jenkins comes to this term from H.W.J Rittel and M.M. Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning," *Policy Sciences* 4, no. 2 (1973).)

can be recognized by its members as legitimate interpretations." [120] In such grave circumstances, we must recognize that religious and moral traditions and communities may at times find themselves incapable of finding a solution to a particular contextual problem. They may not yet have developed the conceptual resources with which to even properly describe the problem, much less address it.

In such circumstances the first need is an acknowledgment of moral uncertainty, even moral incompetence to address an issue as a tradition is currently configured. At those times, greater attention to the concrete reality of the problem, the concrete realities of those who are suffering in light of the problem, will help a tradition in its deliberations about what sort of problem this is, and what types of responses may be legitimate, necessary, or faithful. This opens the door for deliberation about and invention of new moral competencies, practices, and strategies for engagement, as well as incremental solutions.

I will argue in this dissertation that the wicked problem of whiteness, white evasion, and colorblindness pose such a crisis to the church and society, that any hopes for racial reconciliation must be tempered to hopes for a "good enough" reconciliation. I will explain this in depth later, but for now this means that white churches and white theologians must first attend to the concrete realties of racism and determine precisely why they have had such a difficult time addressing the issue. What has it been hidden and "uninterrogated" for so long? Only then can the church develop ecclesial practices—provisional, incomplete, and awkward practices—that might engender some forms of repentance and repair for a broken, divided, and wounded church and world. We must be clear headed and sober, and allow our recognition of our incompetency to elicit "normative creativity"[121] toward developing such practices in individual and pockets of church communities, while confessing and hoping that the Spirit transforms these wounds and inadequacies into opportunities for worshiping in spirit and in truthfulness.

4 Reconciliation and Its Discontents

This dissertation argues for a costly process of racial reconciliation. My argument contends that white evasion of the difficulty of race including the promulgation of a culture of colorblindness are strategies of abstraction that only enable and perpetuate white supremacy. Any attempts at reconciliation must, therefore, contest strategies of and tendencies toward abstraction, and instead attend to the concrete realities of racialized life in an era of colorblindness. For Christians, this means locating reconciliation in practices of the concrete embodiment of Christ the Reconciler—that is, in the Body of Christ, the church. But this also

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[120] Jenkins, 20-21.
[121] Jenkins, 21.

means recognizing that the Body of Christ is wounded and scarred. The church has not only ignored racism and white supremacy, but inflicts racial damage. It is only through concrete practices of remembrance, repentance, and repair that reconciliation will be possible. If whiteness constitutes the wicked problem I identified above, however, we must remain sober-minded about the prospects of reconciliation. The concept and practice of reconciliation has received much criticism recently, for good reason. The problem is exacerbated by the way in which the church is implicated in the origins and perpetuation of racism.

4.1 The Problem of Segregation

As I identified above, churches are already engaged in many practices bound up in white supremacy. I have discussed the segregated character of American congregations above. This empirical reality, however, reveals a deeper cultural tendency toward homogeneity. I call this tendency a practice because it is the praxis of a white habitus that has conditioned us to gather around those who look and think most like us, echo chambers that reinforce our attitudes and insulate us from those with concerns from other contexts.[122] This homogeneity reinforces blindnesses and allows white theologians and white Christians to simply avoid dealing with race altogether—the privilege of ignorance. The realities of race and racism do not impact them on a quotidian basis, so they have no imperative to face it. Alexis de Tocqueville observed the ways that political attitudes were reinforced and spread subtly and indirectly within religious communities nearly two hundred years ago. And in our current political climate, these social and racial attitudes only become reinforced within homogenous cultural-religious enclaves.[123]

On a deeper level, perhaps a more sinister practice is the way that white church culture gets universalized or normalized because of this insulation. What white churches do, or the way white churches do things, are "regular," and the way minority churches do things are "ethnic" or "alternative." White culture not only defines what is normal but also the tools with which one determines what is normal.[124] This happens in the organizational structure of congregations and denominational institutions by categorizing of non-white groups with ethnic specific labels, while white groups are not. This "others" them in ways that negate their

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[122] Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster Publishing, 2012), 437. The Aristotelian concept of habitus was revived by Pierre Bourdieu (*The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), dealing with the shaping of dispositions within a religious or moral agent, and has come into prominence in ethnographic research on church communities. I will attend to this concept more thoroughly in chapter eight.

[123] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Gerald. E. Bevan (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 339-352. Tocqueville claimed that this indirect influence of religion—its shaping of mores within families and like-minded communities—signaled the principle political impact of religion, enough to cause him to claim religion as America's first political institution.

[124] Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 39.

normalcy. Fulkerson and Mount Shoop describe this as "the habit of racializing the ethnic origins of people of color over and against the normed 'regular' churches that are white-dominant." Groups with 'ethnicity,' such as Hispanics and Koreans, are recognized as having cultures, while whites are "unraced," they reveal.[125] This does not mean that racially specific spaces or ministries—for minority groups that must exist in white-dominated culture constantly—should not exist. Often these spaces are vitally important for the health of minority groups. Rather, it means that the white-dominated spaces should also be understood as racialized spaces and not universal, normalized culture.[126] In light of the problems created by homogenous echo chambers, it would seem that further efforts at integration are the solution. Yet, if it is indeed difficult to identify the problem, and its sources and perpetrators, in an age of colorblindness, then mere racial integration will prove deeply insufficient.

4.2 The Problem with Integration

All of the issues that I identified in the previous section—colorblindness, uninterrogated whiteness, and white fragility—signal problems with racial integration as well. Reconciliation, as justice-seeking Christians tend to approach it, identifies the problem of race in the church as racial *separateness* or segregation.[127] Martin Luther King, Jr.'s adage that the 11 o'clock hour on Sunday remains the most segregated time of the week captures the core problem of racial relations in this model. If separateness is the core problem, then togetherness is the solution, and for many, reconciliation becomes synonymous with and encompassed by *integration*.[128] Most Protestant Christians were shaped by the goals of the civil rights movement to think that segregation is the core issue; division is the true evil and unity is the answer. A focus on integration or unity as the solution leads to an emphasis on our sameness across racial differences, our common humanity. This push for unity and sameness as the totality of reconciliation risks the loss of identity of minority selves or communities as they integrate with majority communities.[129] Often, the traffic pattern of unity flows only one way—what whites mean by integration is blacks joining majority white churches—and this only reinforces the white tendency to maintain power even in these multi-racial churches.

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[125] Fulkerson and Mount Shoop 40.

[126] For more on specific church practices that may contribute to the implicit racial prejudice often perpetuated by white churches, see Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 37-53.

[127] Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014). Harvey helpfully suggests there is a difference between separateness and segregation, with the agent of the latter being the oppressor and the agent of the former being the oppressed.

[128] Harvey, 19.

[129] For more on the need for racially exclusive places for minorities see Beverly Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? And Other Conversations About* Race (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

Thus, even multi-racial congregations tend to ignore or replicate the racial structures of society.[130] This occurs because these congregations elevate the common religious or spiritual identity of the individual congregants, and subordinate their various racial identities. This inhibits identifying and contesting the concrete structural realities of race and simply reproduces them within the power dynamics, structure, and leadership of the church. Studies also indicate that even within integrated spaces like churches, the members of majority culture groups tend to stick with those similar to them, the homogeneity effect, and recreate the same segregated dynamics of more integrated churches. "Whites are not necessarily aware of their privileged status as the dominant racial group, nor are they aware how their own actions perpetuate it."[131] Thus, even within integrated churches, the costs of that integration are disproportionately borne by the minority race. Because these congregations too often leave dominant white frames and assumptions unchallenged, perhaps unintentionally coercing minorities to accept these frames, everything from the worship style to leadership positions are affected by the consequences of colorblindness.[132]

In his research on multiracial churches, Josh Chen also discovered that among all the possible racial configurations of a congregation, African Americans repeatedly suffered the most from integration, in terms of feeling uncomfortable, unwelcome, or marginalized. He suggests that this happens for a number of reasons shaped by the particular history of blacks in America.[133] Due to the history of slavery and codified separate but certainly unequal segregation, blacks have been placed at a further distance socio-culturally from whites relative to other minority groups. But perhaps even more importantly, because of that reality, the black church developed as an institution in quite different ways than white churches. It became *the* central social institution for a community, what Dwight Hopkins calls the "practical organizing center of all major aspects of group life."[134] While blacks were excluded from many social organizations and political activities, the church had to serve multiple roles—it was a forum not only for spirituality, but also fellowship, education, and politics. Developing E. Franklin Frazier's notion of the black church as a "nation within a nation," Evelyn Brooks

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[130] Gerardo Marti, *A Mosaic of Believers: Diversity and Innovation in a Multiethnic Church* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[131] Brad Christerson, Korie L. Edwards, and Michael O. Emerson, *Against All Odds: The Struggle for Racial Integration in Religious Organizations*, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 172.

[132] See Penny Edgell Becker, "Making Inclusive Communities: Congregations and the 'Problem' of Race," *Social Problems* vol. 45 no. 4 (1998), 451-472; Kathleen E. Jenkins, "Intimate Diversity: The Presentation of Multiculturalism and Multiracialism in a High-boundary Religious Movement," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* vol. 42 no. 3 (2003), 393-409; Gregory C. Stanczak, "Strategic Ethnicity: The Construction of Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic Religious Community, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 29 no. 5 (2006), 856-881; and Christerson, Edwards, and Emerson, *Against All Odds*.

[133] Josh Chen, "Minority-Dominant Spaces, Reflexive Vulnerability, and Blended Integration" unpublished essay draft. I wish to thank Josh for pointing me toward these sociology sources.

[134] Hopkins, *Black Faith and Public Talk*, 1.

Higginbotham argues that since blacks were denied access to public space the church "came to signify a public space, the one true accessible space for the black community." Open to both religious and non-religious groups, she proposes that the black church historically served as a "multiple site," caring for all the needs of a community under oppression—a "church with the soul of a nation." The lack of institutions open to blacks meant that the black church became "the most logical institution for the pursuit of racial self-help . . . an agency of social control, forum of discussion and debate, promoter of education and economic cooperation, and an arena for the development of leadership."[135]

This meant that black Christianity developed its own highly distinctive religious and liturgical culture. Integrated churches—that tend to still be white-majority congregations—struggle to incorporate these distinctive cultural and liturgical elements well into life together. Belonging is not enough. An integrated church that fails to meet these cultural needs, as well as include the more expansive social roles that the historical black church has filled within its own life and ministry will continue to struggle to move toward any deep and lasting reconciliation. An approach to reconciliation that identifies separateness as the core problem of racial relations fails to see separateness, instead, as a symptom of a deeper problem of unjust social, political, and economic structures.[136] The call for racial diversity as the true and sufficient sign of reconciliation neglects the deeper and systemic injustices that pervade our racial relations, risks placing minorities in positions in which they lose their power and identity, and emphasizes sameness to the expense of particularity in a way that encourages the colorblindness that in fact leaves us blind to the many other elements of our racial brokenness.

4.3 The Failure of Reconciliation

All of this points to the difficulty, even impossibility, of racial reconciliation in our time. This difficulty is apparent in recent despair over the prospects of reconciliation and debate over the degree to which whites ought to even engage in conversations about race.[137] African

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[135] Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 7, 10, 5. See also, Mary Patillo-McCoy, "Church Culture as a Strategy of Action in the Black Community," *American Sociological Review* vol. 63 (1998), 767-784.

[136] Harvey, 60.

[137] For example, the response my project generated from James Cone was quite different than Duke professor Christina Cleveland's reaction to a *New York Times* article on the failure of the white church by Southern Baptist leader Russell Moore. Cleveland chastised Moore over a series of tweets—lamenting the fact that "we need a white make leader of a white denomination to say this" and insinuating the inappropriateness of any white person talking about race—with Cone prodding for white people to write about it more ("I'll tell them if they are wrong!"). See www.storify.com/hannahschaef/christena-cleveland-responds-to-russell-moore-s-ny. Cleveland tweeted nine objections to Moore's article and individually they all make valid and necessary points about the

Americans have good reasons to be suspicious of white intervention, and this suspicion has lead to perpetual controversy over black separatism/nationalism or integration. For example, in a 2016 *Washington Post* opinion article, during the height of the Black Lives Matter movement, poet and activist Zack Linly argued that it is time for blacks to stop talking to white people about race altogether. Linly wrote, "We need to stop arguing with them because, in the end, they aren't invested like we are."[138] He contends that attempting to educate white people will ultimately prove fruitless because "They've gone their whole lives being the default for social and cultural normalcy and never really had to think critically about race at all." Similarly, the Baldwinesque memoir of Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me,* received much attention since its premier in 2015. Coates' sober perspective on the black experience and lack of hope in processes of reconciliation accurately reveal current postures toward racial progress. Coates begins by recalling the moment his son, after hearing the Michael Brown's shooter would go unpunished, telling him that he had to go to his room, crying. He writes to his son, "Here is what I would like you to know: In America it is traditional to destroy the black body—*it is heritage*."[139] For Coates, there is no hopeful or constructive way forward; Coates is not religious and therefore unable to draw on themes of reconciliation, but his despair is revealing. He sees proposals for reconciliation, primarily originating from white America, as attempts to make us "all beige and thus the same 'race.'"[140] In contrast to such claims, he recommends a turn to "the Mecca," which, while figured by the physical location of Howard University, signifies a turn to black sectarianism based in the shared experience of struggle and rejection of America's hypocrisy. His message to his son is words of consolation: "The struggle is really all I have for you because it is the only portion of this world under your control," he says. "I do not believe we can stop them . . . and still I urge you to struggle."[141] Self-consciousness and self-actualization against a world set against him, these are the only options for the black person in the world. He ends the book with this warning to his son, "Do not pin your struggle on their conversion."[142]

This debate over and rejection of reconciliation is nothing new. It has been around since the days of black separatism and nationalism, and in the scholarly works of black humanists like

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need for a more radical call to abolish white power. Yet the fact that a white theologian's attempt to call his white denomination to account for maintaining the myth of a "White Christian America" would meet such stern criticism may result in chastening white attempts to speak about the problems of white power and privilege to their own constituents. At the least, this reveals the complexities of the problem and the fraught nature of calls for "reconciliation."

[138] Zack Linly, "It's Time to Stop Talking About Racism with White People," *Washington Post*, September 12, 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/09/07/its-time-to-stop-talking-about-racism-with-white-people.

[139] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 103.

[140] Coates, 115.

[141] Coates, 107, 151.

[142] Coates, 151.

William R. Jones. The recent development of this movement has been criticism of reconciliation from the side of justice-minded white Christians or Evangelical Christians of all races concerned that the methods of reconciliation often employed seek short-sighted goals or even perpetuate the problems of white supremacy.[143] As white Christians task themselves with sorting out the ways we can overcome our complicity in systems of white supremacy, this has become an internal debate as well. Is reconciliation the primary concept of contending with racism and white supremacy with which we ought to operate? Jennifer Harvey argues it is not. In one of the more influential books on this topic recently, she argues that the "reconciliation paradigm," as she deems it, has failed. The eagerness of most advocates of reconciliation causes them to reach for too-simple solutions and identify in solidarity with the oppressed far too quickly.

On a deeper level, the problem with the reconciliation paradigm as presented here, is that it rests on a universalist ethic. That is, all of the problems with the prominent vision of reconciliation that I noted in the previous paragraph precipitate from a core and underlying universalism when considering race. Whites are trained to see their perspectives as objective and universal, and thus normative. (For example, white theology is just theology while black theology is black theology.) This pretension to an unracialized identity or cultural location "allows whites to view themselves as universal humans who can represent all of human experience." The colorblindness of whites projects their own particular experiences universally onto all others. According to Harvey, this entails a moral and practical standard that addresses everyone in the same way, no matter one's particular racial identity; it presumes that "all differences are different in the same way."[144] And thus it imposes one uniform standard against which we can measure or interpret our experiences of race and one standard we can hold one another accountable to across differences. This allows whites to operate with an individualistic, meritocratic mindset, and maintain a blindness to the ways white supremacy is imbedded in institutional practices, legal policies, and the collective psyche. Because whites have not been trained to think complexly about race in school, in mainstream discourse, or in social institutions, and because it benefits them to neglect to do this, "many whites believe their financial and professional successes are the result of their own efforts while ignoring the fact of white privilege." [145] They form a false belief in meritocracy, that everyone who deserves is able to succeed and those who do not succeed obviously did not succeed of their own fault—

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[143] In addition to Harvey, for a recent black Evangelical perspective see Kenneth N. Young, *The Trouble with Racial Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: NextStep Resources, 2010), and for a critical perspective see the following three-part blog series "Refusing to Reconcile," by Amaryah Shaye at *Women in Theology*, https://womenintheology.org/2014/01/19/refusing-to-reconcile-against-racial-reconciliation. For a similar argument to Harvey's but from a political perspective see, Ronald W. Walters, *The Price of Racial Reconciliation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009).
[144] Harvey, 59.
[145] DiAngelo, 61.

laziness, licentiousness, etc.—a belief perpetuated by "the American Dream." Inequality is explained by many factors other than systemic racism. This engenders a self-perpetuating sense of entitlement, and images white as positive and hardworking, and black as negative, lazy, and dependent.

Most importantly, especially for the argument of this dissertation, this universalism functions practically as a blockage to reflexivity, the inability to think about whiteness as a particular identity that may have an effect one one's life. Whites are obstructed from seeing how their own identity may contribute to their privileged social condition as well as the oppression of others. "Universalism functions to deny the significance of race and the advantages of being white," DiAngelo observes. "Further, universalism assumes that whites and people of color have the same realities, the same experiences in the same contexts, . . . the same responses from others, and assumes that the same doors are open to all."[146] Still, while whites assume their worldviews are universal and normative, they still need racialized others as the backdrop for their normativity, which points to an inherent contradiction: the abstract depends on the particular. The consequence of this universalist preoccupation with sameness for any prospect of reconciliation is the belief that we all equally bear the burden of reconciliation. This results in the same call for action despite one's location of privilege or oppression. It promotes the same duty to owed to one another and entails the same urgency for unity on all parties. As Harvey notes, "particularity and distinct white responsibility is flattened."[147]

Harvey then concludes her critique of reconciliation with four summative points. The reconciliation paradigm fails because it 1) does not identify the different work required of whites and blacks, 2) it does not attend to the deeper history and structures that caused racial separateness, 3) it privileges a white perspective that privileges the work of forgiveness at the expense of repentance and repair, and 4) it prioritizes relationships over action.[148] This is especially true, she suggests, in justice-oriented Evangelical communities who champion personal interracial relationships as triggers for reconciliation. Her problem with an emphasis on relationship building is that it also places undue expectation on people of color to listen to white stories or tell their own, as if it is their job to educate us, in a context of white defensiveness and fragility.[149] Reconciliation in this way becomes a more costly endeavor for blacks than it is for whites, and fails to reckon with the problem of whiteness. Harvey argues instead, we should adopt a "reparations paradigm" that emphasizes redistribution of power and resources and repair rather than reconciliation.[150] She does not eschew reconciled

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[146] DiAngelo, 59.
[147] Harvey, 77.
[148] Harvey, 78.
[149] Harvey, 79.
[150] Harvey, 4.

communities as the ultimate desire or end, but suggests we need to reorder our method by at least temporarily jettisoning a focus on reconciliation.[151]

I identify the shallow form of reconciliation that draws Harvey's criticism as "cheap reconciliation," and I agree with her challenges. However, I believe that the problem does not lie in pursuing reconciliation, but in the conceptual and practical depth with which we pursue it. This is a difficult claim, because we simultaneously know that scripture calls us to be agents of reconciliation;[152] yet we also know the ways this imperative has been deployed and the costly effects it has had on the black community. The challenges to reconciliation posed by Harvey and others should make white Christians seriously consider if history forces us to abandon a scriptural mandate as inadequate in light of our current circumstances.

I want to argue that it does not, and that is the task of this dissertation. I advocate for a form of deep, "costly" reconciliation, drawing on the language of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who will feature occasionally in this project and lies behind not only my work, but the works of Cone and Hauerwas as well. His famous commentary on "cheap" and "costly" grace parallel my argument here for a costly reconciliation.[153] Reconciliation is always costly for African Americans: always has and always will be. A costly reconciliation recognizes and names that cost precisely as the problem. Yet, James Cone has argued forcefully for the importance of reconciliation as a sign of the power of the Gospel—and I will address that fully in chapter seven. For now I am proposing, in light of his commitment to reconciliation and the Christian biblical imperative to become "ministers of reconciliation," that white Christians must engage in a form of reconciliation that requires us to bear some of that cost—while recognizing that we may never bear our proper share of the burden. The problem with reconciliation is models of reconciliation that leave power dynamics in place. Therefore, any adequate form of reconciliation cannot be seen as an attempt to meet in the middle or to bear

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[151] Harvey, 7.

[152] The Apostle Paul writes, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:17-19).

[153] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (English) vol. 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003) (hereafter *DBWE).* Bonhoeffer famously contrasts cheap and costly grace in this way: "Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it the Lord's Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ. Costly grace is the hidden treasure in the field, for the sake of which people go and sell with joy everything they have. It is the costly pearl for whose price the merchant sells all that he has; it is Christ's sovereignty, for the sake of which you tear out an eye if it causes you to stumble. It is the call of Jesus Christ which causes a disciple to leave his nets and follow him" (44-45). Bonhoeffer abides behind and occasionally within the work of this dissertation for reasons I will return to later.

burdens equally. If reconciliation is possible, its process must take the form of reparative cost borne by whites—that is, a costly reconciliation recognizes that reparations must be an ingredient part. Here I do not necessary mean monetary, though that may certainly be considered, but a dramatic restructuring of power dynamics and shedding of privilege. I will spend much of this dissertation talking about the possibility, and difficulty, of this, and will do so by commending a process of practices.

In the same way that Bonhoeffer describes costly grace as constituted by difficult personal and communal practices (outlined more specifically later in his *Life Together*) a costly reconciliation must also require concrete practices. George Yancey defines whiteness as a historical process of hegemony and privilege that "forces bodies of color to the margins" and that is expressed through cultural, political, interpersonal, and institutional *practices.*[154] These practices then combine and converge to create white supremacy, white control of mechanisms of cultural, political, and institutional power. If Yancey is correct that whiteness and white supremacy are constituted by and expressed through practices, any attempt to resist or subvert whiteness must also do so through practices. Yet unlike cheap reconciliation, these practices must acknowledge of racial history; grant all a voice and power to influence communal decisions; and generate the laying down of privilege and power, placing the burden on the shoulders of whites and requiring us to submit to minority authority. After further analyzing the problem and ecclesial context of whiteness over the next three chapters, this dissertation will return to this proposal and explore the contours and concrete practices of a costly reconciliation in its later chapters.

5 Conclusion: Looking Ahead
5.1 Methodology
Tackling a problem as complex as racial relations—even if limited to an ecclesial context and further limited to black/white relations—is a task that transcends any particular methodology. Yet, the call for concrete attention and practices (by both of my theological interlocutors) is both a key argument for this project and its methodology. I argue throughout that abstraction is an instrument of white supremacy; and abstract methodologies risk becoming instruments of impotent or harmful normative proposals in the field of Christian ethics. Cone counters this tendency in his own work and proposes, "There can be no genuine Christian theology without prophetic self-criticism of the Christian community that gives birth to it."[155] Taking my cue from Cone, and drawing on the methodological priorities of both of my interlocutors, I employ a methodology that attends to these concerns: a broadly lived theology methodology.

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[154] Bretherton, "Exorcising Democracy" quoting Yancey, *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* (London: Routledge Publishers, 2012), 5, italics added.
[155] Cone, *For My People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 116, (hereafter FMP).

Lived theology is a broad category that can encompass many particular research and writing methods. Charles Marsh, the founder of the Project on Lived Theology, states that lived theology begins with the questions: "How might theological writing, research, and teaching be expanded, or reimagined, to engage lived experience with the same care and precision given by scholars to books and articles? How might the discipline of theology, in its method, style, and pedagogy, appear anew if narrated accounts of faith-formed lives were appropriated as essential buildings blocks of theological knowledge?"[156] Lived theology understands the ways that ecclesial practices, liturgies, music, ministries, and testimonies create theological discourse. Thus, a lived theology methodology seeks to interpret and narrate the experiences and lived practices of faith communities, but without the confessional constraints of other sociological, empirical, ethnographic, or observant research. Lived theology claims that "any regard for lived experience within the sociological phenomenon called the church has a specifically theological character." Marsh contends that lived theology is characterized by three primary concerns: "(1), keeping narrative space open to the actions of God in experience; (2) understanding the dynamism of theological convictions, the play of doctrinal and confessional commitments—views on Christology, the Trinity, the Church, etc.—in lived experience; and (3) clarifying the social consequences of theological ideas."[157] In this it seeks to make space for the varieties of life experiences, struggles, and redemptions that mark the life of faith, and considers these generative material for theological reflection. In this way, it is located in the interstices of various disciples and bridges the academic cleavage between theory and practice, "casting light on regions of experience that systematic or philosophical theologies often ignore, evade, or even distrust, reminding us that life with God inspires attunement to a deeper mundane, to the varieties of ordinary life."[158] With this focus in mind, I employ a lived theology approach in three specific ways.

5.1.1 Concrete Problems

First, any constructive theological work must begin by attending to concrete existing problems. This aligns with Willis Jenkins' methodological proposal above to address wicked problems, to give greater attention to the concrete reality of the problem(s), as well as with H. Richard Niebuhr's insistence that Christian ethics must begin by asking, "What is going on?"[159] Niebuhr posits this question as the first step in moral deliberation as distinguishing an ethics of responsibility from a teleological or deontological approach to ethics. His account

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[156] Charles Marsh, "Introduction," *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy*, ed. Charles Marsh, Peter Slade, and Sarah Azaransky (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 6.

[157] Marsh, "Introduction" to *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy*, unpublished draft.

[158] Marsh, 9.

[159] Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 60. Though in light of the topic of this dissertation it may be more appropriate to appeal to Marvin Gaye's rendering of this same question.

understand that "all action, we now say, including what we rather indeterminately call moral action, is a response to action upon us."[160] This is true because we are fundamentally "beings in the midst of a field of natural and social forces," constantly being acted upon and thus, responsive beings who must answer to that action in accordance with our interpretation of that action—according to "what is going on."[161] I think that Niebuhr is correct when he argues that theo-ethical work must begin with understanding ourselves as responding to our subjective interpretations (even communally contingent interpretations) of the concrete actions we discern around and upon us, and in accountability to and dialogue with those other moral agents who are acting around, upon, and with us. This ethical approach is consistent with a moral theology that looks to practices of formation to shape the ways in which we respond to our interpretations of reality within our communities of formation. What we learn from Niebuhr and Jenkins is that a theology that seeks to offer concrete practices as a way forward must begin by attending to concrete problems. As Mary McClintock Fulkerson argues in the beginning of her ethnographic account of the Good Shepherd congregation in *Places of Redemption*, theological issues derive from the dilemmas of contemporary life, and theological reflection must not dictate beforehand what problems it will address.[162] While I join Hauerwas and Cone, and others like Mary McClintock Fulkerson, in criticizing theological abstractions and universalizations, I hope to employ a methodology that does the same by attending to the real concrete problems of racism, its (often hidden) sources of propagation, theologians who engage or avoid it (and investigate the specific reasons they avoid it), and a particular faith community's way of negotiating it.[163]

More specifically, ecclesiological scholarship must attend to the problems generated by and endured within the church itself. This model of research allows for no ecclesial triumphalism. Instead, this dissertation project begins with a wound—the wound of racism both originating within and perpetuated by the church. Racism and white supremacy are certainly problems that transcend the life of the church to affect American culture at large. And of course, there is much to be said about this larger phenomenon. I have chosen to delimit my focus to the ways racism is developed, perpetuated, and hopefully disrupted within the life of the church.

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[160] Niebuhr, 61.

[161] Niebuhr, 56, 57. Niebuhr identifies these as four components of responsibility: response, interpretation, accountability, and social solidarity. He summarizes this idea of ethical responsibility as "the idea of an agent's action as response to an action upon him in accordance with his interpretation of the latter action and with his expectation of response to his response; and all of this in a continuing community of agents" (65).

[162] Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 13.

[163] Fulkerson charges that most theologies fail to recognize the marked nature of its objects and subjects, and thus, "risks duplicating the phony universal concern of neoliberal political projects that ignore the residuals of racism in the name of treating everyone the same" (*Places of Redemption*, 253-254).

As I have suggested, theology and the institution of the church had a large part in creating the category of race and problem of white supremacy, so it is appropriate to claim that it has some responsibility to contesting this wicked problem. As Nicholas Healy says, "Sin and error, in short, are part of the church's theological and concrete identity prior to the eschaton,"[164] and these must be generative, instructive, confessional, and constructive sites for theological reflection. He argues that ecclesiological research, therefore, ought to "maintain the tension between the claims for the church's orientation to the ultimate truth on one hand and, on the other, acknowledgement of ecclesial sin."[165] This dissertation follows this advice by investigating the wounds and tensions present within the Body of Christ as generative for theology without looking away or attempting to quickly to resolve them. I hope my analysis and proposals with have implications for those outside of the church, but my attention will be on race as an ecclesiological problem and my energy directed toward seeking ecclesiological approaches to addressing it.

5.1.2 Reflection on Community
Second, this dissertation employs a lived theology methodology by reflecting on the life and thought of the Christian community. As I will demonstrate in Part II, Cone and Hauerwas are both communitarian theologians of some sort, concerned with the lived realities of particular communities. Like Cone, I content that theology must be responsible to and for the community of faith, the church. Here Cone anticipates what has been called the "ecclesial turn" in Christian ethics and political theology—scholars focusing on the church either through ethnographic methods of research or placing the institution of the church as the formative center for the Christian moral or political life. While this turn is not directly associated with liberation theology, liberationists often attend to the concrete realities of real faith communities to address the sufferings faced by real people. All of this follows the proposals I already noted from Gustafson and Healy, as well as from Friedrich Schleiermacher, who claimed, "It can only be greatly detrimental on all sides when the leaders of one church community are not acquainted with the true condition of the rest."[166] He goes on to say that in order to exert any deliberative theological influence, one must appraise the actual condition of the church at that time—the dilemmas present within ecclesial communities. "The tasks of any person who is to exert influence of a genuinely deliberative character arise out of the way in which one appraises the actual condition of the church at the present time," he argues, "according to one's conception of the nature of both Christianity and of one's own particular church community."[167]

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[164] Nicholas Healey, *Church, World, and the Christian Life*, 11.

[165] Healey, *Church, World, and the Christian Life*, 20.

[166] Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study* 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 41.

[167] Schleiermacher, 97-98.

In its reflection upon church life, the methodology of this dissertation is related to the work of the growing field of ecclesiology and ethnography, though it reserves space to make normative judgments throughout—attending to the empirical but not allowing the empirical to occlude theological critiques and judgments over what ought to be done. I also hope that it pushes these disciplines to move past purely interpretive work to, as Luke Bretherton argues, to "judgment leading to further [and better] action."[168] In this way, this project aims for the attentive rigor of works like Mary McClintock Fulkerson's *Places of Redemption*, while beginning from a broader perspective. Fulkerson's approach aims to give "full attention to the structure of situation, its shape and its demand, in such a way that the complex of racialized, normalized, and otherwise enculturated bodies and desire are as much a part of the analysis as the presence of biblical and doctrinal elements."[169] I hope this work approximates that desire while turning these reflections back to the church itself.[170] Along these lines, while this project does not employ an ethnographic method, I hope that it advocates and presses for further ethnographic research and evaluations of faith communities, pairing empirical and theoretical research.

Within this general attention to the communal life of the church, I employ lived theology methodology in two smaller ways. The first is through interview conversation with my two primary theological subjects. I have been blessed in this project to be able to garner interview research with both Hauerwas and Cone. My conversations with both theologians, reveal them both as scholars deeply concerned with the life of the church, and their ecclesial commitments have shaped my approach, my writing, my analysis, and my conclusions. The second is my attention in the final chapter to lived examples of church practices attempting to engage in exercises of racial reconciliation within a local congregation in order to outline a proposal for practices of reconciliation. Appealing to specific practices of one local congregation to illustrate these categories will keep this project grounded in and accountable to the faith community. Nicholas Healy notes that contemporary ecclesiologies, most of which are concerned with church practices, tend to fall into two groups. He says:

> One group consists of those practices which are clearly structured, requiring specific actions at specific times and places. Of this kind, some may be more complex than others. Baptism is clearly a 'big' and 'complex' activity. It requires more actions for it to be performed properly than, say, the practice of

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[168] Bretherton, "Coming to Judgment: Methodological Reflections on the Relationship between Ecclesiology, Ethnography and Political Theory," *Modern Theology* vol. 28 no. 2 (April 2012), 190.

[169] Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*, 21.

[170] Nicholas Healey in *Church, World, and the Christian Life* argues that the only adequate form of reflection upon concrete church is theology, but can make theological use of other forms of discourse to examine the complexities and confusions of human activity, since this activity helps constitute the church (5).

dipping the hand into holy water and crossing oneself. The other kind of practices are loosely structured, if they have any structure at all, so they can be performed in many different ways. Bass lists a number of these, including 'saying yes and saying no', 'honoring the body', 'keeping sabbath', 'dying well' and 'hospitality'.[171]

This dissertation falls into the second group. I draw on specific practices from a local congregation, yet due to this congregation's charismatic and "low-church" liturgical structure, the practices tend toward a looser, organic character. Still, I believe this is important, methodologically, to turn more attention to the types of practices that fly below the radar, so to speak. I will have more to say about this in the final chapter.

5.1.3 Subject Reflexivity

Third and finally, I employ a methodology that understands the necessary reflexivity of the researcher and writer as subject. In true form to lived theological reflection, this dissertation allows for the fact that researchers who aim to attend to lived communities are shaped by our own interests and past perspectives.[172] That is, our vision will always be conditioned by our own contingent location. Experiences shape our subjectivity and reflexively inform our observations as well as our own changing theological beliefs; all research is "interested." Especially when the topic is something as fraught as race, as a researcher I must reflect on the ways that my own racialization and prejudice inflects not only the conclusions I derive, but also the questions I ask and methodology with which I approach this subject. I hope to maintain a reflexivity throughout this project. This project began when I recognized my own biases and blindness, and I have continued stumbling through this work. It is not as though I am debating or arguing about something "else" completely and objectively outside of myself and not infused within my own work. At no point when I criticize any of these groups for inadequacies do I not also include myself. This dissertation will therefore display a level of subjectivity likely unusual to such works since I can never remove myself and my complicity as a white theologian from the words of these pages.

5.2 Chapter Summaries

This opening chapter has cast the academic and cultural landscape of the relationships of theology and race as well as church and race. As the first step in constructing my proposal for a costly racial reconciliation, I provided an analysis of the historical, cultural, and ecclesial obstacles preventing reconciliation. Specifically, the chapter analyzed the ways whiteness infiltrates theology and church practices in ways that blind white theologians and Christians

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[171] Nicholas Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 5 no. 3 (November 2003).
[172] Peter Ward, "Attention and Conversation" *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. Peter Ward (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 37.

from the effects of whiteness. In a state in which whiteness feels its legitimacy threatened, it responds with aggressive power moves, at worst, and fragility and avoidance, at best. I framed these strategies of avoiding race as symptoms of colorblindness, or the inability or refusal of whiteness to see itself and recognize the ways that it impacts theology, church, and the world. These responses have made proposals for racial reconciliation feel cheap and shallow. The next chapter focuses on the theological dimensions of these strategies of avoidance through a close reading of the work of white traditionalist theologian Stanley Hauerwas. One of the most prominent theologians of the last few decades, Hauerwas helps us to uncover the deeper theological reasons that white theologians and churches often avoid dealing with race. His example provides theological depth to the contours of colorblindness I examined in this chapter. Through a close reading of the few times he attends to race, and the ways in which he theologically frames the issue of race and racism, I will highlight the reasons he and many others avoid it (and avoid understanding the ways they are already complicit in systems of racism) as well as identify latent resources within his theology for attending to race, whiteness, and domination.

The next two chapters situate this discussion ecclesiologically by analyzing the ways Hauerwas and Cone understand the identity and mission of the church. While ostensibly offering radical visions of the church and church's mission, I argue that both theologians draw on the same underlying conceptual themes to shape their visions. Since both theologians remain committed to the concrete community, and all of its narrative particularity, any means of reconciliation on their accounts must emerge from within the local church community. Chapter three provides an overview of Hauerwas's ecclesiology and chapter four does the same for Cone, while arguing for the more contentious point that Cone is an ecclesial theologian—that is, reconciliation is a work of the church for him. Both chapters identify conceptual resources the two thinkers hold in common, providing links between the traditionalist/postliberal ecclesiology of Hauerwas and black liberationist ecclesiology of Cone. Their common commitments to narrative, particularity, and attention to concrete problems lay the foundation for a constructive account of reconciliation that fits within the frameworks of both theologians and addresses the insufficiencies with many current accounts of reconciliation.

Chapter five signals a shift to Part Two of the dissertation, from description and analysis to critique and construction. Having identified the shared building blocks of an ecclesiology of costly reconciliation, chapter five turns toward the theological obstacles inherent in the work of Hauerwas and Cone that may inhibit a costly reconciliation. First, I attempt to theorize the reasons for Hauerwas's avoidance of and blindness to race as a deeper symptom of his traditioned thinking that leaves blacks and whites within a situation of incommensurability and misunderstanding. Then, turning to Cone, I suggest that his commitment to white

conversion—that whites can "become black" through their participation with the Black Christ and solidarity with the oppressed—opens the door for further misunderstanding on the part of whites. This allows "colorblind" whites eager for reconciliation to identify in solidarity with their black brothers and sisters too easily and simply, and does not take as seriously the concrete realities of skin color: the fleshly realities that determine how one is treated as he or she walks through this world. Looking to the church as a site that can both take these fleshly realities seriously *and* as a means of redemption, chapter six offers an ecclesiological vision of the wounded Body of Christ whose flesh bears the marks of a long history of racial violence. Drawing on the work of M. Shawn Copeland, Augustine, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I suggest that reconciliation within this wounded Body must recognize that like Christ's crucifixion wounds, these scars do not go away but remain as the very material that must be attended to and lifted up for redemption and transformation.

Chapter seven then turns to the conceptual and practical contours of a costly reconciliation. It argues that a "conversion" paradigm of reconciliation responds to the precise concerns levied against typical patterns of reconciliation and substitutes a costly practice of reconciliation for these cheap attempts. Understanding reconciliation as a process of conversion builds on the proposal of Cone to "become black" while moving beyond the ways his proposal can be misinterpreted and malpracticed. The final chapter then identifies specific practices of reconciliation within this model. The constitutive aspects of conversion—remembrance, confession, and opening to change and hospitality—provide the framework for this process of reconciliation. I attend to each of these practices in detail and link them with the concrete practices of a local congregation to examine the complexities, difficulties, and hopes of reconciliation within an actual community. The dissertation concludes with a reflection on the church as an incomplete, provisional, and wounded Body—just the type of community fitted for the difficult work of reconciliation.

* * *

To identify the church as the community best suited for the difficult work of reconciliation, as this dissertation argues, cuts against much empirical evidence. As noted in this opening chapter, the church has been silent at best in terms of addressing racism, and often seems to fuel the engine of white supremacy while simultaneously blinding white Christians to their own whiteness. It also cuts against much theological evidence; one of the most prominent theologians writing about the church, Stanley Hauerwas, fails to adequately incorporate the implications of race within his ecclesiology. And many of those influenced by Hauerwas, like myself, have tended to do the same. This presents a challenge that this dissertation takes up, to uncover the reasons for this evasion as well as resources to fruitfully engage in costly reconciliation. Therefore I begin my argument by directly confronting the ecclesiological work

of Hauerwas, identifying the building blocks of a church of reconciliation by addressing the whitewashed church presented by Hauerwas. The next two chapters begin this work.

Chapter Two | *The Witness of Whiteness of Stanley Hauerwas*

"The problem of race, it seems, is that it is by no means easy to say what the problem of race is."[1]

1 Introduction: Hauerwas and Black Power

Stanley Hauerwas's first published essay was a defense of the morality of Black Power. This may come as a surprise to those of us accustomed to his typical polemics against liberalism, arguments for the epistemological priority of the church, or emphasis on other specific moral issues like medical ethics, war, and disability. And that surprise would be justified; he has only directly addressed the issue of race in three subsequent published essays or book chapters, and did not do so at all until 25 years after this first publication. Hauerwas does not write about race.

Hauerwas's attention (or rather, inattention) to race is one aspect of his multi-valenced career that has received little critical treatment. I will begin this chapter by situating and contextualizing Hauerwas's consideration of race first through a narration of his early career and description of this surprising first article, and then through the lens of a critical exchange over his subsequent inattention to the issue, one challenging and one sympathetic, by Derek Woodard-Lehman and Jonathan Tran, before later offering a more critical analysis of his work that places him between the polarized assessments of these two scholars. It will be important, at least for the dissertation version of this project, to give a close reading to the (few) occasions in which Hauerwas addresses the issue of race or racism in his corpus.

I do this not because I think Hauerwas is especially unique in this evasion of race. (I would suspect that many readers might question my wisdom: So much, too much, has been written about the things that Hauerwas *does* write about, why devote an entire chapter of a dissertation to what he *does not* write about? Obviously only a sycophant would do that.) Well, I hope I am not a sycophant, though as I indicated in the previous chapter I have been shaped tremendously by Hauerwas and am targeting this dissertation toward others who have been

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[1] Hauerwas, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversation Between a Radical Democrat and a Christian,* with Romand Coles (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 98 *(hereafter CDR).*

likewise influenced. So, I do this because Hauerwas is not especially unique. Rather Hauerwas represents a great cloud of white theologians blinded by their own colorblindness who have failed to witness to the ways their own racial location has influenced their work. This group has evaded the issue of race for one or more of a number of reasons. In this chapter I am interested in the specific reasons Hauerwas offers for why he has done so. I will examine each of the works in which Hauerwas addresses this issue because I contend that they represent many of the same—and most important—reasons that many white theologians in general avoid attending to race as a theological, ethical, or ecclesiological issue. I will engage in a close reading of each of these works, with little reliance on outside or secondary sources, and then expand this discussion to other voices later in the dissertation.

1.1 The Ethics of Black Power

Hauerwas wrote his first article, which as of 2010 was considered "lost to history,"[2] for the campus newspaper at Augustana College, his first teaching job, on the occasion of an upcoming campus symposium on Black Power in February 1969. This was the same year that James Cone released his *Black Theology and Black Power*. Hauerwas later references this article as "The Ethics of Black Power," though in the *Augustana Observer* itself the piece is tagged by the more descriptive headlines of "White Christian Liberals Resentful" and "Hauerwas on Black Power: Movement Morally Sound." In language that reads more like the Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr than the Stanley Hauerwas we have grown to expect, he calls Black Power "a morally healthy development." Further, it is an appropriate democratic strategy to secure greater equality while avoiding the extremes of anarchy or "excessive violence" (this was before his encounter with Yoder converted him to pacifism), though it robbed white liberals of their attempt to assuage their own guilt. He writes, "Suddenly all the avenues which could relieve the guilt of being white have been cut off by the very people with which he wished to identify."[3]

At a time when America currently debates the statements "All lives matter" vs. "Black lives matter," Hauerwas similarly and astutely noted in 1969:

> The phrase 'black power' and what it represents has come as a severe shock to many Christians who liked to think of themselves as liberal on the question of race. They feel as if the starved dog they tried to feed has suddenly bitten the hand of his benefactor. Moreover, it has made sentiments such as 'All men are

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[2] See Jonathan Tran "Time for Hauerwas's Racism," in *Unsettling Arguments: A Festschrift on the Occasion of Stanley Hauerwas's 70th Birthday,* eds. Charles R. Pinches, Kelly S. Johnson, and Charles M. Collier (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012) and James Samuel Logan, *Good Punishment?: Christian Moral Practice and U.S. Imprisonment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008).

[3] "White Christian liberals resentful" and "Hauerwas on Black Power: Movement 'Morally Sound" in *The Augustana Observer*, February 5, 1969, 3,7.

loved by God and should therefore be brothers' seem rather shallow, platitudinous, and logically doubtful.

Deploying his usual critical force on the Protestant liberalism of which he considered himself a full-paid member at the time, he demonstrates an awareness that the equality and integration that white liberals advocated was, in practice, a call for blacks to accommodate to white values and culture. Values such as equality and justice are developed and institutionalized in society in complex ways, he claims, and can even cause us to perpetuate the very injustices we are hoping to fight. Societies seldom respect the rights of the weak, and democracy provides an avenue by which these groups can effectively organize—surely, one of the least Hauerwasian claims that Hauerwas has ever made. "I am committed to the continued need to extend the participation of all men in a democratic society," he says. "There is no doubt that this will cause extreme stresses in the established order of our society, but the development of justice seldom comes without tension. The moral substance of this development in no way depends simply on the ethical goodness of the participants or their particular goals (just as the white participation does not), but rather should be regarded as an opportunity for the enrichment of our common social life." In this sense, in words that resemble the cotemporary social assessment offered by James Cone, Black Power is simply "a call from one black to another that the goods of this society are his not as he becomes what the white man wishes him to be, but only as he becomes a black man."[4]

Hauerwas claims that the Black Power movement is morally sound for two reasons. First, "it perceives with greater clarity and honesty the role of power in group relations," in that they no longer depend on the "good will" of whites. Black Power was a more realistic, necessary, and healthy response to the idealism of Martin Luther King, Jr. African Americans ought to use the same sources and forms of power to secure their self-interests and goals that other groups use. And second (in a move that foreshadows the theme of communal particularity in both his and Cone's work), "the black has had a special experience in America that he is intent on bringing with him into the future. This experience leaves him dissatisfied with the quality of life he sees in the wider society, and he is determined not to mimic it."[5] This, in fact, holds promise, he says uncritically, to enhance the "American experience."

Hauerwas is not simply supportive of the movement, however. He concludes the article by positing two reservations. Consistent with the "realist" ethical appraisal of the piece,

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[4] A note on my use of language in quotations: for the most part I will stick with the author's original rendering of gendered pronouns and nouns as well as racial terminologies. Especially in my treatment of Hauerwas and Cone this serves as a helpful historical and academic contextualization of their work, as well as displaying their development.

[5] Hauerwas, *Augustana Observer*, 3,7.

Hauerwas worries about the possibility of success of a movement predicated on a refusal to form coalitions with others to achieve its goals. However, beyond the political expediency of a movement that seems unwilling to form coalitions, Black Power connotes some sense of a search for identity. He notes that this is an age in which all identity is uncertain. Still he worries that the Black Power movement locates that search for identity in the political realm. And he doesn't think that the political realm can satisfy such a search: "the political realm, while of utmost importance, has limits which make it a poor place to discover the ultimate significance of our life."

Turning finally to his own white liberals, Hauerwas notes that they must now reckon with the fact that blacks have given up on relying on the guilt of whites as motivation to act ethically. "The white must take this opportunity to seriously rethink his own position," he writes. "In a way, he is fortunate because the black, by declaring his independence, has created a new possibility of freedom for the white." Since blacks now refuse to allow the white liberals to assuage their guilt by identifying their cause with the black cause, whites are forced to ask what kind of people they will be and what kind of society they want. "If we honestly address ourselves to these questions, we may someday find ourselves able to meet the black as a brother, in a far more profound way than is now possible," he writes. "Then we will have found that we must both meet as men who share the struggles of what it means to be human."[6]

This article seemed to propel Hauerwas into early career activism on behalf of racial justice during his tenure at Augustana. Hauerwas says he sympathetically followed the civil rights movement during his graduate school years at Yale, animated by many of his colleagues including his friend and Yale colleague Jim Childress's work on civil disobedience. His attention to the movement was shaped by Joe Hough's book, *Black Power and White Protestants: A Christian Response to the New Negro Pluralism*, published in 1968 which offered a Niebuhrian assessment of Black Power that Hauerwas seemed to draw from in his own article a year later.

When Hauerwas arrived at the small Lutheran college in Indiana, founded by "blonde haired and blue-eyed Swedes," there were only nineteen African American students in the entire Augustana student body. According to Hauerwas, he became an unofficial adviser to them, primarily because his accent led them to believe he was a southerner like them (Hauerwas insists he is a Texan instead).[7] As he cites in his memoir, most of his activism at Augustana was directed at race relations. He championed a resolution to hire an African American faculty member, to the chagrin of many other faculty members, and participated in a protest

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[6] Hauerwas, *Augustana Observer*, 3,7.

[7] Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 79 (hereafter *HC*).

with his nineteen African American "advisees" against the administration's refusal to grant them their own activities space in the student union.[8] He claims that these actions may have caused his department chair to soon-after inform him that his position in the faculty "might not be funded in the future."[9]

In an essay written over 25 years later (in fact, the next essay in which he directly addresses the issue of race), Hauerwas confessed that he grew up embedded in practices of segregation. "I have no idea how deeply the habits of racism are written into my life," he admitted, "but I know that they are not the kind of habits you simply 'outgrow' or 'get over.'"[10] Coming of age in Texas, Hauerwas worked alongside his bricklayer father. On the job he began as a laborer, a job generally reserved for African American workers who aided the mostly-white skilled bricklaying crew with the more mundane, difficult, and less-skilled tasks of moving around brick and mortar. As a "white guy who did the work of blacks," he formed a bond with his fellow "laborers," forged in unity against their common enemy, the bricklayers, who often took advantage of the laborers' efforts. This placed him in a cross-segregational situation set against the white skilled workers, a position that he feels influenced his future civil rights sympathies.[11]

It would, therefore, seem that these experiences set up Hauerwas, as Christian ethicist, for a career in addressing the racial atrocities of his time, and his church. At least they would confirm him as one uniquely attune to the struggles of the marginalized and minority. Even when the Christian Realism would inevitably fall away at the hands of MacIntyre and Yoder, there is no obvious reason this passion and insight—his early ideas about the dangers of "reconciliation" and worries about colorblindness—would not be sustained. Yet, as we will see, Hauerwas goes 25 years before ever again broaching the subject.

2 Hauerwas's Avoidance of Race via Woodard-Lehman and Tran

The degree to which these burgeoning experiences prepared him to think theologically about race is uncertain, even in Hauerwas's own reflections, because he intentionally refuses to write about it. Over his illustrious and influential career of nearly fifty years, Hauerwas has directly addressed the topic of race in only three subsequent essays. In the past ten years, two treatments of Hauerwas's lack of attention to race have emerged with interestingly divergent evaluations of this move, both from former students of Hauerwas: Derek Woodard-Lehman

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[8] *HC*, 81.
[9] *HC*, 82.
[10] *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-Century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 225 (hereafter *WW*).
[11] *HC*, 29

and Jonathan Tran. Both of these examinations are important for better contextualizing and analyzing Hauerwas's thought and the usefulness of attending to this topic.

2.1 Woodard-Lehman

In a 2008 *Journal of Religious Ethics* article, "Body Politics and the Politics of Bodies: Racism and Hauerwasian Theopolitics," Derek Woodard-Lehman calls Hauerwas to account for his lack of sustained attention to the issue of race.[12] More deeply, Woodard-Lehman, a white scholar, claims that Hauerwas needs to demonstrate how his radical pacifistic ecclesiology could offer a political form of resistance to "dominative power." Woodard-Lehman engages with the Foucaldian concept of dominative power, rather than violence per se, to attend to the ways violence persists beyond physical force to more subtle and passive forms of violence. With this, he challenges Hauerwas to specify how his ecclesiological ethic resists dominative power "with respect to a specific form of dominative power: racism and racialization."[13] He states plainly, "I suggest that Hauerwas must do something he has been reluctant to do. He must talk about race and racism."

Two aspects of Hauerwas's thought seem to prevent him from adequately dealing with the issue of "nonviolent violent" racist power. First, Hauerwas fails to acknowledge racism as a type of "dominative violence" because it does not fall within his more narrow, primarily physical, notion of violence: he "leaves intact nonviolent forms of dominative power residually present in the everyday lives of Christians."[14] (This is a criticism that James Cone will make of many white theologians, that a narrow—purely physical and military—conception of violence precludes them from realizing the ways in which all humans are already deeply embedded within cycles of violence. The question then, according to Cone, can no longer be one of violent versus nonviolent action, but to whom will one direct the violence in which one is already implicated. While Cone does not use the term "dominative power," the claims resonate.[15]) Woodard-Lehman calls for special attention to operations of racelessness dictated by the power and privilege of whiteness. A society and state that considers itself "raceless" is only an evolution to a "metastasizing of the racist cancer—racism now rendered inoperable and untreatable."[16] In this sense, violence must be understood more broadly as dispersed through social structures and arrangements that close off institutional and social access to

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[12] For a similar critique, see James Logan, *Good Punishment*. Logan asserts, "Why Hauerwas refuses to risk writing constructively about 'the struggle,' and why he views the potential for unity and peace regarding the issue as hopelessly 'eschatological,' given his insights into the politics of ontological intimacy, is a real puzzle" (223).

[13] Derek Woodard-Lehman, "Body Politics and the Politics of Bodies: Racism and Hauerwasian Theopolitics" *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 36 no.2 (2008), 297.

[14] Woodard-Lehman, 306.

[15] I will engage with this more thoroughly in chapter seven.

[16] Woodard-Lehman, 310, n.43.

particular groups. "In short, racially correlated lived inequalities are actual violence," asserts Woodard-Lehman. "Within conditions of late modern biopolitics, dominative power operates apart from, and exterior to, those state governmentalities that Hauerwas's Christological pacifism disavows" and thus, implicating "the white church itself [as] a structure of nonviolent violence."[17]

Secondly, Hauerwas's configuration of church and world allows him to disavow societal racism without offering a correlative ecclesiological proposal for substantive resistance to its dominative power. Yet, as I noted in chapter one, the persistence of racism both without and within the church in essentially equal patterns and structures contests the importance of a strong church/world dichotomy. It is not as if racism is only something "out there." In fact, the ecclesial origins of race and racism in western missionary and colonial ventures places a primary challenge to the church's racism.[18] Thus to accomplish any adequate challenge to racism, Woodard-Lehman claims that Hauerwas must give due diligence to the church's racism—more or at least as much attention as he grants to the state's racism—if he is to continue to credibly champion the church as an alternative to the state's politics of domination. "Dominative power structures worldly and churchly arrangements so that they are interpenetrating," Woodard-Lehman writes. "The everyday lives of Christians perpetuate the subtle forms of aggression, injustice, and nonviolent violence about which Hauerwas wonders. Moreover, these insinuate themselves into the church, rearticulating themselves in theological and ecclesiological registers."[19] If the "church being the church" is a politically significant form of resistance to power, as Hauerwas often claims, then it cannot only proclaim this resistance, but must embody and perform it as well. Ultimately, Woodard-Lehman pushes Hauerwas to offer a non-dominative alternative to the racism that exists in both society and the church, and ultimately claims that the truthfulness of his Christological pacifism, and general theological ethics, hangs on his ability to do so.

2.2 Tran

Jonathan Tran responds to Woodard-Lehman's critique in an interesting Festschrift article titled "Time for Hauerwas's Racism," found in the collection, *Unsettling Arguments*. As a former student of Hauerwas's of Vietnamese-American descent, Tran takes a surprising turn in this essay, arguing that, in fact, Hauerwas has already said too much on the issue of race. "My own thought is that Hauerwas's racism," Tran observes, "absolves him of the need to say much of anything about the church's racism." Silence, and the proleptic patience his silence

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[17] Woodard-Lehman, 312.
[18] See Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* and Luis Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism: The Political and Religious Conquest of the Americas* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992) for the history of the church's role in the origins of modern racism.
[19] Woodard-Lehman, 305.

conveys, is a more interesting option in the shadow of the church's racism, Tran contends.[20] "Hauerwas has allowed his racism to rest in the peaceable time that is his rendition of the church."

Tran counters Woodard-Lehman's assessment, suggesting that because Hauerwas critiques the racist tendencies of Enlightenment rationality, with its proclivity to allow universalizations to run roughshod over particularity, he understands these trajectories not only as a threat to liberal democratic society but a threat to and within the church as well. Woodard-Lehman's challenge doesn't undermine Hauerwas's radical ecclesiology, Tran argues, because he attends to the church's long history of racism by attending to his own (which constitutes an oddly individualistic move from Tran that would certainly not satisfy Hauerwas's own communitarian requirements). Moreover, Tran counters Woodard-Lehman's Foucaldian account of Hauerwas's evasion of race as a form of dominative violence, and especially Woodard-Lehman's call for him to offer a non-dominative alternative, by arguing that a non-dominative option is simply not possible; resistance can only ever be a counter-domination. Thus, the question becomes, not whether Hauerwas can counter the violence of racism with a non-dominative resistance, but whether he can challenge the church to be a rival dominative power to the racism that exists without and within it.[21]

Noting these difficulties, Tran claims that Hauerwas can best offer the church a theological resource to approach race through his silence; why does Hauerwas, particularly, need to say something about the church's racism? Couldn't others perhaps say it better? By having the patience to remain silent Hauerwas best attends to his own racism and best confesses his racism through his silence. While all, at least western, human beings have been racialized by racist social performances and structures, white people are often blinded to these performances and structures by their position as beneficiaries of these. This allows those in power or those with privilege to avoid opening a potentially painful wound.[22] "Stanley can't see his racism because he is not supposed to," Tran argues. "This means that while he struggles against that which he sees as racist, he also misses a lot and in turn benefits from that relative blindness. Much to his credit, Hauerwas doesn't pretend to get it, doesn't play that game in its personal or professional versions."[23] Often, Tran contends, Hauerwas's occasional excursions into the topic suggest that silence may be a better option for him! Tran points to one key example in Hauerwas's most recent treatment of the issue in his co-written work with Romand Coles, in which Hauerwas subsumes racism into the issue of the sovereignty of God.

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[20] Tran, 250-251.
[21] Tran, 252-253.
[22] See Fulkerson and Mount Shoop. For an example see Hauerwas's story of listening to Malcolm X speak in New Haven, referenced in chapter five of this dissertation.
[23] Tran, 254-255.

In this piece he argues that the issue of race is an effort to deny God's sovereignty, and once a person realizes this truth, he or she can no longer be a racist.[24] "Such a vagueness," Tran contends, "is often what happens when white guys feel compelled to say something about a racism they can hardly see, and so cannot help but make inferences that the racism they created isn't so bad."[25] And if this is the alternative, silence is golden.

Not every white guy with influence needs to talk about race—and some may contribute more by actually remaining silent. Hauerwas has mostly done this, Tran claims, rather than pretending to be something he is not. Hauerwas avoids the common temptation of white people to naively avow that he is not a racist. Instead, "his racism having been received into the church's eschatological hope, Hauerwas has learned to sit with it silently."[26] This is not a self-serving elision, nor an omission that undermines his project. This comes at great risk to Hauerwas, Tran suggests. Silence requires a vulnerability to allow others to offer judgments and explanations of one's silence. (A silence predicated on forgetfulness—a neglecting of past wounds—Hauerwas will suggest, is not a vulnerable silence, but an obstacle to finding any common ground for reconciliation.[27] This tension about the type, cause of, and utility of silence marks a tension in Hauerwas's thought.)

Silence is, in fact, *pace* Woodard-Lehman, the rival power that Hauerwas is poised to exercise in contrast to the dominative power of racism. Silence is Hauerwas's repentance on behalf of himself and his church. Tran concludes his essay by remarking, "It is the silence of waiting, of allowing another to speak for and claim you, and the patience that comes with living into the truth that if we survive what we've done to one another, God's going to have to speak."[28]

This account provides an interesting, even deeply Hauerwasian, account of Hauerwas's non-treatment of race. And while there is much to be gleaned from both of these accounts of Hauerwas on race, the question they beg is: Is there something particular in Hauerwas's theology, and more specifically in his explicit treatment of race and the reasons he gives for avoiding it, that Hauerwas can offer the church that others cannot? Both accounts take positions that seem to neglect the important resources Hauerwas offers critical reflection on the topic of race in three key areas: 1) his direct, though infrequent, treatment of the issue (when he is able to avoid the abstractions that Tran reveals), 2) his reasons for his avoidance

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[24] Tran, 255. *CDR*, 98.

[25] Tran, 255.

[26] Tran, 259.

[27] *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Postmodernity, and America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2000), 143 (hereafter *BH*).

[28] Tran, 261. For more on silence and patience see Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

of the issue, and 3) the deeper theological resources in his wider ethical work that these treatments and reasons draw upon. It is in these resources that Hauerwas does offer a unique theological account for race and resistance to racism (beyond silence) that compliments much of the work that Cone is also doing, and also points to deeper resources for church critique.

3 Hauerwas on Race: Three Articles

In this next section I will offer my own analysis and evaluation of Hauerwas's treatment of race. I will first critically examine the three other essays in which he deals with the topic, and in the manner of Tran and Woodard-Lehman, normatively analyze his moves and evasions to approach a theological assessment of "Hauerwas on race." (This is not because critically examining Hauerwas on any topic, especially one he avoids, is an end in itself—even for scholars enamored with their subjects like I happen to be. This means, only, that I believe the particular insights of Hauerwas, both in his treatment and evasions, reflect broader trends among white theologians. They offer unique and useful insights more broadly and constructively for theologians wishing to engage these theological and social issues.) Unlike both of the critics addressed above, however, I will argue that Hauerwas's treatment, or lack thereof, neither undermines his ethical project nor sustains a proper confessional patience. Rather, it does reflect a failure to recognize the ways his, and other white theologians', racial formations impact their own theological projects. This is an omission that at least invites further scrutiny. Still, the particular reasons for his evasion, along with the important insights he offers when he does address the topic, may be theologically generative; they not only provide resources for theologically examining race and racial relations, but speak to and conform to a wider agenda of ecclesial and social critique that resonates with and parallels much of the work of James Cone.

3.1 Remembering MLK Remembering

Hauerwas admits that he does not talk about race. Hauerwas notes in his memoir that not long after publishing the article on Black Power, his experience and shifting theological insight caused him to question what he had written. The Vietnam War and his encounter with students at Augustana who were facing the possibility of the draft, he explains, caused him to rethink Niebuhr and "think the interest-group liberalism intrinsic to my defense of black power was a mistake."[29] Hauerwas's youthful flirtation with Christian Realism along with a liberal assessment of justice and the possibilities of American democracy was short-lived. This jettisoning of Protestant liberalism, however, also precipitated an abandoning of race as an issue integral to his theological agenda—both in the form of practical activism and scholarly attention. With his move to an ecclesiological ethics that focused on pacifism and

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[29] *HC*, 85.

the church as a counter-politics to that of the liberal state, Hauerwas did not write about the issue of race and racial injustice for over twenty-five years. In the two times he did write on the subject, before his final assessment in *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary* in 2010, he still approached the topic obliquely, as a subset of or angle into his more direct confrontation with the amnestic quality of liberalism.

His next treatment of the topic came in an essay on "Remembering Martin Luther King, Jr. Remembering," published in the *Journal of Religious Ethics* and then in his 1995 book, *Wilderness Wanderings*. In this essay, which most explicitly contests the transfiguring of Martin Luther King into a national hero rather than a churchman, Hauerwas necessarily deals with the reality of the black church. He notes, "I am sure that no account of the white church in American can be told without attention to the black church, but I am not sure the reverse is the case. The problem [of "race"] is therefore an ecclesial one."[30] And in this case, he generally has nothing but praise for the black church in America. On the few occasions that he does address African American Christianity, he upholds the black church as an exemplar: "Few churches better embody what I think faithful churches should be than the black church."[31]

Hauerwas contends that King knew that the issue surrounding civil rights was not fundamentally about justice, but about memory: "The crucial question remains whether Americans can ever acknowledge what it means to be a slave nation."[32] America does not want to remember that slavery is part of our history. "Rather, we want to assume that if everyone has 'civil rights,' if everyone is free to be an 'individual,' if everyone is moderately well off, then we can say to those who are still upset about past wrongs, 'Oh come on, what's a little slavery between friends?'"[33] To his credit, here Hauerwas uncovers an important insight about the new form of racism that pervades a "post-racial" society in which the Civil Rights Movement has "won." Prefiguring the growing number of scholars who will later write about the temptations of "colorblindness" and unconscious, sinister dimensions of post-racial racism, Hauerwas identifies the sources of these symptoms as a national amnesia to its long history of racial injustice—a topic he will take up in more detail in the next article. Hauerwas blames liberalism for this loss of memory, and uses the case of persistent racism as a weapon in his broader attack on liberalism in this essay, and turns to the importance of particularity and qualification. Hauerwas's argument about liberalism and King is that remembering King and his speeches as liberal rhetoric abstracts King from his particular context and story—that is, an ecclesial one, and even a distinctively black church one. King actually serves as a model for Christian activism, and an exemplar for Hauerwas (a claim that offers insight into the type

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[30] *WW*, 234, note 1.
[31] *WW*, 225.
[32] *WW*, 234.
[33] *WW*, 230.

of world-engaged activism that Hauerwas thinks appropriate for Christians). King is an exemplary activist because he refused to "hide his Christian convictions in the name of 'pluralism.' While he fought for rights, equality, and freedom, he always reminded those he was fighting for and those he was fighting against that what was at stake was sin and salvation." That is, he did not translate all of his particular Christian convictions into some publicly acceptable reason.[34] And thus, he avoided the temptations of liberalism that are now coopting his legacy. Liberalism tends to universalize King and thus, water down his position—and the solutions to the problem—the type of abstracting moves that both Hauerwas and Cone reject.

However, in targeting his blame at liberalism, and therefore at the state in particular, Hauerwas neglects the parallel history of racism and amnestic temptations within the church. The white church also does not want to remember that slavery is part of its history, and needs the black church to remind it. But Hauerwas doesn't mention this. This is likely due to Hauerwas's conceptualization of church and world as antithetical and partitioned and his frequent failure to acknowledge that the same liberal temptations that pervade the world or state infiltrate, emerge within, and shape the church as well.

Perhaps the most significant part of this essay occurs in a few lines toward the beginning and in a footnote that follows. Here Hauerwas reflects briefly on his own racism and his reasons for not writing on the topic since the article twenty-five years before. He writes that since the habits of racism that he grew up with are "not the kind of habits you simply 'outgrow' or 'get over,'" he claims, "I have therefore refrained from pontificating on 'race' because I feared that that is what it would be—pontification."[35] To this he adds, "For me to 'use' Martin Luther King Jr., and the church that made him possible, to advance my understanding of Christian ethics seems wrong." And then, significantly: "That is not my story, though I pray that God will make that story my story, for I hope to enjoy the fellowship of the communion of saints."[36] He clarifies in a footnote that his hesitancy in writing about King is "not that white people should not write about black people. . . . The issue is not whether we can understand one another's experience, but rather what one is trying to do in appropriating another's story."[37] This appeal to 1) his own experience and embeddedness in modes of racism, 2) more theoretically, the concept of *story*, and specifically the subjective limits of story, and 3) his worry about appropriating and taking over another's story, will be essential themes in my later analysis of his treatment of race and placement of this treatment within his broader ecclesiology.

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[34] *WW*, 230.
[35] *WW*, 225.
[36] *WW*, 225.
[37] *WW*, 234, fn1.

3.2 The Wounds of History

"I marvel at the miracle that African Americans do not each day have to refrain from killing a white person."[38] With this typically hyperbolic statement, Hauerwas ends his lecture at a conference on violence and memory in Northern Ireland, subsequently published as the chapter, "Why Time Cannot and Should Not Heal the Wounds of History," in *A Better Hope* in 2000. Speaking to theologians and ministers in Northern Ireland, Hauerwas says he cannot understand the suffering caused in and by "the troubles" so he will not address the Irish situation. But, significantly, he also cautions that avoiding speaking to others' stories risks a "kind of fatal abstractness" that floats above the lived realities of everyday existence and "makes no difference for how we live."[39]

This claim seems to contrast his reluctance to speak about race in his essay five years prior, "Remembering Martin Luther King Jr. Remembering," because the African American story is "not my story." While he still proceeds cautiously here, and actually refrains from directly engaging the story of the Irish situation, this statement should not be seen as an empty gesture. Here Hauerwas implicates himself—intentionally or not—in a tension between a kind of necessary narrative isolation and the perpetual need to reach beyond one's own story to connect with others. It is also significant that he identifies the consequence of this narrative sectarianism as "abstractness," employing a crucial criticism both he and Cone levy against the universalizing tendencies of modern theology and identifying it as a critical element of the church's failure to attend to its own particularity. The avoidance of intersecting with others' stories is a subjective isolationism that results in perpetuating the abstract and universalizing tendencies of liberalism. But Hauerwas still worries that speaking beyond one's own story—or at least his own story—risks inevitably instrumentalizing the other for the sake of one's own purpose or agenda (the inevitable consequence of our sinful and self-serving nature, presumably). Hauerwas proceeds in this essay to stake out an argument—predictably against liberalism—but more directly against forgetting. The loss of (an even traumatic or horrific) memory is not a productive move forward even when a people realize that there is no way to make a situation right: "Yet our very denial of our history haunts us, frightening us with the reality so that we feel helpless before this ghost of our past."[40]

Again, in a moment of racial reflection, Hauerwas builds on the marker he laid out in the King essay about the dangers of "colorblindness" and "post-racial" pretensions (though he doesn't employ those terms). Liberal civil society has an amnesic proclivity, and this is nowhere more true than when it comes to racial memory: "The member of the dominant

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[38] *BH* 153.

[39] *BH*, 140.

[40] *BH*, 142.

race—failing to know how to speak of our wound—knows it only grows more painful the more deeply it is hidden within ourselves."[41] He contends that as a society we literally lack the language required to sufficiently recognize ourselves across the divisions that our history has created. This leaves us all in silence, lacking the tools to even articulate what we are now recognizing. And, significantly, "As a result, blacks and whites can find no common story that will enable them to heal the wound."[42]

Hauerwas then engages with two proposals for how society might move forward in reconciliation. The "no-fault reconciliation" proposed by scholar of African American religion, and Hauerwas's former colleague at Duke, C. Eric Lincoln, contends that in light of the atrocities of chattel slavery, lynching, Jim Crow, and segregation, the only way forward is to forget the past—"we are beyond the past," he says—and to see one another only for what we can become.[43] Hauerwas counters this proposal by appealing to politician and scholar Michael Ignatieff: "Crimes can never be safely fixed in the historical past; they remain locked in the eternal present, crying out for blood."[44] This aligns with the insights of many contemporary theologians doing research into the effects of trauma and traumatic memory.[45] Hauerwas permits that those who fight to honor their forebears and preserve the memory of the injustices perpetuated against them are probably the only truly "historical" people, in a modern world that constantly encourages us to forget our past. And while acknowledging the reality of this point, he warns that if you trace the implications of this line of argument, however, "it seems I should argue that what we need is a good old race war"! He follows that while he is not advocating that, "It is by no means clear to me that in fact that is not what we have been going through in America since the so-called Civil War."[46]

The next faulty proposal comes from theologian Miroslav Volf, who calls for a "non-remembering" predicated on the commitment that God promises to forget our forgiven sin

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[41] *BH*, 142.

[42] *BH*, 143.

[43] C. Eric Lincoln, *Coming Through the Fire: Surviving Race and Place in America*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 133-34.

[44] Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997), 186.

[45] For a good example, see Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010). Rambo's goal is to articulate the necessary patient to avoid jumping so quickly to narrative of redemption. She say that the goal of life after trauma is to recreate life in the aftermath; "not a state in which one gets beyond death; instead death remains in the experience of survival and life is reshaped in light of death" (25). According to Rambo, "Death persists. Life is not victorious. There is no life after the storm but only life reconceived through the storm" (109).

[46] *BH*, 145.

(Jer 31:34).[47] God's forgetfulness is the source of our redemption, according to Volf, "the grace of non-remembering." Short of the eschaton we must keep alive memory of the suffering, but we remember only in our faith that we will forget. But Hauerwas, again, disagrees. If God makes time, he contends, God remembers and still forgives, and makes that memory possible for us. Our sins are made part of an economy of salvation and thus, the new community and new story.[48] But this new story of God's faithfulness and salvation history makes possible the truthful remembering of our past and its sins (presumably, those both perpetuated and those suffered). "God does not forget our sins but rather redeems our sins in Eucharistic transformation."[49]

And here, Hauerwas waxes Christological. Jesus Christ is the language to end the silence and the memory that makes possible our remembrance of the wrongs we have done and those that have been done to us.[50] He realizes that this can sound platitudinous but presses on nevertheless: "Any reconciliation that does not require such a remembering cannot be the reconciliation made possible by the cross of Christ."[51] Christians are required to confess and remember their sin and also the sins of those who have sinned against us, so forgetting in the matter proposed by Lincoln and Volf ought to have no part in the liturgical character of our lives. "That, I believe, is the way forward: not forgetting but having our memories transformed through the discovery that our sins cannot determine God's will for our lives."[52]

3.3 Race: The More It Is About

Hauerwas begins his final essay on race, appearing in the 2010 book co-authored with political theorist Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, by acknowledging criticisms of his insufficient dealings with race in his hefty corpus of work. Some scholars he claims would assume he has not dealt sufficiently with race in his work because he doesn't "adequately support calls for justice or democracy," and here he has to have in mind many feminist, womanist, and black theologians.[53] However, by categorizing these criticisms as appeals for him to draw on concepts like "justice" and "democracy" in his work, Hauerwas is able to more easily slip past them since his entire ethical project is mounted against such liberal concepts. For Hauerwas, concepts like justice and equality neglect the significance of

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[47] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 136.
[48] *BH*, 150, 151.
[49] *BH*, 151.
[50] *BH*, 146.
[51] *BH*, 141.
[52] *BH*, 152-153.
[53] *CDR*, 89. For one of the best examples of a critique of Hauerwas's allergy to "justice," see Gloria Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities: Toward an Ethics of Liberation for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

the virtues and character for the Christian moral life; they suggest that what we do can be demarcated from who we are. (This makes Woodard-Lehman's criticism even more relevant since he does not do this.) Hauerwas is able to lump these criticisms in with the countless others that simply miss the mark by failing to engage him on his own terms and within his own conceptual imagination in some sort of immanent critique, and suggest to him why race is an issue of central importance for his own life project. Against these charges, therefore, he rightly levies his typical counter, that the church fails to be the church when it attempts to demonstrate its relevance by adopting humanistic strategies to make the world more free or just or democratic. This is simply not the work of the church, even if they may be good things. And with one swift move the issue of race becomes again a periphery and cursory issue (one among a number of humanistic and democratic matters), and postliberals of Hauerwas's ilk have (justifiably) been unconvinced that race matters.

To his credit, Hauerwas still does not completely dismiss the issue, at least in this essay, but uses this as an opportunity to demonstrate how he might engage with the topic within his own conceptual imagination. He begins, again, with an appeal to his own story of his Texas brick-laying adolescence. For a theologian often understood to carve a deep chasm between the tradition and experience quadrants of Wesley's famous quadrilateral for theological reflection, he continually seems to insist that theology cannot be severed from this personal story: "My past has occupied me."[54] Again, and also to his credit, Hauerwas identifies the shape-shifting and insidious nature of racism. While still existing in occasional ostensible outbursts—racialized police violence, racists statements by politicians, etc.—racism in a "post-racial" society exists undercover of institutions and social systems that are inadequate to deal with the lingering inequality from 400 years of racial oppression. "We currently confront the failure of the success of the civil rights movement," he observes, meaning that most Americans assume we no longer have a race problem. "What have been taken as victories hide us from our failure to confront the deeper pathologies of racism."[55] He goes on to analyze this phenomenon, and acknowledges, through engagement with Will Campbell, a white pastor, author, and supporter of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, that part of the problem is that white liberals were open to integration. But "integration" was implicitly predicated on the acceptance into "our" culture—in which we permit the black person to "become an honorary white man"—signaling a connection with one of the core themes of his first 1969 essay on Black Power. African Americans must become acculturated into white society—and here it seems he means both during the process of integration in the 50s and 60s and today as well—to do the same things in the same way as whites do them. He quotes Campbell: "The beginning of genocide is not ovens and concentration camps. The beginning of genocide is

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[54] *CDR*, 93.
[55] *CDR*, 95, 96.

the beginning of integration: the expectation of the majority that the minority will become like the majority."[56]

Hauerwas concludes, "The problem of race, it seems, is that it is by no means easy to say what the problem of race is."[57] And while this is certainly a true claim, and the natural conclusion of the logic outlined above, this also suggests a breakdown in Hauerwas's treatment of race. Racism is more complex than it appears, he says, but as an example of this complexity he turns to white guilt, and notes that one of the most significant consequences of our racial history is that whites cannot accept the forgiveness necessary to be free from their sin of racism.[58] Again, likely a true statement, but certainly not the most crucial and pressing aspect of the issue! He says during the civil rights movement it was much simpler to determine who the enemy was; now that task is more difficult. But this complexity and uncertainty ought to reveal that from the beginning the battle was not against "flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers (Eph. 6:12)."[59]

According to Hauerwas, this means that race is first and foremost a theological problem, and this means that the church must first and foremost learn how to best tell the story that constitutes its life. The sin of the church, he says alluding to Campbell, is not that it has failed to reform society but that it has not realized self-renewal. Only when it becomes the redeemed community can it be empowered to redeem the world.[60] Understanding race as a theological problem, for Hauerwas, means beginning with the reform of the church first, and then moving outward to social and public issues. Otherwise the church will not be sufficiently equipped to address them because it doesn't adequately know its only story and how that story ought to shape the way it engages. This would leave the church too susceptible to the humanistic temptations of engaging the issue on the terms the world provides (presumably terms like justice and democracy). Christians have too quickly allowed the problem to be configured by humanistic efforts and therefore any potential solutions as well. But racism then is fundamentally an issue of sin and redemption. It cannot be solved through state power or social engineering.

And here, again, it is worth noting that Hauerwas uses the issue of race as an occasion to warn Christians again against the epistemological tendencies of liberalism. Race became a "natural" category for Christians when the pivotal emphasis in Christian theology turned from God to

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[56] *CDR*, 97, quoting from Will Campbell and James Holloway, *Up to Our Steeples in Politics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2004; orig. 1970), 137.
[57] *CDR*, 98.
[58] *CDR*, 96n22.
[59] *CDR*, 98.
[60] *CDR*, 90.

humanity: in the terms of Barth, when liberal Protestants began speaking of God simply by speaking of humans in a loud voice![61] Theological liberalism may have actually impeded the process of racial reconciliation by keeping humanity as the center of theological thought; it "confused humanism with the gospel" and deluded Christians into thinking that race can be solved through political machinations and maneuvers. But such a presumption only serves "to legitimate the modern nation-state, which, ironically, has been the primary agent for the categorization of people by race."[62] Further, "These humanitarian and egalitarian concerns lie within the province of Christian witness; but when they constitute all that Christians have to say about race, they are not enough. They are not enough because God, not the human, is the only point of reference that matters." And here, Hauerwas pinpoints the exact conceptual location of the problem—a denial of God's sovereignty. I will quote him at length:

> The sin therefore is that the whole issue of race is an effort to deny the sovereignty of God, to negate the absolute supremacy of God. Once a person has truly seen this truth, that person can no longer be a racist, and can no longer grovel in the agonies of self-pity. [Once she accepts the sovereignty of God] the racist is now afraid to call anyone unclean, to discriminate against anyone, to stand in judgment over any group or individual, or to set himself above any of God's human creatures. From the moment either the segregationist or the integrationist really accepts the absolute sovereignty of God, either is forever thereafter terrified to usurp that authority or to claim any part of it for him- or herself. And this usurping is precisely what one does when one determines a pattern of behavior by classifications of race or class.[63]

The classification of people by hierarchies of color does not exist in the new creation, and therefore, a proper understanding of God's sovereignty identifies the true fallacy of racism and racial prejudice. For Hauerwas, better theological descriptions well help us to understand racism as a matter of sin and reconciliation.

So once again, Hauerwas's assessment rings with theological truth. He locates the problem theologically and identifies the deeper theological generators of racial bias. Surely it is true that richer theological descriptions of a problem will generate richer responses. This is a helpful move and a necessary resource for any theologian concerned with appropriately engaging the issue. However, the "problem of race," cannot only remain there, and any "solution" to the problem cannot be contained in correcting a racist's theological knowledge. There have surely been many who understood themselves to accept God's sovereignty and continued in racist practices. (Cone will offer an alternative to this in his insistence that theology must be coupled with social analysis to have any concrete effect.[64])

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[61] Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 196.
[62] *CDR*, 99.
[63] *CDR*, 98.
[64] James Cone, "Christian Faith and Political Praxis."

And with this, Hauerwas makes the same move that he often criticizes other theologians and church leaders of making—spiritualizing an ethical issue in a way that abstracts it from the concrete suffering and concrete practice of the church. If the enemy does not exist in the form of flesh and blood, as he claims in this essay, then do the problem and any solution lie at the level of spirituality, partitioned from any practical efforts to attend to it? When Hauerwas turns to address the issue of how describing race as a theological problem helps us, he joins Campbell in suspecting that the typical calls to "do" something about racism are not a proper theological response. He quotes Campbell in answering, "Do? *Nothing.* Be? What you are— *reconciled*, to God and man."[65] And this being reconciled with others is accomplished only through the telling of stories.

And while the telling of stories is a crucial practice, and one that I will develop further in this dissertation, it has the potential to come up short, to fall flat, in addressing the complexity and systemic nature of a problem that requires concrete proposals. While I have identified race as a "wicked problem," with no certain methods of resolution, the claim that it is not easy to say what the problem of race is, and the identification of racism as primarily a theological problem, can also be cop-outs to forego deploying the concrete and practical energy necessary to figure out what is going on. That is, while these claims may very well be theologically true, Hauerwas's assessment and constructive moves also ring of abstraction—the very theological move that Hauerwas abhors. He identifies the solution to the problem in simply *being* a Christian: "We have been asking the wrong questions. Instead of demanding, What can the Christian *do* to improve race relations? We should be asking, What must the Christian *be*? As the body of Christ the church first and all must be the redeemed community."[66] And again, of course. But it can't be that simple. Or perhaps, *being* a Christian is not that simple.

4 Analysis: Uncovering Resources

Having attended to Hauerwas's writings on race and two critical treatments of his work, in conclusion of this chapter, I will now analyze the arguments of Derek Woodard-Lehman and Jonathan Tran and, in suggesting why both arguments are flawed, position my own assessment of Hauerwas somewhere between them. I argue that Hauerwas, despite the moves toward abstraction of the issue as noted above, still offers white traditionalist theologians key conceptual resources for concretely addressing the topic of race and the evils of racism— implicitly and perhaps unintentionally. I will then note three key concepts that emerge from his essays on race and gesture toward the way that they may be useful tools more generally in

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[65] *CDR*, 101, quoting Campbell, *Up to Our Steeples in Politics*, 153.
[66] *CDR*, 89-90.

addressing race theologically in concrete and practical ways. The next two chapters will then analyze the ways Hauerwas uses these theological concepts—the role they play in his theological ethics more generally and in his church-world delineation more specifically—and examine how James Cone employs these same three concepts in ways that critique, complement, and amend Hauerwas's work toward a fuller treatment of racism and white privilege.

4.1 Critique of Woodard-Lehman and Tran

Woodard-Lehman is certainly correct that Hauerwas's concept of violence is a truncated concept that neglects the more invisible and insidious forms that he calls "dominative power." While not as explicitly physical as warfare or gun violence, discriminatory housing policies, voter ID laws, and quotidian racial micro-aggressions are also legitimately violent forms of social engagement and structure that cause similar forms of trauma and harm. Woodard-Lehman is correct that for Hauerwas to address a more comprehensive and nuanced notion of violence and offer a more complete vision of pacifism—or shalom—he must talk about racism and the "nonviolent violent" tendencies of a society with "raceless" pretensions. He is also correct that Hauerwas's somewhat dualistic notions of church and world provide an easy escape from dealing with racist tendencies and actions within the church. While, *pace* many of Hauerwas's detractors, Hauerwas is almost always offering an aspirational assessment of the church as it should be, rather than a descriptive assessment of the church as it is, and therefore is not as "triumphalistic" as many opponents suggest, his aspirational vision does in fact permit spots of blindness to issues such as implicit and structural racism within the church body. The infiltration of liberalism, idolatrous nationalism, and violence into the church more easily appear on his ecclesiological radar (determined by his sturdy church-world partitioning) than the sinister and systemic tentacles of racism.

In all of this, Woodard-Lehman is certainly correct: Hauerwas's notion of violence, concept of pacifism, and vision of the church are incomplete without a more dedicated and explicit attention to the implications and animations of race within these concepts. However, I disagree with Woodard-Lehman that the truthfulness of Hauerwas's theological ethics is undermined by this deficit. But I also do not take the same line of disagreement that Jonathan Tran posits. While Hauerwas already offers a helpful move past many white traditionalist theologians simply by acknowledging his racial formation and embedded racism written into the fabric of his life, Hauerwas's silence on race, *per se*, is not an adequate response and resource. Putting aside the question of whether all theological ethicists must address every moral issue, and acknowledging Hauerwas's acknowledgement of his own racism, his silence prevents his own deeper reflection on the ways that this subtextual racism affects his reasoning on other issues. Silence itself is not a useful rival power nor a useful resource for white traditionalist theologians. A quick word or "solution" that risks trite expression or insensitivity may not be the proper resource either—as Tran suggests with his claim that Hauerwas's

infrequent excursions in the issue are more harmful than his silence. But critical reflection on the ways racism has formed not only one's thoughts about race itself, but on the ways this affects one's thoughts on anything from liturgical formation to pacifism to medical ethics, is a necessary move; and one that a theological commitment to silence on such a sprawling topic prevents.

Therefore, my contention is that Hauerwas's project is not undermined, as Woodard-Lehman suggests, because Hauerwas actually generates and employs foundational theological concepts sufficient to address the issues Woodard-Lehman wishes he'd address, even if he does not take them to the sufficient depth himself. This does not valorize Hauerwas in any way. Let us be clear: his evasion of and abstraction from race is a failure of responsibility and imagination and has likely contributed to other white theologians doing the same. I will save a more forceful criticism of Hauerwas for chapter five. Here, however, I am more concerned with a thorough analysis of his evasion. More specifically, I want to highlight the ways this failure may be theologically generative. While Hauerwas promotes a posture of silence, some of his foundational theological concepts, and even his given reasons for avoiding the topic of race itself, offer conceptual tools for theologically addressing race in ways, importantly, unique to Hauerwas. In fact, I will contend, these concepts, in their distinctively Hauerwasian forms, may be most useful in directing white theologians to resources to helpfully address a topic as complex and shifty as race. These conceptual tools are not located in his argument that racism is a theological issue, most directly a refutation of God's sovereignty—an argument that I contend abstracts from the issue rather than constructively attending to it. Rather, these concepts emerge in his infrequent treatment of the issue of race, his reasons for his avoidance of the issue, and the deeper theological resources in his wider ethical work that these treatments and reasons draw upon. It is in these sources that Hauerwas offers a unique theological account for race and resistance to racism.

4.2 Theological Resources for A Theology of Race
Finally, I end this chapter by summarizing the account of Hauerwas's treatment of race offered in most of this chapter—evident in these documentary sources addressed above. However, rather than constructing a comprehensive or chronological account of his development on the subject, for the purposes of this project, it will be more useful to focus this conclusion on the three primary theological concepts mentioned above. These themes help not only to frame his published discourse on race—as well as much of his theological ethical project in general—but they also offer key conceptual resources that mark a way forward in thinking and talking about race and racism.

Hauerwas's three (underdeveloped) concepts that emerge from within the essays assessed above are: Theological Particularity, Story, and Reconciliation. My contention here and in the

rest of this dissertation is that though he does not develop them sufficiently along these lines, these core theological concepts can be more broadly useful for thinking theologically about race, especially for white scholars and Christian practitioners. What is striking, and will be developed in a later chapter, is the way that the founder of black theology and preeminent theologian of race, James Cone, utilizes these same three concepts in threads similar to Hauerwas. Cone develops them further, and in nuanced ways, that prove useful in developing Hauerwas's ecclesiological account and treatment of race, in offering foundational resources for white theologians to address these issues, and in demonstrating a convergence between these two often rival strands of theological thought: traditionalists and liberationists. I briefly address the development of these concepts in the essays on race below, and then evaluate them more comprehensively in the following chapters.

4.2.1 Theological Particularity

Hauerwas begins his treatment of race in his 1969 essay by suggesting that white liberals' calls for integration and reconciliation only mask their more underlying call for African Americans to assimilate to white values and culture. This astute claim points to his deeper concern for particularity. While this is manifest most prominently, and infamously, in his staunch defense of the distinctiveness of the church from the world and the particularity of Christian witness, this demonstrates that Hauerwas is concerned for multiple social and cultural particularities and opposes many forms of universalism more generally. The early Hauerwas recognizes "a call from one black to another that the goods of this society are his not as he becomes what the white man wishes him to be, but only as he becomes a black man." This concern is not lost when Hauerwas later drops the Niebuhrian tone of his ethics.

Later in the 1995 essay, he identifies racism as an ecclesial issue, pulling it within the particular purvey of his ecclesiology, though unfortunately leaving it undeveloped and under-criticized. He is willing to critique the racism of society—of the "world"—but without analyzing its formative force in the church itself. The claim that society is post-racial, he says, is only a universalist and abstract effort to gloss over the deeply embedded problems within our own history. While his opposition to universalizing ethics comes through in his critiques of liberalism, it can just as easily be applied to the dangers of abstracting from the concrete realities of our racial pasts and presents.

4.2.2 Story

This commitment to particularity is manifest most prominently in Hauerwas's focus on story—the second key concept. Hauerwas contends that the story of race is not "my story" to tell. Again in his 1995 essay: "For me to 'use' Martin Luther King Jr., and the church that made him possible, to advance my understanding of Christian ethics seems wrong. . . . That is not my story, though I pray that God will make that story my story." There are two issues

Hauerwas identifies with telling the story of racism and figures like King. First, he worries about using race to further his own agenda. Implicitly addressing the colonialist tendencies of whites, and especially white theologians, this raises the question of whether one can engage another's story without instrumentalizing it. Along with this concern is the issue of what delineates the multiple stories that shape an individual's and community's life. Surely our social, cultural, and theological lives are multistoried and overlapping with multiple others. What does it mean to say that another's story is not your own? Second, he also cautions that avoiding speaking to others' stories risks a "kind of fatal abstractness" that floats above the lived realities of everyday existence and "makes no difference for how we live.

This illuminates a tension in these two employments of the concept of "story" for Hauerwas between a kind of necessary narrative isolation and the perpetual need to reach beyond one's own story to connect with others. Hauerwas still worries that speaking beyond one's own story—or at least his own story—risks inevitably instrumentalizing the other for the sake of one's own purpose or agenda. But he also worries that failing to engage with the story of the other risks the abstraction that he spends so much time critiquing.

Unfortunately Hauerwas never reconciles this tension in these essays and leaves the reader wondering how white theologians might address or engage with the stories—including the suffering, claims, hopes, and modes of reasoning—of the cultural other without colonizing and instrumentalizing them. His most helpful move in addressing the dilemma comes later in the essay in *A Better Hope*, when he diagnoses that as a society, Americans literally lack the language required to sufficiently recognize ourselves across the racial divisions that our own history has created. This leaves most white theologians, like Hauerwas, in silence. He laments, "As a result, blacks and whites can find no common story that will enable them to heal the wound."[67] But this perhaps signals a story that some within both groups would be able of finding in common—that of the story of Christ. And this begins with the recognition that to properly and faithfully enter that story, a proper reckoning with history and memory is the only path toward reconciliation—leading to the third key concept I identify. This tension drives much of the central arguments of this dissertation: between colonizing and silence, intimacy and alterity, concreteness and abstraction. I will return to it more thoroughly in Part Two.

4.2.3 Reconciliation

The third concept is that of reconciliation. Granted, Hauerwas does not employ this term often, or in the direct fashion with which I will use it in this project. Still, Hauerwas does appeal to a constellation of terms that revolve around this theme, and does so in a way that

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[67] *BH*, 143.

coalesces with Cone's stronger emphasis on reconciliation. Hauerwas specifically identifies racism as a problem of memory, and memory is the vital first step of reconciliation. With this he offers an implicit foundation for the church's witness of and against its own racism—exemplified in Hauerwas's acknowledgment of his own racism (though this needs further critical development). In his "Wounds of History" lecture he noted, "The member of the dominant race—failing to know how to speak of our wound—knows it only grows more painful the more deeply it is hidden within ourselves."[68] Again, memory of our own sins and oppression of others is not only a key to witness but also the first, and necessary, step toward reconciliation. He claims in that same essay, "Any reconciliation that does not require such a remembering cannot be the reconciliation made possible by the cross of Christ."[69]

It is not enough to simply admit that one is a racist. Still, his critique of universalism and abstractness—despite his own failures in this regard in his final 2010 essay (noted above)—and his focus on social/cultural particularity animated by memory, provide an important concept for the development of a theology of race. This forms the first move in combatting the amnesic tendencies of a society that prides itself on being "post-racial" and "colorblind." Again, while he does not trace these themes out to adequate constructive conclusions, he offers the theological scaffolding necessary to support efforts in helping white theologians more adequately address the racist history of the church and their own participation in systems of privilege and oppression, as well as resources for a more fruitful dialogue and engagement about overcoming these racist histories.

In an unusual subjective turn, Hauerwas continually claims that theology cannot be severed from his personal story: "My past has occupied me."[70] I take this, along with Jonathan Tran, as Hauerwas's confession; Hauerwas offers his memory of his own story as a confession—and what he perceives as the first step toward reconciliation between different cultures (and different stories). In this case, the African American story may not be his story formally, but he can enter into their story through their common foundation in Christ's story. As Tran notes, Hauerwas subjects his own story to the judgment of others, and this may mark Hauerwas's repentance on behalf of himself and his church.

5 Conclusion: Looking Ahead

This chapter introduced the reluctance of many white theologians to address problems of race, and attended to potential insufficiencies of those who do. Using Stanley Hauerwas, perhaps the most prominent—and certainly one of the most prolific—America Christian

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[68] *BH*, 142.
[69] *BH*, 141.
[70] *CDR*, 93.

theologians and ethicists of the past fifty years, following the civil rights movement era, as a representative of this tendency, I analyzed critical treatments of his inattention to race as well as the few essays in which he does address the issue. I drew out the particular reasons Hauerwas gives for this inattention, as well as the patterns and themes he employs in the few occasions in which he does address it. These themes of narrative, theological and communal particularity, and reconciliation (broadly construed this far), will guide the movement of the remainder of this dissertation and serve as a conceptual scaffolding and hermeneutical lens through which I will 1) analyze the thought of Hauerwas and James Cone, 2) challenge and critique the ways these theologians as representatives address the issue of race theologically, and 3) offer a constructive proposal for an ecclesial model of reconciliation.

The next two chapters will, more specifically, analyze the ecclesiologies of these two thinkers—the way they envision community and locate God's work of healing and redemption within God's people. This move, to follow up a chapter dedicated to identifying the shortcomings in Hauerwas's theological treatment of race (as representative of wider tendencies) to a comparative analysis of the ecclesiologies of these two figures may need a brief defense. There are many conceptual apparati that are employed in theological treatments of race and racism. Likewise, both of these thinkers offer many varied conceptual tools, angles, and avenues for a comparative project.[71] So, why the church? As noted above in my brief treatment of Hauerwas, both Hauerwas and Cone argue for a socially-embedded, contextualized, concrete understanding of theology. Theological reflection should not, and in fact does not, exist as a universalized, neutral, or object enterprise.

Instead, both thinkers recognize the fleshly limits of reason and attend to the contingent and conditioned nature of theology, most specifically, the fact that it is always based within a particular community, with a particular history, and with a particular narrative of its identity. For both thinkers, Christian theology takes place in the community called the church. (Both theologians will have different definitions of what constitutes the identity, membership, and mission of the church, but both will locate theological reflection within this community of God's people and work.) Theology is necessarily an ecclesiological project. In surprisingly similar, and representative statements, Cone's claim that "There can be no genuine Christian theology without prophetic self-criticism of the Christian community that gives birth to it"[72]echoes Hauerwas's insistence that theology is "the kind of discourse that must, if it is to be truthful, be embedded in the practices of actual lived communities."[73]

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[71] The only one I have found, however, is a dissertation project by Michael Duffy at the University of Virginia in 1993, "What Kind of Community?: Stanley Hauerwas and James Cone on the Christian Communal Life," in which he compared the character of each theologian's vision of community.

[72] Cone, *For My People* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 116 (hereafter *FMP*).

[73] *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 157 (hereafter *STT*).

One of my criticisms of Hauerwas above is that during one of his few, and in this case the most recent and presumably most mature, treatments of race, he frames it as a theological issue. This is obviously not bad, *per se*, except that on this occasion he does not ground that theology concretely, or ecclesiologically. This omission causes him to further frame race as a problem of misunderstanding God's sovereignty—and in making this move to irrevocably abstract and even spiritualize a concrete matter of life and death into universalized theological terms. This resonates with the tendency of many white theologians to remain on the level of abstraction in order to avoid the messiness of concrete complexity.[74] By not incorporating race, or the moral issue of racism within the church, as an integral part of his theology and ecclesiology—or only doing so abstractly—Hauerwas effectively permits the racist, anti-black culture of liberalism and the modern western church to go unchallenged.

For this reason, my goal for this project is to remain true to Hauerwas's and Cone's best instincts: that any theological treatment of race must remain in the concrete, must move "from the phraseological to the real," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's terms (terms he coined after encountering the black church in Harlem, in fact). And for both thinkers, consistent with their typical aversion to abstraction, this concreteness of theological and ethical reflection lies in the concrete, socially-embedded, worldly-positioned, saintly and sinful community called the church. It is necessary, then, before returning directly to the issue of race and racism, to better understand what this community called "church" means for each thinker.

The past few years have witnessed a grotesque display of racial violence. Historians will tell us, however, that the violence, racism, and brutality of these years is not different in kind or degree from any other period—because of social media it has only become more visible. And in the twisted manner of wicked problems, this increased visibility of racial violence helps us to confront and forces us to reckon with this reality. We can no longer rest in our willful ignorance, conveniently framed as "blindness" in order to let us off the hook. For while the visibleness of white supremacy, now available to us in videos of police violence, racist tweets, and greater data on structural inequality, has increased, this has only pointed our view even more sharply to the invisibleness. For it is "colorblindness"—colorblind racism—that funds the visible forms of racism that are now all too apparent.

In these first two chapters of the dissertation I have examined the current state of affairs of white supremacy and then investigated the lack of attention given to race within white theology—offering Hauerwas as my example. One argument has been that the avoidance of

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[74] I am not suggesting that this was Hauerwas's intention in the "Race: The 'More' It Is About" essay, simply that it results in the same effect as other white theologians who do, and who *want* to do so. This is another reason Hauerwas serves as an important representative of this tendency.

race as a theological issue by Hauerwas and the supposed colorblindness of our contemporary "post-racial" culture are really one and the same. They are both ways of abstracting from the concrete realities of racism, white privilege, and white supremacy. The tendency of white people to abstract renders even overtly visible forms of racism suspect because we are willfully blinded to the histories and structural realities of racism that like an undercurrent carry us farther and farther from an ability to not only empathize but to believe that a problem exists in the first place.

The next two chapters, then, will help to further frame this project concretely, and ecclesiologically, by analyzing and comparing Hauerwas's and Cone's theology of the church. The three themes previewed above in section four of this chapter form an important part of Hauerwas's ecclesiology. Interestingly, they also form the core of James Cone's theology of the church, and also the conceptual foundation for his treatment of whiteness, racism, and racial reconciliation. Thus, I will focus this treatment of their ecclesiologies through the lens of these three concepts and then draw out the specific implications of their ecclesiologies—both the resonances and key differences—for a critical treatment of race.

Chapter Three | *The Postliberal Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas*

Theology can too easily begin to appear as 'ideas,' rather than the kind of discourse that must, if it is to be truthful, be embedded in the practices of actual lived communities.[1]

Introduction

Tdropcap:There are few topics that have received more sustained—and critical—attention in the world of theology than the ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas. Since he emerged onto the Christian ethical scene in the early 1970s, Hauerwas's treatment of tradition and church (as well as pacifism, of course) have in some ways directed the landscape of American Christian ethics. With his merger of MacIntyre's conceptual schema of tradition and narrative and Yoder's emphases on Jesus and the church as the locus of Christian ethical reflection, the man once tapped by *Time* magazine as "America's Best Theologian" has successfully positioned the church at the center of academic Christian ethics.[2] By this I mean that today, few treatments are made of the church, or relationship of church and world, without attending to Hauerwas's thought. Even those who disagree (strongly) and are prone to dismiss him find themselves bound to defending why they disagree with him.[3]

Most criticisms of his ecclesiology tend to be of similar shape and content: Hauerwas espouses a withdrawal ethic; he obsesses over Christian distinctiveness; he draws too sharp a distinction between church and world; his inflated, triumphalized "church" doesn't actually exist. To be honest, I find most of these retorts well-trodden, unnuanced, and tiresome, and mostly misguided. This is not to say Hauerwas does not make mistakes and oversights, have room to

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[1] *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified,* 2nd ed. (London: T & T Clark, 2016), 168.
[2] *Time* vol. 158 no. 11 (September 17, 2001).
[3] Just why his insistence that Christian ethics begin with Christian community caused—and causes—such an uproar is still somewhat of a mystery to me. (Perhaps this confusion only serves to identify me as a member of the Hauerwasian camp, a claim I don't feel the need to dispute). Still, critiques of Hauerwas abound. In fact, there seems to be a small publishing industry constructed around Hauerwas criticism, with critics lobbing assaults from all theological, political, and sociological corners, and Hauerwas offering any new constructive content generally by way of fending off these attacks.

grow, and room to cut back as well—something this entire project is meant to demonstrate! But it is to say that I find the compelling criticisms few and far between. The reader wanting to immerse herself in such criticisms will have ample opportunity in other sources. For this project and especially this chapter I will attend to the criticisms that I find most compelling and interesting, and most relevant to the topic of this dissertation. The chapter will focus mostly on a constructive analysis of Hauerwas's ecclesiology but will occasionally engage with criticisms that seem most pressing—as Hauerwas is often best understood through his interpreters and critics.

All this is a prelude to saying that there is not much to say that has not already been said of Hauerwas's ecclesiology. Any new treatment is bound to find nothing new under the sun when it comes to this topic. I mean this in some ways to excuse my brief treatment of this issue, and in other ways to prime the reader for my particular treatment. I mean this chapter to be in no way comprehensive—this has been done more than adequately elsewhere[4]—but simply to enflesh the concepts identified in the previous chapter ecclesiologically in order to more closely address the relationship between church and race in the final chapters.

With the requisite throat-clearing performed, and expectations properly limited, I will turn in the first half of this chapter to the ways in which the themes of story, particularity, and reconciliation function in Hauerwas's ecclesiology. To arrive at Hauerwas's understanding of just what the church is and what it does (and is there any difference), I must first turn to the topics on which Hauerwas builds his ecclesiology: community, tradition, and narrative.

1 The Building Blocks of Hauerwas's Ecclesiology
1.1 Story
Hauerwas's theology begins with story. That is, narrative is the lens, content, and even method of his theology.[5] He means this primarily as a descriptive claim: "The appeal to narrative is the

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[4] For a few examples see: Arne Rasmusson, *The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jurgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); *Postliberal Theology and the Church Catholic: Conversations with George Lindbeck, David Burrell, and Stanley Hauerwas*, ed. John Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Press, 2012); Robert J. Dean, *For the Life of the World: Jesus Christ and the Church in the Theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stanley Hauerwas* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016); John B. Thompson, *The Ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas: A Christian Theology of Liberation* (London: Routledge Publishing, 2003); John B. Thompson, *Living Holiness: Stanley Hauerwas and the Church* (London: SCM Press, 2012), in addition to the Michael Duffy dissertation, as well as many other critical treatments included as chapters or smaller sections in a multitude of other works.

[5] Hauerwas defines narrative as "a connection among elements (actions, events, situations) which is neither one of logical consequence nor one of mere sequence. The connection seems rather designed

primary expression of a theological metaphysics and is, therefore, an unembarrassed claim about the way things are."[6] Hauerwas offers three points identifying why narrative is significant for theology: 1) character and moral actions only take on meaning in a narrative, 2) narrative and explanation are related because moral disagreements involve rival histories of explanation, and 3) in contrast to the standard account of moral objectivity and universal rationality, narrative has its own rationality.[7] This constitutes the claim, fundamentally, that we learn who we are through the larger stories in which we understand our story to take place, and insofar as theology teaches us who we are and what we are to be about, we understand this narratively. That is, stories do not explain as a theory explains, but "involve the agent in a way of life."[8] This means, for Hauerwas, that moral agency is not a matter of free choice; every person is already embedded in a community, which means we are embedded in a story. We all have experienced particular experiences and have particular relationships that will shape and limit the possibilities of our choices, and also guide the choices we do make. We are far from autonomous decision-makers, but decision makers whose decisions are limited and guided by the moral imagination given to us by the story (or stories) in which we find ourselves. Contemporary ethics and theology attempt to secure moral judgments apart from the subjective beliefs, desires, and stories of the agent who makes them, from all contingencies, by appealing to an objective and impersonal rationality.[9] But, according to Hauerwas, this universal rationalist account fails to reckon with the way our moral selves are formed. It doesn't account for the development of character, the "variety of our [moral] notions and the histories on which they are dependent," which determine the way we make a decision, and whether a decision is needed at all.[10] In sum, the character of an agent is formed by the narratives that give our life meaning.

In one of the foundational Hauerwas essays—one of his earliest—he explains how persons and communities are "story-formed" by telling a story: analyzing the story of the rabbits in Richard Adam's *Watership Down*.[11] One of the basic premises of Hauerwas's thought is that we live in the midst of a morally fragmented world, with no unifying morality. And in this fractured

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to move our understanding of a situation forward by developing or unfolding it" (*Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 28 (hereafter *TT*)).

[6] *Performing the Faith: Bonhoeffer and the Practice of Nonviolence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004, 146 (hereafter *PTF*).

[7] *TT*, 15.

[8] *TT*, 78, 73. Cone makes a very similar claim.

[9] *TT*, 16.

[10] *TT*, 22.

[11] "A Story-Formed Community: Reflections on *Watership Down*," in *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) (hereafter CC).

epistemological reality, narrative is what holds us together within communities. Every community, every polity, has a narrative (thus story is political, a theme I will return to later).[12] We are agents who have developed a particular character because of the narrative in which we find ourselves embedded, based on the community of which we are part. The "virtues" we have developed are conditioned by our social context.[13]

One of the very first claims I remember hearing from Hauerwas in his Introduction to Christian Ethics course was that the project of modernity is the "attempt to produce a people who believe that *they should have no story except the story that they choose when they had no story.*"[14] This is the product of liberal democracy, the institution and ideology that receives most of his ire. Americans, westerners, liberals, Protestants (whomever it is that Hauerwas is currently critiquing) are those people who believe that we live in a story-free world, or at least that we have the freedom to choose the story with which we will make sense out of our lives. In an extended, but representative quote, he writes:

> We become who we are through the embodiment of the story in the communities in which we are born. What is crucial is not that we find some way to free ourselves from such stories or community, but that the story that grasps us through our community is true. And at least one indication of the truthfulness of a community's story is how it forces me to live in it in a manner that gives me the skill to take responsibility for my character. . . . This is a particularly foreign perspective for most of us today. For our primary story is that we have no story, or that the stories that we have must be overcome if we are to be free. Thus, we demand a universal standpoint so that the self may

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[12] CC, 121.

[13] Hauerwas often speaks of narrative and story in the singular, leaving himself open to the criticism that he neglects the ways multiple stories overlap and interact in the moral and communal development of an agent. In some ways it seems that this formation by a singular narrative—he often uses the terms "the Gospel," "the story of Jesus," or "the Christian story" to designate this narrative—is what distinguishes the church from the world that offers an endless option of stories from which one may choose. Yet, Hauerwas is not so uncomplicated and occasionally does invoke the notion of multiple formative stories, acknowledging the "many-sided tale" of Jesus narrated in four different gospels and the ways Christians are given arguments and conflicts within the biblical narrative (see "Jesus: The Story of the Kingdom" and "The Moral Authority of Scripture" in CC). For an account of how multiple stories interact to form a particular church community see my "A (Multi-) Story Formed Community: The Bible and Politics at Ebenezer Baptist Church," co-authored with Sam Speers in *Ecclesial Practices* (forthcoming). I thank Ashleigh Elser for alerting me to this complication within Hauerwas and treating this topic in her dissertation, "Beyond Unity: Reading Hermeneutic Frictions in Biblical Literature."

[14] This quip is repeated many times in many places. This particular iteration was pulled from: www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/07/02/3794561. Hauerwas recalls that it first appeared in print with full explanation in *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 164-176.

reach a point from which is can judge and choose objectively among competing particularistic stories.[15]

This quote not only represents the central role of story in Hauerwas's ethic—and specifically in his understanding of how our character is formed in light of the story of a particular community—but also depicts the role of communal particularity in Hauerwas's thought. The false story modernity teaches us is that we are able to achieve a neutral and universal position (an objective position above and free from all stories), a position from which to judge the stories of particular and rival communities. In truth, Hauerwas claims, we are incapable of escaping the story that gave birth to us and the community of which it is part. Again, "recent attempts to identify Christian ethics with a universal human ethic fail to recognize that all accounts of the moral life are narrative dependent," he says. "There is no point outside our history where we can secure a place to anchor our moral convictions. We must begin in the middle, that is, we must begin within a narrative. Christianity offers a narrative about God's relationship to creation that gives us the means to recognize we are God's creatures."[16] It is only when we recognize ourselves within that story that we are able to make that story our own—not through an objective choice about the matter. For Hauerwas, stories offer an account for how we see and describe the world.[17] They are "interpretive frameworks" that "bind events and agents together in an intelligible pattern."[18] That is, they give our lives coherence.[19] Hauerwas claims that truthful stories are the only way to know God and ourselves. This is due to his account of practical rationality. Because there is no universal rationality, no "noncontextual" rationality, and therefore, "we can only begin and end in the middle," narrative is essential to any true account of practical rationality.[20] Any description of a human act already has done the work of embedding it in the narrative of a particular community of reasoning. Important for Hauerwas is that a story is not essentially about something nor does it have the purpose of making a point. Rather, stories are the point

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[15] *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001, 250 (hereafter *HR*).

[16] *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 61-62 (hereafter *PK*).

[17] In this section I draw on the work of Michael Duffy, and his dissertation "What Kind of Community?: Stanley Hauerwas and James Cone on the Christian Communal Life," (dissertation, University of Virginia, 1993), and Nicholas Healy, *Hauerwas: A Very Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishers, 2014). While the former is a favorable analysis and the latter (very) critical, they both helpfully summarize his major thoughts and pointed me toward the most important sources in Hauerwas's corpus.

[18] *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1988), 25 (hereafter *CET*); and *TT*, 76.

[19] *Vision and Virtue: Essays in Christian Ethical Reflection* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1974), 71 (hereafter *VV*).

[20] *PTF*, 145, 144.

themselves, because they generate meaning by making sense out of our contingent actions and experiences.[21]

With this Hauerwas draws heavily on philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre's concept of narrative. MacIntyre argues in *After Virtue* that we need stories to help make our lives intelligible to ourselves and others: "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do,'" he writes, "if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"[22] Appealing to a trope that Hauerwas often changes to that of "adventure," MacIntyre writes, "My life has the continuity and unity of a *quest*, a quest whose object is to discover that truth about my life as a whole which is an indispensible part of the good of that life. So on this view my life has the unity of a story with a beginning, middle, and end."[23] Theological reflection, then, necessarily begins in the middle–fully and deeply lodged within a particular narrative. Commenting on this aspect of Hauerwas's thought, Sean Larsen notes: "Every notion is . . . embedded in a particular language and therefore a form of life. The language is passed on to individuals when the particular communities that form them teach them how to use words in ways that match the rules." Thus, as Hauerwas is fond of saying, "You can only act in or refrain from acting in a world you can see, and you can only see what you've learned to say."[24] It is through the foundational stories of the community we are in that we learn the language to describe the world around is, as well as how we are to relate to that world. While many scholars critique Hauerwas for dismissing the category of experience from theological reflection, this goes too far. Experience does play a role; it is simply and necessarily narratively mediated for Hauerwas. "All ethical reflection occurs relative to a particular time and place," Hauerwas summarizes. "The very nature and structure of ethics is determined by the particularities of a community's history and convictions."[25]

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[21] "A story has no point but the display of itself for others, but especially for ourselves." You cannot separate the point of a story from the story itself–the point is the story. If I tell the "story of my life," and at the end someone asks me, "What is the point?" my only response is that the story is the point. The unity of the narrative does not depend on its having a point. It is simply in the ordering of a narrative that character develops and offers insights into the human condition, "which recommends narrative as a form of rationality especially appropriate to ethics" (*TT*, 30).

[22] *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2nd ed.* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 216.

[23] *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 197 (italics added).

[24] Sean Larsen, "How I Think Hauerwas Thinks about Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 69:1, February 2016, 29; 30 (quoting Hauerwas in class.)

[25] *PK*, 1.

1.2 Tradition

The point of narrative is to account for the actions of an agent or group of agents in such a way as to clarify how the resulting pattern becomes a tradition.[26] The theme of story then leads to the institutions of tradition and community; or put more precisely, a coherent and continuous "set of stories" constitute a tradition, and a tradition forms and defines a community. In this way, tradition is understood to be a way of life, or "set of interpretations about a history or way of life, that are transmitted from generation to generation."[27] Again, Hauerwas draws on the work of MacIntyre—without much modification—specifically his definition of tradition and understanding of traditions as "traditions of inquiry." For MacIntyre, and others following him, tradition is shaped by a community's continual deliberation about what it ought to be and how it ought to reason and behave. Tradition is not an inflexible rule, but is "constituted by a continuous argument" about the contours of its life together.[28] While theologian Kathryn Tanner finds many objections to this line of thinking, her sense of Christian identity as a "task" rather than fixed for all places and times and her idea of Christian community as a "community of argument" are helpful models of describing MacIntyre's concept.[29] To be a part of a tradition is to be in dialogue with one's inherited modes of being and vision of community—its crucial beliefs and practices—and to pass these on to future generations. But it is also to continually elaborate, revise, amend, and even reject parts of this inheritance.[30] This broader understanding of tradition in communities, notes MacIntyre commentator Romand Coles, "develops a distinct order that is more than an arbitrary imposition of power and exists with a combination of determinacy and openness."[31] Traditions are patterns of reasoning that serve as the method of determining authority for a community. This authority proceeds not from an external source but from within the common life of a community itself. A tradition, therefore, is "the history of a community's sharing of [particular and contingent] judgments as they have been tested through generations."[32]

Following MacIntyre, authority, for Hauerwas, is community dependent and based on that community's interpretation of its story. For the Christian community, it is based on that community's interpretations of the scriptural narrative. The common life of a community, then, proceeds from interpretations of the community's story—and thus, is only made possible

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[26] *TT*, 30.

[27] *PK*, 24; CC, 61.

[28] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 206.

[29] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 155.

[30] *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 101.

[31] *Beyond Gated Politics: Reflections for the Possibility of Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 91.

[32] CC, 62.

by tradition.[33] One important implication of this understanding of tradition is that, because a tradition pursues inquiry within its own rationality—its limited set of interpretations about its own formative story—this results in "significant incommensurability and untranslatability" between traditions.[34] A tradition may be a community of argument and contestation, but it is an internal argument within the bounds of its own rationality determined by the language of its formative story.

1.2.1 Criticisms of Tradition

It is at this point that the criticisms begin to fly. Before continuing my sketch of the building blocks of Hauerwas's ecclesiology, I'll engage with two important objections because they are worthy on their own merit and also give constructive shape to this summary of Hauerwas's thought.

Nicholas Healy has written a critical "introduction" to Hauerwas's theology that helpfully distills the content of his vast corpus of writing. Along with many other challenges to Hauerwas's thought that I will not address, he contends that Hauerwas is mistaken to understand Christianity as a "tradition." Specifically, he worries that Hauerwas talks about the church as a "tradition of inquiry rather than a community that follows its Lord."[35] Hauerwas's understanding of Christianity as a MacIntyrian tradition of inquiry is too naturalistic; that is, it lacks an adequate theology.[36] It seems as if Christian formation through the medium of practices is something we can do "by nature alone," apart from the grace of God's action. As an ethicist, Hauerwas prioritizes a concern for what we ought to do over what God does for us, not properly positioning our actions always in response to what God has first done for us. Healy worries that in Hauerwas's account practitioners can "achieve excellence," using MacIntyre's terms, by their own effort through their own practices. But what concerns Healy is that this model does not position as primary the goal of moving closer to God. Kathryn Tanner posits a similar worry that such models of tradition do not leave sufficient room for "the free exercises of God's grace" and rely too heavily on something human-made.[37] Likewise,

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[33] CC, 62.

[34] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 5.

[35] Nicholas Healy, *Hauerwas: A Very Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishers, 2014), 108 (hereafter Healy).

[36] Healy, 129.

[37] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 137. Her critique of a view of tradition as primarily concerned with retention seems to be a straw-man concept compared to the Hauerwas/MacIntyre concept of tradition as primarily concerned with contestation and refinement. Tanner also opts for a postmodern view of tradition "as invented" with a good deal of human sculpting (134). But Hauerwas/MacIntyre do not discourage the role of human decision-making in tradition. Still her sense that "the interpreter is not called so much to approximate the already given shape of those materials as to organize them in a way that makes clear what else might have a place within them" (134) may similarly designate traditions as

Jennifer Herdt also seems to agree with these challenges and adds another concern, that "If we trust the practices of the church to form us in true–and distinctive–virtue, we will be tempted to despair when we become aware of the sinful failures of the church."[38]

I will return to this matter in my own account of practices in chapter eight, but what is important to note for now is that Hauerwas, as a sanctificationist, does not actually exclude grace or God's action from Christian formation through practices. Human efforts at development and formation through practices and God's graceful work of sanctification do not have to be mutually exclusive. And in fact, the biblical witness appears to be on Hauerwas's side. Paul writes to the church in Philippi, that they should "work out your own salvation," and do so "with fear and trembling."[39] And the Apostle immediately adds, "for it is God who is at work in you." Here we see that Paul understood God's action and human action as mutual allies in the formation of a Christian. Christians "work out" their salvation with the understanding that God's grace is at work, mysteriously, often in hidden ways, in their own work. Likewise, the writer of Hebrews nods to the notion of formation: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil."[40] Christians mature in their faith, and their moral reasoning, through training in practice. This obviously suggests that human effort, human training, and practice, are required to mature in faith. It is for these reasons that I believe Healy is mistaken in demarcating human practice from the work of grace in his challenge to Hauerwas. While Hauerwas may rhetorically focus on the human dimension to counteract the overemphasis he believes has been placed on Christianity as merely a cognitive exercise, this does not exclude the mutual action of God and action of humans working together to work out our faith.

Additionally, if theology seems absent from Hauerwas's understanding of Christianity as a tradition, that is because I don't believe Hauerwas thinks of Christianity *in toto* as a tradition. More precisely, I think, MacIntyre's concept of tradition serves as a model for how the church ought to engage with other groups and institutions. It is a model for engagement with the world in a context of pluralism, not a description of the church as a whole. Regarding Healy's concern, I grant (and think that Hauerwas also believes) that the church *is* to be primarily a

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open to contestation, but may leave the boundaries of a contestable tradition more open and porous than Hauerwas does.

[38] Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 352.

[39] Philippians 2:12.

[40] Hebrews 5:12-14.

community that follows its Lord—though in a pluralistic society the church's role as "inquirer" and work of negotiating with other traditions is essential to its identity and mission. In that light, this model of tradition, which always negotiates its own claims in relation to the claims of other traditions in order to evaluate them but also to demonstrate their truth, is not a model antithetical to Christianity. It appears that the apostle Paul did just as much during his sermon on Mars Hill in Athens by appealing to the idols of unknown gods, and in fact appropriating them, in order to demonstrate the veracity of the God of Israel.[41]

1.3 Community

Traditions, as arguments extended through time, are embodied within communities. As such, "Christian traditions are inseparable from Christian communities that teach the virtues whereby people may see and understand their sin and learn how to live faithful lives before the triune God."[42] In light of the progression from story to tradition to community, we see that ultimately, a community is "story-formed" for Hauerwas. He argues that a community is a group of people who share a history and who hold a set of interpretations in common about that history. For the community, these common interpretations—common but not uncontestable—provide the basis for the community's common action. The narrative of which a community understands itself to be part will form and determine the particular way that community acts or behaves in this and other situations.

It is important to note one epistemological implication of this. This means one cannot judge the truthfulness of a particular story from some neutral vantage point. None exists. Truth can only be validated by the truthful witness of the community that proclaims that truth. "Witness requires the faithful display of Christian speech sufficient to test what is said in the light of how it is said," he writes. "Such a testing, moreover, cannot be separated from the character of those who speak. Indeed, to speak Christianly means that the speakers' lives must correspond with that they say." In short, the grammar of a community's speech must be commensurate with its character.[43] While the gospel itself is universal, "it is particularly carried." And it is carried by the witness of the community that calls the gospel its story. Thus, while this witness takes place in various forms and places, "the shape of the witness is not unbounded; indeed, it remains tethered to the first witnesses."[44] Whether an assertion or story is true is relative to

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[41] See Acts 15.

[42] See Willie Jennings' description of MacIntyre's vision of tradition in a Christian theological register in *The Christian Imagination*, 69.

[43] *Approaching the End: Eschatological Reflections on Church, Politics, and Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2013), 42 (hereafter *ATE*).

[44] *ATE*, 55. Hauerwas sees himself in line with Barth who challenged the assumption—supported by the works of Troeltsch and Schleiermacher—that Christianity is but one religious expression among many of the human longing for the infinite. He claims this view turned Christian theology into the task of legitimating Christianity to modern culture, attempting to ensure its acceptance within the

the particular tradition of the community in question. They are judged by the "richness of moral character and activity they generate."[45] For the church, "The story of God as told through the experience of Israel and the church cannot be abstracted from those communities engaged in the telling and the hearing. As a story it cannot exist without a historic people, for it requires telling and remembering if it is to exist at all."[46] In this way, "Christian ethics begins in a community that carries the story of the God who wills us to participate in a kingdom established in and through Jesus of Nazareth."[47] And that community is the church.

This claim is meant to train the work of theology as well. Theology is not an abstract discourse of God-talk; but is the God-talk of a particular community and for a particular community. "Theology can too easily begin to appear as ideas," he laments, "rather than the kind of discourse that must, if it is to be truthful, be embedded in the practices of actual lived communities."[48] Theology is linked to the practices of church communities, not only guiding them but developing from the witness of the church through its distinctive practices.

2 Basic Elements of Hauerwas's Ecclesiology

In light of the conceptual building blocks addressed in the previous section, we see that any account of Hauerwas's ecclesiology is simply an explication of the following core claim: "The church is the organized form of Jesus' story."[49] Hauerwas expands on this claim by turning to Christology. Jesus' life and death on the cross reveal the social character of Jesus' mission, that "Jesus was the bearer of a new possibility of human and social relationships." And because Jesus' mission has a social character, Christian discipleship is necessarily social and, in fact, forms the community of Jesus followers into a polity. Thus, to be a disciple is to be part of a new community constituted by the life and death and resurrection of Christ, and formed around obedience to the One who was obedient to the cross. "Being a Christian is an expression of our obedience to, and in, a community based on Jesus' messiahship," he writes.

"epistemological conceits of modernity." In contrast, Barth's claim that "God is God" was not a redundancy but refocuses theological inquiry away from human self-awareness to the "particularity of a God who has initiated an encounter with humankind." Barth challenged the accommodation of Christianity to a foreign set of epistemological assumptions (*ATE*, 76).

[45] *CC*, 95.

[46] *PK*, 97. Larsen comments: "Substantively, Hauerwas's work is a modern *apologia* for the church's faith with an Anselmian approach: it defends Christian teaching by making it intelligible. . . . On these terms, an immanent critique of a Hauerwasian claim would establish that the claim either undermines or obscures the faith." (Larsen, 22).

[47] *PK*, 62.

[48] *STT*, 157.

[49] *CC*, 50.

"The constitution of this new polity are the Gospels. . . . To be a disciple means to share Christ's story."[50]

This identification of the church as the community that models Christ's story shapes the remainder of his ecclesiology. Nicholas Healy summarizes this view well: Once we have dispensed with the myth that we are self-made or universal, objective agents, we see that "characters are built by living within a community; ethics therefore requires community; and Christian ethics requires the church community. Thus we arrive at the center of Hauerwas's thinking, the church, the 'community of character' for Christians."[51]

2.1 The Social Task of the Church: Mission & Formation

But what exactly is the character of this community?[52] It is one thing to identify the church with the story of Christ, but another to more specifically define the concrete character, or marks, of that church. This is what Hauerwas calls the "social task of the church." "The 'political' question crucial to the church," he claims, "is what kind of community the church must be to be faithful to the narratives central to Christian convictions."[53] He answers his own question, generally, by returning to the idea of formation: the most important task of the church is to be a community that is "capable of forming people with virtues sufficient to witness to God's truth in the world."[54] Here we see that for Hauerwas, the church has two primary tasks; the church is the locus of Christian mission and Christian formation. For many scholars, her or his ecclesiology pivots on the relationship between these two tasks.

Contrast this with the prominent ecclesiology of a theologian like Karl Barth. For Barth, the church *is* mission. The mature Barth shifts emphasis from the *gathering* of the church community to its *sending*, claiming that "the true community of Jesus Christ is the community

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[50] *CC*, 48-49. In a later essay Hauerwas quotes Gerard Loughlin: "The story of Christ continues in the story of the Church because the Church is precisely constituted as the continuation of Christ's story. . . . The Church is the community that tells Christ's story by being itself the continuing story of Christ; embodying the story of Christ in the circumstances of its day." (*PTF*, 145-146, quoting Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 84.)

[51] Healy, 29.

[52] Distilling the Hauerwas corpus is a tall order. He does not write systematically—or really write actual books, he would say, but rather occasional and episodic essays, which are often collected in volumes with minimal cohesive themes. (*The Peaceable Kingdom*, written as a "primer" for Christian ethics, is the one exception). Still, many of his core claims and concepts are repeated in many places. For the sake of condensation, and to demonstrate the continuity of his thought over time, I will draw from several sources but primarily from two of his earlier works, *A Community of Character* and *The Peaceable Kingdom*, and one of his latest works, *Approaching the End*.

[53] *CC*, 2.

[54] *CC*, 3.

which God has sent out into the world in and with its foundation. As such it exists *for* the world."[55] For Barth, mission is not merely an activity of the church but its very being, the "one *nota ecclesiae* without which the church would not be and could not be recognized as the church."[56] Barth writes that "*all* activity of the church is mission, even if it is not expressly called that."[57] The church exists only in its missional activity, not its gathering activity. Thus Barth's ecclesiology eclipses the role of formation in the church community —worship is mission, not a formative time or practice.

Though drawing significantly on Barth, Hauerwas's ecclesiology includes equal emphasis on mission and formation, or even integrates them. The church is mission, for Hauerwas, but as any cursory reading of his material reveals, the church is principally, a site of formation. Formation precedes witness and is necessary for a proper witness, and at times it even *is* its witness. The community has to have its character formed through its act of worship. In fact, Hauerwas ordered his edited textbook on Christian ethics (co-edited with Sam Wells) by the moral implications of particular liturgical practices, and frames Christian ethics in terms of communal formation through worship. This is because "worship is the time God trains his people to imitate him."[58] As explanation for this framework in the introduction to the volume, he writes, "The liturgy offers ethics a series of ordered practices that shape the character and assumptions of Christians, and suggest habits and models that inform every

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[55] *Church Dogmatics* IV/3, 768. For Barth's account of the church's "gathering," "upbuilding" and "sending" by the Spirit see *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 § 62, IV/2 § 67, and IV/3.2 § 72. Barth arrives at this emphasis on mission in the following way: mission is not just an *action* of God; it is part of God's very *nature*. God's self-sending is not only what God does but also who God is. God's being and God's activity cannot be separated. And just as there can be no breach between God's being and act, neither can there be any breach in the church's being and act.[55] Therefore, Christian community is not "'an end in itself. As fellowship with Christ, it is in principle and nature a *service*. It is *witness*" (John Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 179.) Thanks to John Shelton for drawing my attention to this material.

[56] Markus Höfner, "Barth and Political Ecclesiology," in *Theo-Politics?: Conversing with Karl Barth in Western and Asian Contexts*, ed. Markus Höfner (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, forthcoming 2017), referencing *Church Dogmatics* IV/3, ed. G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrence, (London: T & T Clark, 1961), 771 (hereafter *CD*). Höfner observes, "The 'gathering' of the Christian church is not the *ratio* of its being and not the determining centre of God's reconciling work. As for Barth, the Christian church is not *first* gathered as a community of believers enjoying the gift of salvation and *then* bestowed with the additional task of being sent into a yet unreconciled world. Rather, the gathering of the church according to Barth takes places on behalf of its sending out into the world, the gathering is (just) the *conditio sine qua non* for the sending as *ratio* of the Christian church (*CD* II/2, 94-145)."

[57] Barth, "Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart," 190 (the English quotes come from an unpublished translation by Darrell L. Guder and the page numbers refer to the original German manuscript).

[58] *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 25.

aspect of corporate life."[59] Against universalized and principled approaches to Christian ethics, Hauerwas claims that the church forms our characters in a way that determines the contour of our mission. But these two ecclesial roles of formation and mission do not form a simple chronological progression, because for him, the process of formation is itself part of the witness. There is no mission "out there" that the church is being prepared for by its formation in worship. The liturgical formation is itself the church's witness to the world of the way an alternative, non-violent polity embodies an alternative lifestyle premised on its allegiance to its non-violent Lord Jesus. This is what he means by suggesting that the church is founded on the story of Christ's submission to the cross. For him, this is because Christian identity is not located cognitively, in statements or debates or arguments; identity is a matter of practices, commitments, and habits. Thus, "Christianity is not principally something people think or feel or say – it is something people do. The narrative of the Gospels is the story of what Christ did, and what God did in Christ, and the scriptural narrative shapes and inspires disciples to go and do likewise."[60] Liturgy, through the church, shapes the moral life by providing a concrete, practical means for the story of Jesus life in scripture to take shape in the life of Christians. The Christian moral life is ultimately placing our stories in line with God's story.

This allows Hauerwas to famously claim, "The primary social task of the church is to be itself." He goes on, "The fact that the first task of the church is to be itself is not a rejection of the world or a withdrawal ethic, but a reminder that Christians must serve the world on their own terms."[61] And this leads to the next famous claim that "The church first serves the world by helping the world to know what it means to be the world."[62] The church, therefore, serves as a contrast model to the sociality and politics of the world; by embodying a life together through practices of peaceableness and truthfulness, it reveals to the world its inherent untruthfulness and dependence on power and violence for its survival.[63] Being an alternative polity to the polities of the world involves a suspicion of these other polities. It does not disavow any involvement, but does mean that it witnesses to a life of peace—"to exhibit in our common life the kind of community possible when trust, and not fear, rules our lives."[64] The virtues of peaceableness, faithfulness, truthfulness, and forgiveness mark this community, and for Hauerwas, separate it from the marks of the world. In a description of the church's character

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[59] *Blackwell*, 7.
[60] *Blackwell*, 7.
[61] *CC*, 10.
[62] *CC*, 50.
[63] "The challenge is always for the church to be a 'contrast model' for all polities that know not God. . . . The story of God is the truthful account of our existence, and thus we can be a community formed on trust rather than distrust. The hallmark of such a community, unlike the power of the nation-states, is its refusal to resort to violence to secure its own existence or to insure obedience" (CC, 84-85).
[64] *CC*, 85.

that highlights themes that will be important for this project on race, Hauerwas claims: "To be a people capable of accepting forgiveness separates them [the church] from the world: The world, under the illusion that power and violence rule history, assumes that is has no need to be forgiven . . . since it lives not by memory made possible by forgiveness, but by power."[65]

2.2 Formation through Practices
As the above discussion demonstrates, ingredient to Hauerwas's understanding of the church and its crucial social task is its responsibility to form its members into disciples. As I argued in the previous pages, Hauerwas couples the twin tasks of ecclesial mission and formation, and in ways counter to those of other church-heavy theologians like Barth, predicates the church's mission on its formation and even, to a degree, locates its mission in its formative worship practices.

Again, this emphasis owes much to Hauerwas's commitment to virtue ethics and his particular theological anthropology. Our moral decisions and our character are dependent on the moral disposition we have acquired through our repeated actions, what he calls, drawing again on MacIntyre, practices.[66] Specifically for Hauerwas, our characters as Christians are formed by the worship practices of the liturgy, shaping our dispositions and habits through repeated bodily actions. By repeatedly engaging in certain actions we develop a disposition to act in that way and over the course of time find it easier to do so. Thus, the moral character of agents is formed, and should be intentionally formed, by the community of which they are part. Formation is a community activity, and Christian formation occurs only in the church, for Hauerwas.

One way of more deeply uncovering the implications of this central emphasis on practice in Hauerwas's work is by attending to a couple key challenges to this line of thought. Again, Nicholas Healy's work is helpful. Healy worries about Hauerwas's apparent insistence that a congregant can avoid the influence of external sources seeping into church practice; he asserts, people don't simply go to church and become more Christian through church formation. "Things are much more complicated in the concrete," Healy contends. "[Hauerwas] would need to say far more about the many and varied ways church members make their own

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[65] CC, 69.

[66] MacIntyre defines practice as "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the results that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" (*After Virtue*, 175). I will address this definition more thoroughly later in this chapter and more thoroughly in chapter eight.

decisions, and in doing so form ourselves and our churches."[67] Our characters are not *simply* formed, but are the result of ongoing negotiations between many influences and sources. Many criticisms similarly suggest that by locating the Gospel story exhaustively within the church community—as the people who enact this story in the world today—Hauerwas's project is undermined by neglecting the way in which humans are necessarily and inevitably formed by multiple, and often contradictory, stories.[68]

Another of the most sophisticated criticisms of Hauerwas's ecclesiology, and one similar to Healy's concerns, comes from Kathryn Tanner. Tanner takes to task this sense that Christian practices are "taken to be a group-specific, unified whole, sharply bounded to form, at least initially, some sort of self-contained unit."[69] While this model allows that Christian practices may be "mixed up" with wider cultural practices, it insists that the Christian identity of those practices is internal and self-originating.[70] Alternatively, Tanner understands the church not as a society set-apart but as a voluntary association or kind of "club"; "and like what happens in an association and not in a separate society, the character of those outside activities also infiltrate it."[71] She drops the usual empirical obstacles to such an understanding, but also suggests a few theological ones (and I'm blurring a few separate criticisms of postliberals and radical orthodoxy into one batch). First, Christian accounts of a "new identity" in Christ downplay social distinctions like ethnicity and sex, so it seems improper to understand Christian identity itself as imparting a separate social distinction. Second, such accounts fail to take seriously the way sin and grace affect those inside church as much as outside church, and seem to undermine notions of the universal condition of sin and the oneness of God. A third critique correlates to some of the core themes of this dissertation, that since Christian community is a contextual and socially-determined community, its boundaries may shift across different Christian contexts.[72] In some ways this is simply a recognition of the diverse and contested character of Christianity—dispersed among different denominations and geographical contexts. But it also identifies a tension within Hauerwas's ecclesiology, in which he seems to attempt to hold together the contextual nature of the church (beginning *in medias res*[73]) with a more monolithic sense of *the* church (in the singular) and *the* Christian tradition.

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[67] Healy, 90, 96.

[68] As Jennifer Herdt observes, for Hauerwas "insofar as Christians are formed by any narratives other than that of God's work in Christ, they too are sinful" (348).

[69] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 95.

[70] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 105.

[71] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 98.

[72] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 109.

[73] *STT*, 3.

These attempts to proclaim the autonomous nature of Christian practices identity lead Tanner to judge that such accounts may be "nothing short of idolatrous."[74]

Instead, she proposes a more fluid understanding of Christian practice and culture as one which uses culturally-shared material differently. It transforms borrowed materials from other cultures and social contexts, not casting aside previous or outside practices or objects, but giving them back to the community in a new form. With this claim, she follows John Howard Yoder—who identifies Christians as "believers who for Jesus' sake do ordinary social things differently"[75]— and Michel de Certau in emphasizing the transformative, and even subversive, character of practices. Certau claims the "others" in a society—those not considered to be part of the dominant culture—re-use cultural products imposed on them by the power structure, but do so in their own everyday ways.[76] Likewise for Tanner, "Christian practices are always the practices of others made odd."[77] This recognition seems resonant with the scriptural witness as well, especially the pericope of Jesus taking a Roman coin with the image of Caesar and turning it into a lesson on our service to the God in whose image we are made.[78] This means that one cannot understand Christian identity apart from others and the cultural materials of other contexts and societies; identity is essentially relational, constituted by the same practices now conceived and employed in different forms with different goals.

In the end, I think this is a proposal with which Hauerwas would agree. While his rhetoric often draws a picture of the church as completely bounded and self-determined, some of his work signals that Christians may make full use of practices originating in non-Christian contexts. (One example of this is his commendation of grassroots political organizing in the style of Saul Alinsky in his book with Romand Coles.[79]) Despite the criticisms I cited earlier in this essay, Hauerwas occasionally acknowledges a community's possession of 'conflicting

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[74] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 102. Tanner correlates these claims to those of subordinated groups—that their own way of life and social practices are original and authentic. For these oppressed groups, this constitutes a well-intentioned effort to demonstrate that their cultural life is not dictated to them by those in power. But in the same way that this effort does not recognize the ways cultural artifacts and practices are relational and inter-dependent, theological efforts to do the same with the church fail to recognize the complex nature of culture (Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 112).

[75] Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 75.

[76] *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Randall (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1984), xiii.

[77] Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 113.

[78] Mark 12:13-17.

[79] To be fair, this book, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, was written after Tanner's critique in 1997 (which also did not explicitly identify Hauerwas as her direct target), but written before Healy's. In fact, I'm not sure Healy's critical introduction ever references this work.

stories' and interpretations.[80] He describes what he learned from MacIntyre as understanding 'the narrative form of my life is but a part of an interlocking set of narratives embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity.'[81] He even suggests this diversity is integral to the making of a truthful community. And while his critics may be correct that this attention to the complexity of multiple stories is only a minority report within Hauerwas's writings, I contend that these other (often overlooked) insights better illuminate the complexity of communal life.

In a second, and more helpful, challenge, Healy objects to a narrow definition of practices that he observes in Hauerwas's work. Practices cannot simply be bodily acts, alone; without any intentionality or explanation they have no role in a community's witness. Healy seems correct when he says, "We must tell the story to those non-Christians to whom we wish to witness," meaning it may be necessary to explain the reasons for the practices we have.[82] He believes that they lack the sufficient power to adequately form people without some explanation as to why and how the community performs them.

In place of this skeletal vision of practice, Healy insists that the concept of practice must account for intentionality and explanation, and draws on the work of David Kelsey to offer an alternative account.[83] Kelsey defines practice as "any form of socially established human interactivity that is conceptually formed, is complex and internally coherent, is subject to standards of excellence that partly define it, and is done to some end but does not necessarily have a product."[84] Thus, similarly to Hauerwas, "practices define . . . communities' corporate or communal identity. They also decisively shape the personal identities of the members of the community who enact them." [85] The modifications in this concept from the Hauerwas/MacIntyre version lie in the deletion of any appeal to employ human powers to achieve "excellence." Where as MacIntyre claims that practices are activities intended to "achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity," Kelsey contends that excellence is not the goal, faithfulness is. A second

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[80] *CC*, 60. Elsewhere he writes, 'What we actually possess are various and sometimes conflicting stories that provide us with the skills to use certain moral notions. What we need to develop is the reflective capacity to analyze those stories, so that we can better understand how they function." In fact, he claims that the stories of the Christian and Jewish tradition are not the only stories that "offer skills for truthfulness in the moral life" (*TT*, 38).

[81] *PTF*, 140; referencing MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 218, 221.

[82] Healy, 114.

[83] Since Kelsey never directly addresses Hauerwas's work, and the contrast between their ideas of practice (Healy, 54), I will allow Healy's comparison to guide my own appraisal. What follows is drawn from Healy, 116-120.

[84] Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 14.

[85] Kelsey, 43.

modification is the addition of the phrase, "conceptually formed," which Healy takes to mean, practices are intentionally derived as responses to divine action and grace to bring us into better understanding of the God we worship. For Kelsey, and Healy, this reintroduces the cognitive aspect—the logic of belief, as he calls it—that goes missing in Hauerwas's overemphasis on bodily ritual. Hauerwas is so concerned that Christianity has been reduced to an abstract system of belief that he grounds Christianity in practices so that "doctrine cannot float free from Christian living."[86] While an admirable goal, Hauerwas tilts too far. With attention to beliefs lacking, the Hauerwasian practitioner may not know why she is performing the practice she is practicing. Healy finds Kelsey's model more appealing because it embraces the whole person by including a "conceptual component within that embodiment"[87]—the component of belief or faith.

Healy then concludes, "The church has not developed its practices primarily in order to form its members, but in order that we may respond appropriately to God made known in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit."[88] But surely these two ends are not incommensurable or even mutually exclusive. In fact, I would suggest that Healy's systematician predilections obscure him to the responsive nature of Hauerwas's practices. Hauerwas grounds practices in the worship of Christ as Lord. These practices are only intelligible as a response to the Christ whom we worship as creator, redeemer, and Lord of life. This formation and responsiveness are integrated. What is responding to God if not being formed, or con-formed to the likeness and character of God? These practices may be located in quotidian jars of clay, but that does not mean these outward bodily actions cannot renew our inner natures as a training for our coming weight of glory. (See my comments on the scriptural witness of the role of formation through practice in section 1.2.1 of this chapter). The fact that Healy does not recognize this leads him to further suggest that "If our intentionality is Christian, we can bend almost any socially-sanctioned practice into a Christian practice," and then he goes on to cite examples of Thanksgiving, singing the national anthem, even accounting.[89] Now granted, all that we do we are to do to the glory of God,[90] but this does not mean that everything we do can be for the glory of God. Just calling something a practice does not baptize it as Christian. If this is where Kelsey's definition leads, then Hauerwas employs important boundaries for what constitutes as practice.

Nevertheless, while Healy ends up with far too capacious an account of Christian practice, his insistence on the intentionality, and thus explainability, of a practice, is an important

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[86] Healy, 119.
[87] Healy, 118.
[88] Healy, 118.
[89] Healy, 119.
[90] 1 Corinthians 10:31.

component that needs to be added to MacIntyre and Hauerwas's account. This also prevents the concept of practice from becoming yet another abstract notion partitioned from any concrete intelligibility in a community. It is also an important reminder that Christian practice is ultimately for the telos of transformation—but not just any transformation, but that of conformation to the character of God.

With this challenge to Hauerwas's understanding of practice notwithstanding, we still see the central role of practice, and hence formation, in his ecclesiology. It is liturgical practices that constitute not only the formation of the community but also its mission and witness. And this mission is to reveal the world as world and in doing so, proclaim the salvation of Christ. The church is not against the world, and when it encounters hostility, it must first check to ensure that it did not instigate the hostility. Hostility with the world was not "written into the foundations of the created world" or the mission and identity of the church, yet without the church the world would not know the salvation and life that it is missing, and to which it is called.[91]

Such strong proclamations of the church's life often lead critics to ask Hauerwas, "So where is this church you speak of?" His best answer to this question lies in two essays written about his membership at two churches: Broadway United Methodist in South Bend, Indiana and Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.[92] He describes his life in community in great detail, and explains how this church creates the type of culture that witnesses to an embodied, concrete Christianity. Recall his claim that "Theology can too easily begin to appear as ideas,' rather than the kind of discourse that must, if it is to be truthful, be embedded in the practices of actual lived communities."[93] He then proceeds to offer an example of the practices of this actual lived community.[94] For the purposes of this dissertation, Hauerwas notes how the cultural formation at Aldersgate, through its practices of church calendar, sermon, and discernment mark "the great task before Christians today . . . to unmask the invisibility of those stories that constitute our lives which we assume, wrongly, are commensurate with our being Christian."[95] It is worth noting here that it is just that sort of story—the story white Christians tell ourselves about our racial history and present complicity—that is a story we prefer to remain invisible. And though it often seems that Hauerwas wishes

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[91] *ATE*, 60.

[92] *CET*, 116; "In Defense of Cultural Christianity: Reflections on Going to Church," in *STT*.

[93] *STT*, 157.

[94] This is commensurate with the goal of my previous book, with Sam Speers, *Kingdom Politics: In Search of a New Political Imagination for Today's Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015). We researched and analyzed the practices of five lived congregations in an attempt to demonstrate "where" this church that Hauerwas and others speak about actually exists.

[95] *STT*, 164.

it to remain invisible as well, it is just this sort of story that Hauerwas believes the church has the power to unmask.

2.3 Church Criticisms

Despite an abundance of charges that Hauerwas operates with an over-inflated ecclesiology, one too triumphalistic, culturally and socially bounded, publicly and politically withdrawn, and so on,[96] Hauerwas spends much more time criticizing the church than praising it. Hauerwas's primary criticism of the church is that it has lost its sense of its formative narrative and instead adopted another narrative. This alien narrative, and therefore newly formative one for the church, is liberalism. This critique is ubiquitous across Hauerwas's writings, so I will focus on one instance of this theme, from one of his earlier works, *A Community of Character*. Grounded in his sense of the narrative identity formation of communities, he observes that in the modern U.S. context:

> Liberalism provided a philosophical account of society to deal with . . . a people who do not need a shared history; all they need is a system of rules that will constitute procedures for resolving disputes as they pursue various interests. Thus liberalism is a political philosophy committed to the proposition that a social order and corresponding mode of government can be formed on self interest and consent.[97]

Liberal citizens—and Christians who understand themselves to be citizens of a liberal democracy—search for ethical, political, and social stability by uncovering universal principles that any rational person would accept as a way out of their fragmentation.[98] But, Hauerwas insists, this is not a Christian task, and even has disastrous affects: "Liberalism thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; a social order that is designed to work on the presumption that people are self-interested tends to produce that kind of people."[99] Liberalism becomes a stain that is difficult to scrub away and even corrupts other formative aspects of one's life. For those deeply embedded in the ways of liberalism, even if Christians attempt to recover the social

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[96] Another example: "What Barth saw as an ever-shifting boundary between church and world appears to have hardened in Hauerwas's rhetoric into a rigid and static line between Christian virtue and liberal vice" (Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 154). Stout and James Hunter devote entire chapters in one of their majors works to criticizing Hauerwas's withdrawal ecclesiology—more specifically his ecclesiology within the broader groupings of New Traditionalism and Neo-Anabaptist— and Healy devotes much of his book on Hauerwas to this topic (See Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*; Hunter, *To Change the World; and* Healy, *Hauerwas.* I find the most compelling criticisms of Hauerwas's ecclesiology to appear in Tanner, *Theories of Culture*; Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue*; Jennifer McBride, *Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Nathan Kerr, *Christ, History, and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008). I draw on most of these works in this chapter.

[97] CC, 78.

[98] Jeffrey Stout offers one of the clearest summaries of Hauerwas's position available, and follows it with one of the most compelling critiques (*Democracy and Tradition*, 140-179).

[99] CC, 79.

significance of the Gospel, they find that they must and do express those convictions in terms that are secular.[100]

Hauerwas notes several implications of this. Liberalism leads Christians to presume that political involvement is the best mechanism to deal with, and perhaps even transform, structures of injustice. Hauerwas writes, "It is my contention, however, that Christian enthusiasm for the political involvement offered by our secular polity has made us forget the church's more profound political task. In the interest of securing more equitable forms of justice possible in our society, Christians have failed to challenge the moral presuppositions of our polity and society. . . . The church has increasingly imitated in its own social life the politics of liberalism."[101] Many Christians also assume that a liberal and secular society is at least neutral to, if not an advantage for, the church, so that we have a stake in the American political experiment.[102] We make the freedom of the individual an end in itself, without providing a notion of what to do with that freedom. "The story that liberalism teaches us is that we have no story," he concludes, "and as a result we fail to notice how deeply that story determines our lives." He goes on:

> Accordingly, we fail to recognize the coercive form of the liberal state, as it, like all states, finally claims our loyalty under the self-deceptive slogan that in a democracy the people rule themselves because they have 'consented' to be so ruled. But a people who have learned the strenuous lesson of God's lordship through Jesus' cross should recognize that 'the people' are no less tyrannical than kings or dictators.[103]

Hauerwas's primary criticism of the church, then, may be summed up as follows: the church has adopted another narrative as its own—that of (the overlapping categories of) liberalism, liberal democracy, American civil religion—and believes the myth that it has freely chosen these narratives as its own.[104] This has resulted, as Hauerwas is fond of saying, in the church believing its task is to underwrite American democracy, and this reinforces the modern myth of the autonomous, unconditioned individual. The church has forgotten its central narrative and allowed itself to become coopted by other traditions. As we will see in the next chapter, the basic framework of this ecclesial critique maps on surprisingly well to the primary ecclesial critique of James Cone.

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[100] CC, 72.
[101] CC, 73.
[102] CC, 74.
[103] CC, 84.
[104] For an account of democracy that Hauerwas ought to be able to support—at least one for which I argue he should support—see my "Democracy and Church: Barth and Yoder on Democratic Practice," in *Theo-Politics?* (forthcoming).

3 The Church's Particularity: Against Universal Rationality

At stake in his insistence on loyalty to the church's narrative is the particularity of the church's witness. Framed by Hauerwas and critics alike as a concern for the distinctiveness of the church—its formative elements, way of life, mission, and witness—this focus on the particularity of the Christian community is perhaps the most ubiquitous implication of Hauerwas's theology. "The Christian ethic is in its fullest sense a way and pattern of life for those whose faith in God has Jesus as its center," he says. "It is not first of all a universally valid objective model of morality." [105] Hauerwas grants almost obsessive attention to distinctiveness or particularity because his claim that a "universally valid objective model of morality" does not exist is perhaps his most fundamental claim—the one on which his whole theology rests. I have dealt with this topic above, but return to it here as the flip-side of his ecclesial criticism that I outlined above.

The primary temptation for we moderns is to pretend to universal, rational notions of morality.[106] The modern person builds an account of universally accessible knowledge for all reasonable people on the foundation of abstract and universal reason.[107] Truth and morality are not communally-dependent elements for us—their content transcends cultures and contexts. But Hauerwas is not having it. Progressive arguments are self-undermining, he objects, when they rely on universalizing epistemologies rather than the resources internal to a particular tradition. Universalizing justifications deploy liberalism's epistemic resources in order to settle for bland, conventional and often self-undermining modifications of liberalism.[108]

Hauerwas therefore rejects difference-denying approaches to morality as "autonomous," which give pride of place to the analysis of specific moral acts, "quandaries," and individualized decisions concerning them. Approaches that presume a universal subjectivity establish practical reason on false pretenses, resulting in moral incoherence. As MacIntyre argues, 'To be outside of all traditions is to be a stranger to enquiry; it is to be in a state of intellectual and moral destitution.'[109] For Hauerwas, true practical reason requires that we embrace rather than avoid our contingency, for the deeply-embedded middle is the only place we can truthfully begin. That is, the middle is the only possible place for "practical wisdom" to

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[105] CC, 42.

[106] Likewise, Healy argues that the particularities of Hauerwas's context do not matter for interpreting his writing, and therefore does not allow them to factor into his supposed objective criticism. This sort of abstraction of speech and argument from history and rhetoric is implausible to me, and it confuses the genre of Hauerwas's writing for a formal treatise (Healy, 28n.)

[107] Larsen, 23.

[108] Larsen, 26-27.

[109] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 367.

begin.[110] Hauerwas contends, "Christian theology always finds itself *in medias res;*"[111] and theologians should begin from whatever middle they are in. The theological task to bear reality (drawing on Bonhoeffer) grasps the significance of the present moment from the various middles of this life and the world's history. Sean Larsen observes that the reality Hauerwas seeks to bear is broad, even universal; "But the starting point is frustratingly particular: because acts are intelligible only with reference to the agents and the communities that form the agents, no framework offers an abstract and universally accessible method of moral analysis in order to determine right obligations or just outcomes."[112] With this, Larsen sees a continuity between Hauerwas's project and black, feminist, womanist, queer, or postcolonial ethics: they all reject the modern project of granting deference to the dominant subject of universal rationality (white, heterosexual, male). Larsen argues, "Though Hauerwas and subversive ethicists may differ in degrees about whether a form of traditional Christian orthodoxy can avoid reintroducing the same hegemonic subject, both similarly deconstruct progressive Protestantism in order to make it sustainable."[113]

Yet this temptation toward abstraction is just as great for those in the church as for those outside—i.e. no ecclesial triumphalism here. Hauerwas laments, "In the attempt to make Christianity intelligible within the epistemological conceits of modernity, theologians have been intent on showing that what we believe as Christians is not that different from what those who are not Christians believe."[114] The church has presented itself in such a way that many secular people now assume that its descriptions of reality employ a religious "varnish" that can be scraped away to reveal a more basic account of reality. "What I find so interesting," he writes, "is that many Christians accept these naturalistic assumptions about the way things are because they believe that by doing so it is possible to transcend our diverse particularities that otherwise result in unwelcome conflict."[115] But Hauerwas sees it as his task to convince Christians that the church is a material reality that must resist domestication to the modern, liberal tendencies to make our lives intelligible on their terms, and universally relatable, all for the sake of social peace.

Instead, Hauerwas claims that we need to rethink what we mean by the church, and this can only happen by doing theology "from below," that is, a theology that is more concrete and specific. Here, he appeals to Barth. Barth's theology began with a strong defense of the "wholly otherness" of God but gradually began to reconfigure God as the partner of

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[110] Larsen, 23.
[111] *STT*, 3.
[112] Larsen, 37.
[113] Larsen, 27.
[114] *ATE*, 68.
[115] *ATE*, 68.

humanity. But he did so, importantly, through the lens of God's dealings with humanity rather than humanity's relationship with God. "In short," Hauerwas comments, "Barth discovered that it is precisely God's deity that includes and constitutes God's humanity. We are not dealing with an abstract God, that is, a God whose deity exists separated from man, because in Jesus Christ there can be no isolation of man from God or God from man."[116] Because of God's concrete relation to humanity, and the comprehensive implications such a claim makes on human earthly life, Barth did not assume that his theology had political implications because it was itself a politics.

And this leads to the final implication of Hauerwas's concern for the particularity of the church—the church is a polis, an alternative politics: "The existence of the church is itself the determinative (although not the only) witness to an alternative politics to that of the old age."[117] This claim means that the church does not exist to be in service of the work of wider society. This does not mean that the church is not to serve the world, but it serves through its witness—by "being the church" and demonstrating to the world, as a contrast model, that it is the world. That is, the church proclaims the good news of the gospel by its peaceable life together, and through this witness of an alternative social ordering—and alternative politics—the power structures of the world will come to realize God's sovereignty over them. "Jesus is Lord" is a political claim, not a subjective statement. "So I am ready to rule," Hauerwas admits. "The difficulty is that following a crucified Lord entails embodying a politics that cannot resort to coercion and violence; it is a politics of persuasion all the way down."[118]

Jennifer Herdt summarizes Hauerwas's overall commitment to Christian particularity well: it is "not just narrative but scripture, not just practices but liturgical practices, not just tradition and community but the church."[119] For Hauerwas, the church has a particular communal identity, not because it is a home of saints or because it always adequately embodies the narrative of the Gospel, but simply because this is *its* narrative. It is this narrative that gives the church its identity and this is what makes Christians distinct from the world—whether or not they live up to it. God's dominion is not "limited or confined to the church," he is sure to say[120]—though many critics overlook such comments. (Healy's criticism that in order for Hauerwas's argument to work, the empirical church must in fact live up to the kind of

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[116] *ATE*, 77. Barth claims, "We have no universal deity capable of being reached conceptually, but this concrete deity—real and recognizable in the descent grounded in that sequence and peculiar to the existence of Jesus Christ" (Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 48.)

[117] *ATE*, 46.

[118] *ATE*, 82.

[119] Herdt, 345.

[120] *STT*, 45.

alternative way of life he insists it should, seems misguided.[121] As he himself acknowledges earlier, Hauerwas is speaking aspirationally, perhaps prophetically, and not empirically when he makes such comments.) It is important to note, as critics like Healy do acknowledge,[122] Hauerwas never advocates withdrawing from the social or political life of the world, or even of America. And as Jennifer Herdt observes, "Hauerwas is more critical of the church and more appreciative of the world" than many critics indicate. He also worries about our predilection to determine the boundaries of the kingdom ourselves, and Herdt quotes his assertion that "as Christians we may . . . find that people who are not Christians manifest God's peace better than we ourselves."[123] Still she concludes, Hauerwas's rhetoric often betrays this commitment to a more capacious inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. Herdt joins others, though in a softer more charitable tone, in calling for a more "porous" understanding of Christian identity. She concedes that while Hauerwas's understanding of the particularity of the church and its witness allow for a more holistic account of the Christian life, and offer illuminating accounts of human agency, it is overly concerned with the purity of that identity and the possibility of contamination by outside influences. A stronger affirmation of God's grace, she contends, would allow for a chastened account of Christian distinctiveness, avoid the concerns of critics like Healy that Hauerwas's program is too immanent and natural, and eliminate worries about so strongly defending distinctiveness.[124] This, she argues, embraces a truer sense of church as gift and of our dependency upon God for proper Christian formation. While Hauerwas does worry about participation in institutions like liberal democracy, as his books and especially his work with Romand Coles indicate, his is not an ethic of withdrawal and the church is not a community of withdrawal or passivity. Not only is Hauerwas's epistemology consistent with that of black liberation ethics, as Larsen suggests, but Hauerwas's church is more commensurate with an activist church, of the type James Cone prefers, than many critics want to admit.

4 Salvation & Reconciliation

Hauerwas's understanding of the church as an alternative politics—a distinctive community that relies upon its on narrative particularity rather than universalized rational principles for its way of life—is prominent and mostly straightforward. As is his understanding of the church's relationship to its formative gospel narrative. His understanding of the church's relationship to salvation and ultimate reconciliation, however, proves to be more evasive. One

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[121] "The empirical problem, for Hauerwas's social theory, is that the identity-formation of most Christians is generally insufficient for them to be recognizably Christian in their everyday lives" (Healy, 73, 82).
[122] Healy, 37,
[123] Herdt, 347 (quoting Hauerwas, *PK*, 101).
[124] Herdt, 351.

reason for this is that Hauerwas's treatment of soteriology is about as scant as his treatments of race! Yet, because of the concern of this dissertation with the task of reconciliation, it is important to briefly examine the ecclesiological implications of reconciliation as an element of salvation for Hauerwas.

For Hauerwas, reconciliation is indeed an element within the broader reality of salvation—and unsurprising, salvation is not an abstract theological concept, but a communally-grounded element of ecclesiology. In fact, one could justifiably be concerned that Hauerwas proffers a limited view of redemption, or salvation, and tethers it too closely to the immanent church community. "God's salvation is nothing less than the participation in God's very life through word and sacrament,"[125] he claims in one brief treatment of the topic; and elsewhere, "Jesus saves by making us participants in a new way of life. The name of that way of life is church."[126] By this, Hauerwas intimates that the church is not only a means of salvation, but also its telos, by constituting the community of the reconciled.[127] He comes dangerously close to identifying soteriology with ecclesiology. In a representative quote in *Sanctify Them with the Truth*, Hauerwas writes that salvation is best understood as "our material embodiment in the habits and practices of a people that makes possible a way of life that is otherwise impossible. That is why we are not saved in spite of our sin but we are saved precisely through practices of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation."[128]

Thus, the church is not only the locus of social formation through particular practices, wherein church members find themselves located within God's story, and it is not only the locus of God's witness of an alternative politics to a world that is fragmented, but it is also the locus of reconciliation—humanity's reconciliation to God and our reconciliation with one another. For him, it is true that the beloved community, the community of the reconciled, indeed the whole world reconciled to God and to one another, is the telos of salvation. So in this sense, insofar as the church is the Body of Christ that will one day be transformed into the Kingdom of God, it is both a means and a proleptic witness of salvation. But we might rightfully worry that this proleptic sense of reconciliation goes understated. Hauerwas perhaps comes too close to identifying this telos with the immanent and empirical church by locating it almost exclusively in liturgical participation. Despite this worry, we may still mark the following claims as important: the church is a (the?) place where reconciliation occurs 1) because its resources of church practices offer the best hope of achieving earthly reconciliation—breaking down the dividing walls between us and 2) because we profess a faith

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[125] *BH*, 60.
[126] Hauerwas, *Matthew: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 30.
[127] Healy, 32.
[128] *STT*, 74.

in a God who first reconciles us to God's self through these church practices. It is this grounding of material, concrete reconciliation in the material and concrete media of church practices that will forge a link between the hopes of both Hauerwas and Cone.

5 Conclusion

As I conclude, I need to directly address the issue of Hauerwas and sectarianism, because many readers will assume that this marks the strongest contrast between Hauerwas's and Cone's ecclesiologies.[129] It is true that Hauerwas maintains an integral concept of the church, one that seldom admits that multiple cultural narratives, even secular ones, participate in the formation of Christians and seldom acknowledges the work of God outside of the church, "parables of the kingdom" in Barth's terms. This may mean that his zeal to (aspirationally) proclaim the particularity of the church may occlude the influence of centripetal cultural forces upon and within the church, and refuse to admit a more porous boundary. But it does not occlude the centrifugal force of the church upon the world. Hauerwas's ecclesiology is not a withdrawal ethic—certainly not commensurate with the proselytizing of Christian withdrawal via a so-called "Benedict Option" and other insulated communitarian projects. Due to the inherently political nature of the church it will influence the world through its witness of peaceableness and missional ministries. But, more directly, in his book *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, Hauerwas encourages Christian participation in grass-roots community organizing. He does not embolden Christian compromise in political circumstances which exceed the moral bounds of the life of discipleship, and thus disregards the realist insistence that we all already have "dirty hands," but his ecclesiology is one that not only permits but encourages Christian participation in the civic structures of the world that is passing away. Still, with that said and importantly for this dissertation, Hauerwas's ecclesial vision may promote homogeneity through its sturdier boundaries, precluding the influence and edification that comes with the inclusion of more diverse groups. It also does not sufficiently account for the sinfulness and malformation that often occurs within churches. Both of these critical elements will protract into a fuller criticism of his work in chapter five.[130]

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[129] While this paragraph focuses more exclusively on Hauerwas, I will compare them more fully in chapter five.

[130] Jennifer McBride provides a helpful image of a more sinful and confessionally-grounded church (in her book, *The Church for the World* but more directly in her dissertation), though in her criticisms—like so many others—fails to sufficiently account for aspirational character of Hauerwas's account. See also Nicholas Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?": "the difficulty with [Hauerwas's vision of a practice-constituted ecclesiology] is not that Christians sin and must seek absolution; that is part of our proclamation, after all. It is that his theologically-informed social theory relies too heavily upon the assumption that the practices of the church are at least for the most part performed according to their abstract and ideal descriptions. Ordinary concrete mis-performance or non-performance and its effect upon character formation and church witness is left out of the picture.

Now having identified the building blocks of theology in the form of narrative, tradition, and community, this chapter outlined the basic elements of his ecclesiology. In sum, for Hauerwas, the church can best be understood as a "schooling in a narrative"—a community which through its distinctive practices form agents' characters in a way that conforms to the story of the Gospel. [131] Hauerwas's narrative foundation frames his ecclesiology in terms of a tradition, a community shaped and formed by practices that continually remind the community of the particular story to which it belongs. Healy helpfully summarizes Hauerwas's ecclesiology, noting four marks to the Hauerwasian church: 1) a distinctive narrative, 2) a distinctive identity, 3) distinctive practices, resulting in 4) a distinctive people. This people embodies this distinctiveness by constituting an alternative community that witnesses to the truth in and for the sake of the world. [132] In the end, the church for Hauerwas is the place in which Christian identity is formed as Christians develop a character consistent with the Gospel narrative through church practices, and this cultivates an identity that serves as a distinctive alternative to the world (not because it seeks to be, but because the world has made it so). [133] The ecclesiological elements of particularity—the church as a community ordered by a particular formative narrative and not a universal sense of rationality or obligation—and the concreteness of the church—as a community constituted by actual lived practices—will serve as guiding concepts for much of this dissertation. These same elements will appear quite strongly in the work of James Cone as well. It is to that topic I turn in the next chapter.

Some of the church's practices are confused or misguided or worse, even in the abstract. But even when abstractly perfect, they are performed by an often confused and sometimes sinful and faithless body."

[131] *PK*, 33.

[132] Healy, 38. Healy then accuses Hauerwas of proffering an "ecclesio-centric" theology rather than an actual "theo-logy" by focusing on the subject rather than God's action—i.e. it is too anthropocentric to be true theology. He compares his to Schleiermacher in this sense, suggesting he comes close to falling prey to Barth's criticism that liberal Protestants like Schleiermacher—and now Hauerwas—speak of God only by speaking of humans in a loud voice. This move from "the general to the particular" also results in a focus on "contrast." This last point is important, as this is a pivotal move for both Hauerwas and Cone.

[133] Healy, 33.

Chapter Four | *The Black Liberation Ecclesiology of James Cone*

"There can be no genuine Christian theology without prophetic self-criticism of the Christian community that gives birth to it."[1]

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I briefly outlined the ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas. For the purposes of this project, it is important to understand the ecclesial basis of both Hauerwas and Cone—their criticism *and* praise of churches—in order to better understand the way they both identify the specific reasons for the church's racial problem and point toward resources for reconciliation. In this chapter, therefore, I turn to the ecclesiology of James Cone. While Hauerwas is known for his ecclesiology, Cone is less "churchy"—to use his term—or at least less ostensibly so. This chapter argues, however, that James Cone is an ecclesiological theologian, and that one cannot adequately understand his larger theological agenda, nor his treatment of racism and blackness, without locating those concepts, criticisms, and challenges within the context of the Christian church. More specifically, his turn to the concrete particular, against white theology's tendencies toward abstraction, is the key to his call for a liberatory theology and a liberatory Christian practice. His sharpest critiques and greatest hopes for racial liberation lie in his treatment of the church—though we must uncover what he means by this term and how it differs from Hauerwas.

In order to meet this task, I will take a different methodological route than the previous chapter on Hauerwas. For Hauerwas, it was better to close in on his particular conception of the church by way of the philosophical buildings blocks of his understanding of story, tradition, and community, as well as the critiques other scholars have levied against his ecclesiological moves. This chapter will focus more tightly and exclusively on the thought of Cone himself, a close reading of Cone's ecclesiological texts and passages. Since Cone is not often referenced as an ecclesiologically-minded theologian I will begin directly with his

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[1] *FMP*, 116.

conception of church, and then move to the contours and implications of the criticisms he levies against this ecclesial community, specifically the way these criticisms move him to an emphasis on theological particularity.

1 Concept and Criticism of Church

In this section I will uncover and analyze James Cone's specific critiques of the church: first, his surprisingly brief criticisms of the white church, that racist body that seems beyond repair and undeserving of much attention short of a challenge to submit to black authority; and second, his illuminating critiques of his own black church tradition, and what these critiques reveal about his own particular ecclesiological insights. Most significantly, these critiques pivot on the notion of the black church's accommodation to the white church's version of an otherworldly and passive gospel message that prevents the church from fulfilling its true mission of liberating God's people from oppression. This results in the church's loss of its essential identity and distinctive history. But before turning to these critiques, it is first important to establish the concept of church with which Cone operates, and from which these critiques emerge.

1.1 Concept of Church

Most of the constructive, conceptual work on ecclesiology can be found in Cone's earlier writings, and most prominently in his first two monographs, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970). This does not mean that Cone leaves behind any constructive pronouncements about the church or decides that the church, per se, is beyond repair. Instead, most of Cone's constructive ecclesiological work can be gleaned from the specific criticisms he levies against the church in these two works, as well as his later critical works. In fact, his most explicitly ecclesiological work—*For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (1984)—contains very little conceptual or constructive work on the church, but reads as an urgent corrective to a church gone astray. The most interesting of Cone's ecclesiological insights emerge from his language of theological critique.

1.1.1 Gospel

Cone's model of ecclesiology can be best described as a liberatory participatory model. For Cone the concept of church is simply derivative of his understanding of the gospel, and the gospel is God's work to liberate humanity from worldly oppression—that is, oppression within the bounds of history.[2] This notion of the gospel begins with an understanding of the task of

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[2] "To be oppressed is to be defined, located, or set aside according to another's perspective" (*A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1970), 28-29n4 (henceforth, *BTL*).

theology as demonstrating what the changeless gospel means for and in each new situation.[3] In short, Christian theology's "sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that their inner thrust for liberation is not only consistent with the gospel but is the gospel of Jesus Christ."[4] In words echoing those of Dietrich Bonhoeffer—one of the two white theologians Cone draws from, along with Karl Barth[5]—he says that theology must express the "concreteness of Christ's continued presence today."[6] This concrete character of theological reflection will play a pivotal role in Cone's work and in this analysis of his ecclesiological criticism.

In this way, theology is not purely an intellectual exercise but "a worldly risk," he claims.[7] And this has been the failure of "white theology," the theology of the privileged, the oppressors, from the time of Constantine through the colonialist theology of Europe, to the dominant theology in America that serves to help those in power keep their feet on the necks of the oppressed. Cone proclaims an immediate need to emancipate theology from the "White gospel"—a quietest gospel that looks to an otherworldly future for Shalom, rather than liberation during this present world. It is only an understanding of the gospel as social and political liberation—in the manner that Jesus speaks of it, Cone adds—that can enable blacks to "be capable of making an honest self-affirmation through Jesus Christ": the goal of theological inquiry.[8]

But is this possible? Can the gospel be stripped of its "whiteness"? The process must begin with scripture. One must first see that Jesus' work is essentially a work of liberation. Here Cone appeals to the gospel passage of Luke 4:18-19, and asserts that, "In Christ, God enters human affairs and takes sides with the oppressed."[9] It is this liberatory concept of the gospel that drives Cone's ecclesiology.

1.1.2 Definition of Church

The church, therefore, is the community that participates in God's liberating work in history.[10] Cone defines it most specifically in his early work: "The church is that people called into being by the power and love of God to share in [God's] revolutionary activity for the liberation of man" and "a visible manifestation of God's work in the affairs of men."

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[3] Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1969, 31 (henceforth, *BTBP*).
[4] *BTL*, 17.
[5] For a defense of this claim, see chapter eight.
[6] *BTL*, 219.
[7] *BTBP*, 84.
[8] *BTBP*, 32.
[9] *BTBP*, 36.
[10] *BTL*, 229.

According to James Evans, Cone's ecclesiology is best understood as "the company of the elect." Cone views the church as a people chosen by God, "whose mission is to be the vanguard of the new redeemed order."[11] This election and subsequent mission is expressed in the church's call to service. "If Jesus is Lord of the church, then the church is his servant,"[12] Cone writes. Within a world that produces evil—and often in the form of dominion, injustice, and racism—the church is "the company of the elect who are chosen for service," to be a redemptive presence in a world gone mad.[13] Expanding on this sense of election, Cone also says the church "consists of people who have been seized by the Holy Spirit and who have the determination to live as if all depends on God."[14] It is important to note that this is also an immanent vision of church as interested more in earthly affairs than spiritual development, especially the work of liberation. But one must not overlook the important pneumatological aspect, and sense of dependence on God. In a later essay he also explicitly frames the church Christologically as "that people who have been called into being by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus so that they can bear witness to Jesus' Lordship by participating with him in the struggle of freedom." He goes on, however, to suggest that this Christological basis privileges the church's human, political role over its spiritual: "This means that the primary definition of the church is not its confessional affirmations but rather its political commitment on behalf of the poor."[15]

In moves that foreshadow, and certainly animate, the work of the so-called "New Black Theology"—a movement that focuses on the inescapable Hebrew origins of the church as a community grafted onto the people of Israel in an effort to overcome the triumphalist, ethnocentric, and supersessionist European accounts of theology that led to the origin of "race" as a category utilized for oppression[16]—Cone situates the church within the people of Israel. In fact, specifically in *Black Theology and Black Power*, he locates the beginning of the church not at Pentecost or the first Eucharist, but at God's calling to God's people at Mt.

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[11] James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 150.

[12] Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 124 (hereafter *ST*).

[13] Evans, 151.

[14] *BTBP*, 63. 65. Cone alternates between affirming this community as called by, and participating in the liberatory work of, God and Christ. This is not a matter of ecclesio-trinitarian indecision on his part, but seems to be an intentional oscillation intended to affirm the Christological dimension of the church while also stretching its history back to include God's election of the people of Israel.

[15] *ST*, 123; from Duffy, 144. As in the previous chapter, I appeal to Duffy occasionally in this chapter to identify important ecclesiological characteristics that mark points of contrast or affinity between Cone and Hauerwas, as one of the only other scholars to pair these two in a work on the church.

[16] See the works of J. Kameron Carter, Willie Jennings, and Brian Bantam, previously cited.

Sinai join into covenant relation.[17] The beginning of Israel is the origin of the church; these events and communities cannot be separated. The Pentecost event in Acts simply provides the already existing church with a new and specific mission in Cone's account: it is to be God's "agent in this world until Christ's second coming."[18]

His designation of the church as "God's agent in the world" suggests a surprising ecclesiocentrism on the part of Cone. He does not disallow other earthly institutions or movements from *also* being used as divine agents of liberation; but he locates the central action of God's mission within the church community. Yet, what this actually means for Cone's concept of the church is somewhat ambiguous. In his early work Cone claims that the church is not defined by those who gather regularly in worship, but by those at work in the world on behalf of liberation.[19] In fact, this more expansive view of the church leads him to occasionally call for abandoning the institutional church. Here it seems Cone adopts a moral conception of the church. Much like his conception of race—whiteness and blackness—as I will discuss in chapter five, Cone's conception of the church is defined by its work and its mission on behalf of the oppressed: he calls the church any "movement struggling collectively for identity and liberation and has some capacity for self-criticism."[20] It is predicated on action rather than profession of faith, because God identifies God's people as those joining the work of liberation. How much of this is a reaction to the deep failures he sees in both the white and black churches and how much is a constructive proposal for ecclesiology remains unclear. Still, the take-away for us is this: we must understand liberation as the driving marker of the church, which means, at least, that a body that claims to be church but is not actively pursuing liberation of the oppressed—or more accurately, participation in God's work of liberation of the oppressed—is fundamentally *not church*. This means that a community if activism for justice and liberation, like the Black Lives Matter movement, may possess more markers of the church than many communities that identify as such, and will serve as an instructor to the church, a mirror through which to see its own failures.[21]

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[17] He explicitly locates the church in the election of God's people at Mt. Sinai—"the call of this people at Sinai into a covenant relationship for a special task may said to be the beginning of the Church" (*BTBP*, 64).

[18] *BTBP*, 65.

[19] *BTBP*, 128.

[20] Cone interview. Interview material comes from consolidated notes from two interviews, February 16, 2016 via phone, and April 12, 2016 in New York.

[21] "Black Lives Matter is the closest thing to the movement that gave birth to black liberation theology. Black represents the bottom and if the bottom matters then everyone matters. Because if black people matter in American then everyone is going to matter in America" (Cone, "God is Black in 2015," *HuffPost Religion* "All Together" Paul Rauschenbusch interview with James Cone).

Yet, this is not the complete picture, and we must also not be too quick to think of this as a reductionistic claim. Cone's vision of the church may be more porous than traditional conceptions of the institutional ecclesial structure, or more precisely it may be predicated on different criteria. Still, we should not be quick to think that Cone thinks that every individual, community, movement, or institution that participates in human liberation as church. While the defining characteristic of the church is participation in God's work of liberation—and a "church" that does not do this is no church at all—not everything that participates in liberation is church. Duffy summarizes these tensions and various ecclesial definitions provided by Cone by calling the church "a revolutionary community of the oppressed and for the oppressed."[22] He argues that for Cone this entails the epistemological claim that one can only understand God and God's work if one locates one's self with the oppressed, and the practical claim that God's work for the church is the liberation of the oppressed. But this requires a transcendent and divine referent. The church is fundamentally a divine community constituted by those who respond to a divine calling and is dependent on and submissive to God's authority. Cone asserts that the contours of the church are not limited by ethnic or political boundaries; it "includes all who respond in faith to the redemptive act of God in Christ with a willingness to share in God's creative activity in the world."[23] This is both a claim about inclusivity and exclusivity. Its inclusivity transcends earthly socio-political identities; it breaks down these dividing walls, as in Paul's words to the Ephesians (2:14). Still, there is an epistemological exclusivity to the church—an understanding that this is a community that belongs to God and identifies itself as responding to and participating in divine work. The church is constituted *only* by those who have responded, self-consciously, in both faith and mission—faith in God's promise of redemption and participation in God's work in the world. This is also a claim about authority, in Cone's words (that will sound similar to Hauerwas): it "consists of people who have been seized by the Holy Spirit and who have the determination to live as if all depends on God. It has no will of its own, only God's will; it has no duty of its own, only God's duty. Its existence is grounded in God."[24] These claims, in the midst of Cone's anger at the contemporary church and occasional cries to look outside the wayward institution for God's true work, pull up short any alternative claims that Cone submits a completely porous or incoherent ecclesiological account.

1.1.3 Marks of the Church

Therefore, while the church's raison d'etre is liberation—in accordance with its gospel mission—and even more specifically, participation in the particular kind of liberation that is God's work, it has other, secondary markers that continue to distinguish it from any and all works of social justice. To build on this foundation of inclusivity and exclusivity, Cone

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[22] Duffy, 144.
[23] *BTBP*, 65.
[24] *BTBP*, 65.

suggests three markers (tasks or functions) of the church: preaching (*kerygma*), service (*diakonia*), fellowship (*koinonia*). The church, 1) through its preaching, proclaims the reality of divine liberation.[25] It tells the story of Christ's victory and invites people to live as if God has already won the battle over racism—that is, to live into this gospel reality.[26] This proclamation must then lead to and result in action, as the church, 2) through service, actively shares in the liberation struggle.[27] This makes the gospel message a social, economic, and political reality. "If the Church is a continuation of the Incarnation, and if the Church and Christ are where the oppressed are," Cone writes, "then Christ and his Church must identify totally with the oppressed to the extent that they too suffer for the same reasons persons are enslaved." In America the oppressed are blacks, and they are oppressed because of their blackness. Therefore, "It is the job of the Church to become black with him and accept the shame which white society places on blacks."[28] Finally, the church must be a sign of the Kingdom in the world, and this witness is manifest not only through its service but through its life together, its 3) Fellowship as a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality.[29] Uniting these three markers he insists that the church's service is framed by its piety—both in gospel proclamation and in its fellowship. It, therefore, must be concerned about church discipline and the holiness of its members, he says; it must ask, "Who among us does not live according to Spirit of Christ?" Ultimately, these three tasks help the community better understand, and work out of a coherent understanding of its identity, nature, and purpose.[30]

Michael Duffy identifies four aspects of the Christian community's structure in Cone's thought. The church:
1. is unified, reconciled to one another
2. is inclusive of all humanity, and affirms humanity of all others'
3. highlights equality
4. embodies a democratic and socialist structure that models a new order for wider society—serves as a witness.
5. gives attention to and activism on behalf of the poor and oppressed
6. embraces and learns from the creative elements of the poor and the various religions of the poor.

He synthesizes these six points into a three-word picture of community embodying equality, affirmation, and openness.[31]

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[25] *BTL*, 230.
[26] *BTBP*, 67.
[27] *BTL*, 231.
[28] *BTBP*, 69. For more on "becoming black," see chapter five.
[29] *BTL*, 232.
[30] *BTBP*, 70.
[31] Duffy, 196-200.

In sum, this leaves us with a complicated conception of the church, and even more complicated relationship between the church and the world—one to which I will return in a later section. First, not all who call themselves churches are actually church, according to Cone. And second, church may often define something beyond the institutional ecclesial structure and include others working for social liberation. But, we must remember, this work must still be grounded in some acknowledgement and proclamation of God's agency behind any and all human liberation—a move that does discount some (atheistic or agnostic) human works of liberation. For Cone, his liberatory participatory model of ecclesiology requires that 1) God's work of liberation transcends traditional, institutional notions of ecclesiology, but 2) also requires some degree of acknowledgement of divine agency—or even worship?—on the part of the participating community in order to be church. It is not only liberatory work, but liberatory work understood by a particular community as participating in a larger system of divine mission during its time in the world.

1.2 Church Criticisms

The church seldom lives up to this liberatory model. For many reasons the church, both white and black, succumb to tendencies that inhibit their primary mission. Cone identifies specific, and at times distinct, problems within white and black churches that prevent them from participating in God's work of liberation.

1.2.1. The White Church

Cone actually spends little time criticizing white churches, relative to the attention he gives his own black church tradition. While the sins of the white church were ostensibly more egregious—in fact his underlying critique of the black church concerns the ways that it mimicks the pitfalls of the white church—Cone devotes most of his critical attention toward his own community, for reasons that will become important later. Still, a few significant elements of his assessment of the white church are salient for the purposes of this dissertation. Three points stand out.

First, Cone claims that the white church operates with a truncated view of the gospel, one circumscribed by an exclusive focus on spirituality with little to say to the social or political conditions of the oppressed. This is far from the liberatory gospel he proclaims throughout his corpus and claims about Jesus' primary message: "Almost without exception, white American churches have interpreted religion as something exclusively spiritual with no political content useful in the struggles of the poor for freedom."[32] This short-sighted understanding embraces a gospel vision that eclipses the political demand for the liberation of victims that Cone reads so strongly in both the black church's history and the scriptural narrative. This is due both to

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[32] *FMP*, 182.

the position of privilege held by the white church—it's lack of material need blinds it to the material elements of the gospel message—and, in a more sinister manner, to the white church's position of oppressor—white churches present religion as an opium for the oppressed so they will not challenge the unjust conditions of society.[33] "By identifying the gospel of Jesus with a spirituality estranged from the struggle for justice," he says, "the church [itself] becomes an agent of injustice."[34]

The second element of this critique is the way in which white theology has become co-opted by, or too intermingled with, the state. "At least since the time of the Emperor Constantine and his making of Christianity the official religion of the Roman State," Cone offers a historical explanation, "the chief interpreters of the Christian tradition have advocated a spiritual view of the gospel that separated the confession of faith from the practice of political justice."[35] As this Constantinian theology became translated into Reformation theology and then European colonialist theology, white American theology followed suit and became subservient to the state—which for Cone means blindly patriotic in a way that perpetuates the racist structural inclinations of the state.[36] The oppressed see the state as the enforcer of oppression, not God's servant in the way Paul proclaims in Romans 13, Cone offers. This suggests, again, some important distinctions between church and other worldly institutions and movements such as the state.[37]

And third, white churches fail to see how their theology is inseparable from their oppressor-mentality, which shapes everything they say about God.[38] In other words, they fail to understand that there is no talk about God "except as God is participating in liberation of the oppressed."[39] The second important criticism of the white church, therefore, is its failure to understand the contextually-dependent nature of all God-talk, especially discourse about the community of God. Cone understands this to be, in fact, a denial of the incarnation.[40] Racism that is funded by a theology that is blind to its own contextuality is simply a failure to understand how all theology is contextual because, through Jesus Christ himself, God entered

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[33] *FMP*, 181.

[34] *FMP*, 182. "The advocates of this new theology are intolerant of any perspective on Christianity that fails to relate the gospel of Jesus to the economic and social conditions of people," ("Christian Faith and Political Praxis," 130). "When faith is understood as commitment to an ultimate concern, then it is obvious that there can be no separation between faith and obedience, because obedience determines faith. . . . I merely want to emphasize that the very nature of faith demands a practical activity commensurate with its confession," 133.

[35] Cone, "Christian Faith and Political Praxis."

[36] *BTL*, 22.

[37] *BTL*, 71.

[38] *BTL*, 85.

[39] *BTL*, 153.

[40] *BTBP*, 73.

into a particular context with a particular ethnicity and particular socio-political location (as one of the oppressed, in fact!). This is the problem of universalizing that Cone admonishes so strongly. Universalizing, or neglecting the particularities of one's own social conditioning by projecting one's own particularities onto others, results in the white church being blind to the ways its own color. Therefore, for whites to become free, they must firstly recognize the manner in which their own racial formation has shaped their theological perspective, secondly, acknowledge the ways in which their socio-theology has become heretical and harmful, and thirdly, shed their white being and submit to be created anew in black being in order to have any chance of becoming reconciled with the black community.[41]

1.2.2 The Black Church

For this reason Cone directs most of his attention, and critique, to the black church. Echoing Friedrich Schleiermacher nearly a century earlier, who claimed that in order to exert any deliberate theological influence one must "appraise the actual condition of the church at the present time, according to one's conception of the nature both of Christianity and of one's own particular church community,"[42] Cone asserts the importance of ecclesiological critique: "There can be no genuine Christian theology without prophetic self-criticism of the Christian community that gives birth to it."[43] And prophetic self-criticism is just what he offers.

Cone perpetually couples black theology and the black church, and as is apparent from the quote above, believes that theology dislodged from engagement with and for the church—with which it operates in some relationship of dialectical accountability—is useless. For this reason, all theology ought to be deployed for the sake of the church, that is, with an ecclesiological outlook such that its goals and methods are conditioned by the condition of the church at the present moment in view of its history and tradition. Cone begins his critique by offering a historical overview of the black church's shift from activist to accommodationist.

In my interview with Cone, he began his comments on the black church by saying, "I don't like the black church much more than the white church. Institutions are by nature selfish, interested in survival. . . . Still, if there is any Christian religious identity, it is coming out of African Americans."[44] Yet, he calls the black church the "single most important institution in the black community."[45] The black church began during the antebellum period, created by people whose daily existence was scripted by their encounter with the reality of white power. For slaves it was the sole source of personal identity and their sense of community. The

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[41] *BTL*, 176.
[42] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology*, 259.
[43] *FMP*, 116.
[44] Cone interview.
[45] *FMP*, 99.

historical and social context of the black community formed the church into a public communal space set apart from the hegemonic force of white society and control, a necessarily more expansive public—and political—role than their white counterparts performed. Affirming the church's variegated public role, Cone writes that "the black church was born in protest,"[46] and as the sole source of community, became the home base of revolutionary activity. Slaves used the church as a platform to proclaim freedom and equality, and occasionally plan for uprisings. This activist pre-Civil War church became involved in activities like the Underground Railroad and slave insurrections.[47] This was possible because the community refused to accept the dominant white interpretations of Christianity that focused on otherworldly liberation.

Black churches experienced a significant change after the war, however. As blacks were expelled from white churches during Reconstruction, these socio-political shifts led to two significant changes: 1) the expansion of black congregations and development of independent black denominations, and 2), a shift in posture from revolutionary social activism to therapeutic social escape. In the words of Cone, "The black church gradually became an instrument of escape instead of, as formerly, an instrument of protest."[48] Churches became havens of retreat from the dehumanizing forces of white power and the growing menacing reality of Jim Crow, a sanctuary where blacks could shake free from the white reality that demeaned and humiliated them.[49]

There are certainly important social and political reasons for this shift, and a charitable reading could understand this as the church simply adapting to meet the needs of a people now emancipated from one form of slavery only to be delivered into another, perhaps equally, precarious situation where oppression, discrimination, and violence go unregulated and unseen. Cone, on the other hand, views this as a blatant denial of the church's origin and purpose and accommodation to the oppressor's worldview and wishes. He offers a litany of reasons, pivoting on this shift from concern with the material realities of this world to other-world concern. "The injustices of the present were minimized in favor of a Kingdom beyond this world" and black churches adopted the theology of the white missionaries convincing them to look only to future for restoration and redemption.[50] This meant that from the time of the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement "the organized fight for justice was transferred

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[46] *BTBP*, 9.
[47] *FMP*, 107.
[48] *BTBP*, 104.
[49] Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare?* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 25 (hereafter *MMA*).
[50] *BTBP*, 105

from the churches to secular groups."[51] The lost zeal for freedom caused the churches to turn inward to more bureaucratic matters, retreating riskier public struggles. The black denominational structures created appealing positions of power and privilege within the church community; Cone insists they became amusement centers and "an organ for recognition, leadership, and worship," "perversions of the gospel of Christ and places for accommodating the oppressed plight of black people."[52] This legacy, he claims, ensures that now many black people view the church as a hindrance to black liberation, because black preachers and church members appear to be more concerned about their own institutional survival than the freedom of poor people in their communities.[53]

2 Basic Elements of Cone's Ecclesiology

James Cone's critiques of the church, both white and black but especially the black church, stand as a striking indictment of the failure of American Christian theology and practice. These specific critiques, described above, also provide important elements of his ecclesiology that carry implications both as a means of delineating and analyzing Cone's work as well as for analyzing other theological systems and church communities.

In order to understand Cone's emphasis on the contextual, and communal, particularity of theological reflection, I will address three primary themes in Cone's ecclesiology—story, the relationship of church and world, and his understanding of the sacred and secular dimension of black theology. In this section I will set the stage for his thought on particularity through his understanding of the church, his view of the sources of theology, and finally his emphasis on experience. I will analyze the ways in which these themes clarify his criticisms of the church and offer foundations for further critical and constructive ecclesiological reflection on concrete church practice.

2.1 Story

One way to understand Cone's account and criticism of the black church is through the concept of story. For Cone, story plays a significant, if somewhat tacit, role in his theology and ecclesial critique. While Hauerwas begins with narrative as the central and unifying element in his ecclesiology, I contend that story similarly underlies Cone's ecclesiology. Cone says, "The Christian life is not identified with doctrine but with story—in fact, with the story of Jesus. And that story is what black people could access."[54] For both of these scholars, the

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[51] *MMA*, 8.
[52] *BTBP*, 106.
[53] Cone, "Black Theology and The Black Church: Where do we go from here" *CrossCurrents* vol. 27 no. 2 (Summer 1977), pp. 147-156.
[54] Cone interview.

particularity of the community's native story (for both this means a particular interpretation of the "the gospel") shapes its social formation, mission, and politics. And for both, their central criticism of the community (church and black church in this case) lies in the community's forgetting of its own narrative and adoption of an alien story.

For Cone then, on a foundational level, the overarching reason for the failure of the black church and its ministers to speak to the needs of black people is the adoption the narrative of white theology. When the church's story began to be identified with a passive Jesus concerned exclusively with saving souls, this narrative shaped the social outlook of the black church as well as the story it told about itself. It allowed the white church's narrative about itself to become the black church's formative narrative. The post-Civil War black church thus "fell into the white trick of interpreting salvation in terms similar to those of the white oppressors. Salvation became white: an objective act of Christ in which God 'washes' away our sins in order to prepare us for a new life in heaven."[55] Black churches became satisfied with intrinsically white solutions to earthly injustices, which meant, no solutions at all. In fact, this accommodation and adoption meant that black congregations became agents in their own oppression, not meeting the material needs of blacks in American, but also perpetuating the very systems that kept them underfoot. In one of his strongest condemnations, Cone claims that gradually black churches became no more Christian than white churches: "The black church, though spatially located in the community of the oppressed, has not responded to the needs of its people. It has, rather, drained the community, seeking to be more and more like the white church. Its ministers have condemned the helpless and have mimicked the values of white."[56] Those seeking the activism of the black church heritage had to turn elsewhere, and this signaled not only a failure of mission but a failure of hermeneutics, that is, to properly understand the story of the gospel. Fundamentally, it is a failure to be church.

This resulted in a loss of history and loss of identity. Appealing to Gayraud Wilmore, he claims that most black preachers mimic white Evangelicalism; "Because they do not know the rock from which they were hewn, they and their people do not know who they are and the inheritance that was passed on them."[57] And thus, like white churches, black churches were no longer "the people of God but rather the agents of the anti-Christ." Like white churches, for these black churches "it was possible to be a Christian without a concrete historical validation of it through political engagement."[58] For Cone, like Hauerwas, the particularity of

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[55] *BTL*, 225.

[56] *BTBP*, 114.

[57] *FMP,* 116.

[58] *My Soul Looks Back* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 66, 68 (hereafter *MSLB*). According to Cone, "The black church as been radical, serving as the most important instrument of black liberation, but it has also been one of the most conservative institutions in the black community" (*FMP*, 100).

a community's own story shapes its polity—and informs its manner of political identity and engagement.

Reflecting on his own early church criticism and why he primarily addressed his own black ecclesial tradition, Cone recalls that when he began writing *Black Theology and Black Power*, he was as sincerely angry with the black church as with its white counterpart.[59] "In June of 1968, two months after Martin King's assassination," he writes, "I began to write Black *Theology and Black Power*. While writing that book in my brother's church, a place of worship where blacks regularly 'caught the spirit,' something happened that I can't explain. It seemed as if a transcendent voice were speaking to me through the scripture and the medium of African American history and culture, reminding me that God's liberation of the poor is the primary theme of Jesus' gospel."[60] His primary theological aim, then, became the task of reminding the black church of its foundational narrative.

This rising discontent with the black church, with the eradication of its sense of an earthly, socio-political mission animated the emergence of Black Theology, of which James Cone became the prominent scholar. And while Black Theology and the black church have become largely uncoupled today, perpetuating a rift between the revolutionary voice of Black Theology and the ethereal therapy of the black church—the topic of Raphael Warnock's *The Divided Mind of the Black Church* (a Cone doctoral student)—Cone understands Black Theology to have originated within and for the church. Black theology is ingredient to the practice of the black church: "Indeed it was simply the black church criticizing itself in order to become a more effective participant in the black liberation struggle." Most early black theologians were pastors, not professors, he recalls. It was a prophetic self-criticism "regarding the complete irrelevance of black churches to the urgent needs of the oppressed black community" that called black churches to "reorder their priorities by making the liberation of poor blacks the central reason" for their existence (*FMP*, 104, 102). Some early black theologians called on black churches to address five concerns: establish freedom schools to offset white dominated public schools, workshops on black family solidarity, training in community organization, give financial support to black groups working for self-determination, removal of all images suggesting God is white (*FMP*, 103).

[59] *FMP*, 107.

[60] *CLT*, 154. As other professors gradually became involved, however, the target of criticism shifted to white churches and racism. But in primarily criticizing white churches, Cone later reflected, black theology granted too much influence to the black power movement and its focus on white racism. He became concerned that black theology may not retain its black identity if it directed all of its energy and criticism to white churches: "Reaction to white racism consumed too much of the mental energies that should have been directed to black churches in an effort to have them make Jesus' liberating gospel their primary concern" (*FMP*, 113). Negative energy focused on whites precluded the important work of self-criticism and constructive measures to affirm the identity of the black community itself. Cone notes, "If black theologians and clergy radicals had been more reflective about fusing black theology with black power as we said in our rhetoric, we would not have overlooked the need to place it within the worship and organizational life of independent black churches, which are the most obvious presence of black power in the black community" (*FMP*, 113).

In his final analysis, Cone's critique turns to challenge; "This is the paradox, the contradiction, that makes faith necessary if we are to survive oppression and analysis necessary if we to overcome it. To pray for justice without analyzing the causes of injustice is to turn religion into the opium of the people. The time has come for the black church to take a critical look at its vision with the intention of radically changing its priorities."[61] The only solution, Cone insists, requires the death of the church in its familiar patterns.[62] In one of his most famous challenges Cone claimed, "If the black church organizations want to remain faithful to the New Testament gospel and to the great tradition of the pre-Civil War black church, they must relinquish their stake in the status quo and the values of white society by identifying exclusively with Black Power. Black Power is the only hope of the black church in America."[63] In other words, due to its failure to live up the its purpose and inherent story the church must look outside itself to other—non-explicitly-Christian—sources for the methods and motivations to return to its true reason for being. In his more hopeful moments, though, Cone believes the black church can retrieve its own distinctive identity and story. He believes this because he sees glimpses of this in history. He recalls that African Americans took the Christianity given to them by white oppressors, and reshaped it conform more closely to the biblical story. This happened during the civil rights movement, when the black church's identity was "built around song, and story, and preaching."[64] And Cone attempts to rebuild this identity narratively in his recent work, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, by renarrating the gospel story of sacrifice and salvation through the story of the lynching tree.

Ultimately, his primary claim that the black church looks to another story (white theology and society) as the groundwork and infrastructure of its identity rather than the gospel of Christ as properly understand through its own communal experience and narrative—its own tradition and sources of interpretation in conversation with its own contextual location—foreshadows the same critique I uncovered in Hauerwas. This concern for particularity will create an important synthesis between the two thinkers in terms of their specific language of ecclesiological critique and then constructive vision for the church.

2.2 Church and World
This central role of the community's story then leads to Cone's understanding of the relationship of the community to the outside world, and then for Cone, to the relationship of the sacred and secular. It comes as no surprise that for James Cone the concept of the relationship between church and world is complicated. In this brief section I will analyze his

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[61] *FMP*, 197. Cone's Marxism is an essential aspect of his theology and results in his insistence that theology must always be tethered to social analysis.
[62] *BTBP*, 116.
[63] *BTBP*, 109.
[64] Cone interview.

view of the relationship between the two, beginning with his particular concept of *world*, and submit an analysis of his discussion of the sacred and secular in his pivotal book *The Spirituals and the Blues* as a case study to illuminate the church/world relationship more clearly. I will suggest that his configuration of this relationship forms a central, if tacit, theme of his overall work and offers a framework with which to better come to terms with the specific critiques analyzed in the previous section. His configuration of the relationship between church and world lays the groundwork for analysis of the other two pivotal themes of his ecclesiological critique—particularity and eschatology—examined in the closing sections of this chapter.

From the very beginning of his career, in *Black Theology and Black Power*, a work that contains a stunning indictment of the church, Cone speaks of the world almost entirely in negative terms—as that realm pitted against the liberatory mission of God. The world is that domain of conflict, where the emancipatory forces of God wage battle against the forces of oppression. It is not a metaphysical entity or ontological problem, but a concrete reality—the location and time in which the oppressed live: "The world is earthly existence, the place where people are enslaved." And he continues, even more pointedly: "The world is white people. . . . In short, the world is where the brutal reality of inhumanity makes its ungoldly appearance, making persons into animals."[65] This is not a neutral battlefield, some unclaimed no-man's land to host occasional cosmic skirmishes. The world is not only the cosmic location of suffering, but for Cone it is an active agent in the cause of suffering. Quoting Jurgen Moltmann, he argues that "peace with God means conflict with the world."[66] The world has chosen sides: "The world and Christ are in constant conflict," he says.[67] "To be free in Christ is to be against the world."[68]

Though created by God and called good, for Cone the world seems to have an agency of its own, and it is an agent of oppression. Though not beyond redemption, it is not only experiencing the "birth pangs of suffering," but actually inflicts that suffering on the hurting. The constant presence of suffering and experience of oppression configures the world as evil for Cone, but also, importantly, marks it as the point of departure for theology.[69] And here we have the first clue to the dialectical relationship between church and world for Cone—the

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[65] *BTL*, 233. "It is where laws are passed against the oppressed, and where the oppressed fight even though their efforts seem futile. The world is where white and black people live, encounter each other, the latter striving for a little more room to breathe and the former doing everything possible to destroy black reality."

[66] *BTBP*, 102.

[67] *BTBP*, 42.

[68] *BTBP*, 42. Again, echoing the words of Bonhoeffer from three decades before, he claims, to be free in Christ means being a slave for Christ in order to do God's will. This call to discipleship is a bid to "come and die" in Bonhoeffer's terms.

[69] *BTBP*, 120.

church cannot be properly defined or understood apart from its relationship with the world; and the world cannot be rightly reckoned apart from the presence of the church.

Despite this striking indictment of the world at the beginning of Cone's work, his assessment of the world, and its relationship with the church, only becomes more complex. Often the church, due to its failure to live up to its liberatory purpose, must look to outside sources—sources in the wider world—as a corrective to its passive and racist ways. Theology cannot be theology, and therefore the church does not know how to be church, apart from recognizing its existence in the world. The church cannot remain aloof from the world; it must instead be fully engrained within the world—incarnationally—because Christ is in the world. "Theology then," Cone claims, drawing on the thought of Bonhoeffer, "if it is to serve the need of the church must become 'worldly theology.'"[70] This ambiguous term means primarily two things for Cone: 1) that theology must make sure that the word and deed of the church are harmonious with Jesus Christ, and 2) it must make sure that the church's language about God is relevant to every new generation and its problems. It must ask, like Bonhoeffer's haunting question from a Nazi prison cell, "Who is Christ for us today?"[71] The church's task must be a concrete one, working to liberate real people from real suffering through an effort animated by its love for and calling by Jesus Christ. "While Black Theology cannot say that the 'church is the world' or the 'world is the church' (as implied in some secular theologies)," he says, "it does affirm that the church cannot be the church in isolation from the concrete realities of human suffering."[72]

With this incarnational ideal of the church in the world, Cone quickly disavows two extremes in conceptualizing the relationship: "Because the church knows that the world is where people are dehumanized, it can neither retreat from the world nor embrace it."[73] Ecclesial retreat from the world is nothing more than a denial of its calling to share in the divine work of liberation: "[The church's] very existence is affirmed and reaffirmed only as it demonstrates to all what Christian existence is all about *in* the world."[74] In the same way, a full embrace of the world is also a denial of the gospel, of the lordship of Christ, and the reality that the world

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[70] *BTBP*, 84. When I asked him about his ambiguous rhetoric of the "world," Cone responded, "Sometimes I'm talking about the world of the oppressors. And sometimes the world of the oppressed; the world they are working to create. Theology has to engage both worlds, but has different things to say to each of them."

[71] Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, Enlarged Edition, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 279; from an April 30, 1944 letter to Bethge.

[72] *BTL*, 233. Again recall his insistence that Black Lives Matter is the closest movement to origins of black liberation theology. ("God is Black in 2015").

[73] *BTL*, 234.

[74] *BTL*, 234.

stands under Christ's judgment.[75] In the middle of these extremes "the task of the church is to be out there in the world, not as an endorser of its oppression but as the visible representative of his Lordship."[76]

Ultimately the difficulty of defining the meaning of the church and its involvement in the world, and the reason for this complexity in Cone's theology, stems from the "unchurchly behavior" of the institutional—and racist—white churches. Only to confuse matters more, and perhaps signal a departure from his claims that the act of "participation" in Christ's work of redemption was a constitutional criterion of church, Cone concludes his reflections on church and world in a later work with the following claim: "If white and black churches do not represent Christ's redemptive work in the world, where then is Christ's church to be found? As always, his church is where wounds are being healed and chains are being struck off. It does not matter in the least whether the community of liberators designate their work as Christ's own work. What is important is that people are being liberated."[77] This ambiguity in Cone's thought never goes explained, but is left open to the interpretation of his readers, to be understood in conjunction with other guiding theological categories. I will turn to two of these shortly, but will first turn to a case study to more closely examine this church/world relationship by way of his thoughts on the sacred and the secular.

2.3 Ambiguity of Secular/Sacred via *The Spirituals and The Blues*
In order to better understand this complicated relationship I will engage more deeply with one of Cone's less-studied but more significant books. In fact, it is this book—and the research that led to its writing—that permanently altered the direction of Cone's thinking by shifting the sources for his theological investigations and constructions. In *The Spirituals and the Blues*, written after *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970), but before *God of the Oppressed* (1975), one observes Cone mining the depth of the black music experience. In doing so, he discovered the rich theological resources adequate to build the black theological enterprise he had been grasping for. After this point, the appeals to thinkers like Tillich and Barth nearly fall out, while appeals to gospel song lyrics, spirituals, blues, and black folktales erect the scaffolding for all of his subsequent theological writings. This turn to the particularities of the black community and black tradition as the primary source for black theology will be the subject of the next section. For now, his analysis of the "sacred" spirituals and "secular" blues provides an illuminating example for investigating Cone's thought on the relationship between church and world. Throughout his corpus, Cone claims that the black tradition fundamentally breaks down the distinction between sacred and secular: "Christ's meaning is not only expressed in formal church doctrine but also in the

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[75] *BTL*, 235.
[76] *BTL*, 235-236.
[77] *BTL*, 237.

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rhythm, the beat, and the swing of life."[78] This is most apparent in his analysis of Negro spirituals and blues music. His insights into the distinctions and commonalities of these two genres of music suggest a pattern for comprehending his complicated view of the church and its relationship with, in, and to the world.

2.3.1 Spirituals

The experience of black people in America is primarily one of servitude and survival. Originating in slavery–in the experience of begin torn from homeland and family, sold like chattel on the auction block, and worked and whipped in the "land of bondage"–the black experience abided in the tension between despair and hope, suffering and resistance. The spirituals, the genre of black religious music that developed during slavery, were both songs of sorrow and affirmations of life. James Cone builds on this insight to examine the spirituals as cultural expressions of blackness and black community.

He treats them as, and argues for them to be considered, historical documents that express the conditions, feelings, and aspirations of slave communities, but also as artifacts with which these communities constructed their own consciousness and conditions for survival. Drawing on the biblical motif of the exiled Hebrews singing the songs of Zion on the shores of Babylon, Cone suggests that for slaves, "through song they built new structures for existence in an alien land."[79] Two claims are of particular importance here.

First, the lyrics contained lament for the present conditions of suffering and appeals for God's presence in the midst of it, and also expressed hope for a coming rest and redemption. But as Cone argues, the spirituals were not songs of passive resignation, but "freedom songs which emphasize black liberation as consistent with divine revelation."[80] Eschatological appeals to "going home" to heaven and exhortations to "git on board the gospel train" were at the same time calls to resistance and affirmations of liberation. The appeals to transcendent locations like heaven or the Jordan River were actually references to specific earthly places like Canada or the Ohio River, where slaves might escape during this earthly existence. Thus, the spirituals as historical documents explain the ways in which black slaves attempted to define their present history "in the light of their promised future and not according to their past miseries."[81] And with notes of his ecclesiology audible here, Cone suggests that the spirituals allowed slaves to recognize the need for their own participation in God's work of liberation.

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[78] Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 105 (hereafter GO).

[79] Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 30 (hereafter *SB*), drawing on Psalm 137:1-4.

[80] *SB*, 35.

[81] *SB*, 79.

Second, Cone repeatedly asserts that the spirituals were based on black sources: African culture and the slave experience. Slaves created their own religion out of useful remnants of both African and Christian sources, and the spirituals were an expression of that native religion. Christians sources, learned from their white masters but adapted to and shaped by their own social condition, and their current slave experience as well as memories of their pre-slavery existence were all woven together to provide a historical possibility for black survival and resistance. This argument that the spirituals drew almost exclusively from black sources is an important point for Cone, because it is this dynamic that enabled the songs to be simultaneously spiritual and otherworldly as well as this-worldly and historical. The lyrics were fraught with double meanings—both sorrow and resistance, eschatological and earthly—because unlike white platonic culture, Cone insists, blacks viewed life as holistic and did not make distinctions between the secular and sacred.[82]

2.3.2 The Blues and The Secular
In contrast, the blues are presumed to depict the "secular" dimensions of black experience. They are "worldly songs" about lust and sex, loneliness and depression, poverty and death. He says, in short, "The blues are about black life and the sheer earth and gut capacity to survive in an extreme situation of oppression."[83] They offer a black perspective on the incongruity of life and the attempt to achieve some meaning in a situation fraught with contradiction. But unlike the spirituals with their transcendent and symbolic appeals to God's ultimate restitution, the blues operate fully within the immanent frame: "Implied in the blues is a stubborn refusal to go beyond the existential problem and substitute otherworldly answers."[84]

According to the spirituals, blacks can endure oppression because they believe the God of Israel will liberate them. In contrast, the blues sing as if God is irrelevant and deal with the troubles and sufferings life brings without reference to Jesus Christ as liberator. Importantly, "The achievement of being is an entirely historical reality, grounded and defined within the context of the community's experience," he says. "The blues people believe that it is only through the acceptance of the real as disclosed in concrete human affairs that a community can attain authentic existence."[85] The blues operate with an "objective transcendence." They are not absent of hope, but the burden of hope is placed on human shoulders and the achievement of the object of that hope is dependent upon exclusively human works of resistance. While the blues emphasize the possibility of concrete changes to the present condition of suffering, the hope offered in their lyrics is both aimed at and grounded in the concrete historical realities of black experience. But Cone also qualifies these claims and

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[82] *SB*, 39.
[83] *SB*, 97.
[84] *SB*, 99.
[85] *SB*, 113.

challenges simplistic understandings of the purely secular nature of the blues. While the blues may not explicitly invoke divine action or make direct overtures to divine revelation, Cone insists that claiming their secular character does not mean they were atheistic. Instead, both genres reflect a similar mood and both flow out of black experience. In fact, Cone goes so far as to claim that the blues issue out of the spirituals, even claiming them as "secular spirituals."[86] The complex nature of the blues and spirituals reveal how white categories are not sufficient to give full meaning to the black experience, especially in a situation of oppression. "There is no attempt in the blues to make philosophical distinctions between divine and human truth," he writes. "Truth is experience and experience is the truth. If it is lived and encountered then it is real."[87] White culture makes too much of a distinction between spiritual and bodily; it does not know how to talk about body as sacred, he claims.

Just as he argues that in making transcendent petitions and eschatological allusions the spirituals were at the same time referring to earthly locations and events, the blues in their evocations of bodies and money and sex were expressing deep existential truths about human experience and desire that transcend the mundane realities of life. As expressions of black culture and experience, both forms of music refuse to acknowledge platonic (and white) dualisms but affirm all reality as one.[88] Both genres help to construct the scaffolding of a particular value system for the black community and grant a particular meaning to existence. That is, both affirm the essential value of black humanity, defining its sense of "somebodiness" and cultivating a personal and social consciousness that makes sense out of the black experience.

Finally, important for Cone is that while both the spirituals and blues are charged with an absence of social protest—that they do not directly condemn white society or call for specific policy changes—he claims that their political dimensions are overlooked because they lie at a deeper, more foundational level. Both the spirituals and the blues are political simply and fundamentally in the way they affirm blackness.[89] More specifically, they affirm the "political otherness" of black people and create a new political consciousness among them. Through artistic expression, the spirituals and blues construct a new "black" political identity and consciousness as an alternative to the values and politics of white culture.[90] While the political

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[86] "They are secular in the sense that they confine their attention solely to the immediate and affirm the bodily expression of black soul, including its sexual manifestations," he says. "They are spirituals because they are impelled by the same search for the truth of black experience." They are transcendent to the degree that through the communal sharing of trouble and suffering they can move to another level of human existence (*SB*, 114).

[87] *SB*, 106.

[88] *SB*, 129.

[89] *SB*, 188, 122

[90] *SB*, 6.

value of these musical genres may not be readily apparent, they touch on the deeper political registers of identity, values, and community formation.

In sum, it is important to note that these sources are not exclusively ecclesial or traditionally theological ones. Cone reflects: "The historical embodiment of black faith is found not only in the creation of separate institutional black churches with songs, prayers, and sermons about liberation. Also important is the presence of black faith outside of the confessional and organizational framework of black denominations. Black faith is found in "secular" songs and stories, slave insurrections and protest assemblies."[91] This shift toward a recognition of a "secular faith" within the black experience structures the larger narrative of the relationship between church and world in Cone's work. The relationship is both porous and distinct in ways that don't easily map onto existing categories. This is why Cone is able, early in his work, to claim the Black Power movement as a legitimate expression of black faith. In this case, and in accordance with the logic of Cone's work, God's mission of liberation can be discovered and identified in efforts not originally animated by confessional commitments.[92]

This effort to claim the explicitly non-Christian Black Power movement as a movement of faith and a corrective to the tragic passivity of the black church—even the work of the Holy Spirit—again demonstrates the complex intermingling of church and world in Cone's thought. Faith is a category not bound by traditional theological or ecclesial borders. Yet, Cone is still careful to maintain an ecclesial focus in this discussion. That is, rather than disavowing the church as a failure and hailing the Black Power movement as a new and better liberatory method, Cone rhetorically conscripts the Black Power movement into the Christian mission of liberation. Black Power witnesses to the Black Christ. It affirms the image of Christ in the poor and oppressed. Cone does not leave the church behind and further separate the church from earthly causes or efforts. Rather he integrates them in a way that leaves the borders

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[91] "Christian Faith and Political Praxis," 136.

[92] The driving thesis of his first published work, *Black Theology and Black Power*, is that Black Power is not antithetical to Christianity, but actually Christ's central message to 20th century America. Unless the empirical black church makes an effort to recapture the person of Jesus through a total identification with the suffering of the poor as expressed in the Black Power movement, "that church will become exactly what Christ is not" (*BTBP*, 1-2). Black Power allows blacks to affirm their own blackness as a good, not something to be despised, and for African Americans, he insists, faith is accepting the image of themselves as revealed in Jesus Christ (*BTBP*, 18, 53). If the gospel of Christ means to be on the side of the abused and oppressed, he writes forcefully, then Black Power is the message of Christ himself; by seeking to meet the needs of the oppressed it is the work of the Holy Spirit (*BTBP*, 37, 60). Cone realizes this close identification of a human liberation movement with the work of God may overrun Barth's important emphasis on the distinction between God and humanity. But, Cone counters, Barth in his context was more worried about identifying the work of God with the state, rather than a more universal spiritual/secular partition (*BTBP*, 38).

porous but still places the church at the center of all good movements for the sake of God's oppressed.

3 Theological Particularity

Another driving theme of Cone's ecclesiology is that of theological particularity. Cone arrives at this theme critically, by suggesting that the primary sin of the church is a lost sense of its identity and mission through accommodation to an alien vision of the gospel, proffered by white theologians and practiced by the white church. This is the loss of its distinctive narrative. Cone pleads for the black church to regain its particular vocation through attention to a more concrete Christology interpreted through the lens of the black experience.

For Cone, theology is a communally-, and specifically an ecclesially-, based enterprise that is forged within and responds to the particular situation and needs of that community. This does not mean that Cone offers a sectarian view of the black church. In fact, as the previous section demonstrated, his configuration of the relationship between the church and the world precludes such an exclusivist and closed image. Rather, I will illustrate how his attention to the particular native and communal sources of ecclesiological reflection actually enable a greater degree of participation in the work of liberation in the world across traditional barriers, while avoiding the problems of accommodation noted in his criticisms.

I will analyze this critical theme first by examining the specific claims to the particularity of the black Christian witness and community, then by drawing on the influence of Cone's own church experience, and finally by outlining his scholarly turn from a reliance on white sources to sources embedded within the black experience.

3.1 The Loss of Particularity

Cone's primary critique of the black church, that it uncritically accepts white American religion and culture, suggests another significant critical theme for the thinker—particularity. The black church and black theology failed to develop an identity of their own, but allowed the white church and white theology to dictate an alien identity to them. He laments of black churches that when they lose a sense of their historical identity—or permitted white oppressors to cause them to forget—"they have no other alternative but to assume the identity of the group that conquers them."[93]

Black theology developed along similar lines—also bound in its identity formation to the dictates of white theology. Cone describes black theology, at least in its original formulations,

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[93] *MSLB*, 89.

as "event theology;"[94] that is, it came into being in response to the events of its time. Later implicating himself in this criticism, he claims that the early black theologians viewed their task as identifying God's work of liberation with the events of the Black Power movement. But, writing several years later in a memoir, he concedes this was too reactionary. It was so determined by reaction to racism in white churches and society that it failed to construct an identity of its own. It was, in sociologist James Hunter's terms, an "identity of negation."[95] "Black theology, then," he recalls, "was being created out of a negative reaction to whites rather than as a positive reaction to the history and culture of blacks."[96]

Black theologians also overlooked the resources for a necessary structural analysis offered by a Marxist critique that would have suggested that identity is contextually and socially embedded and constructed. Simply "changing hearts and minds" is not sufficient. Cone's appeals to Feuerbach and Marx argue for the contextuality of all intellectual thought. This means that all thinking is dependent on a social *a priori*, but this is particularly true for theological thinking. "Theology is subjective speech about God," he notes, "a speech that tells us far more about the hopes and dreams of certain God-talkers than about the Maker and Creator of heaven and earth."[97] Ideas do not have independent existence but are a social product of theologians' reflections about divine things, and are always intertwined with manifestations of actual life. In other words, revelation is universal and eternal; but theological talk about that revelation is always filtered through human experience.[98] All questions and answers about the gospel are limited by their social contexts and actually reveal more about the material conditions of a given society than they do some abstract and universal truth about God.

Cone points to the failure of black theology to look to its own sources and the failure of the black church to develop its own creeds and liturgy. The black church and black theology turned to the resources of the dominant white theological culture and incorporated them into their practice. And, he interjects, the dominant culture always thinks its own values are universal. "Most black denominations preached a 'spiritual' gospel that ignored the political plight of the black poor," Cone writes. "By failing to connect the gospel with the bodily liberation of the poor, black churches forgot about their unique historical and theological identity and began to preach a gospel no different from that of white churches."[99]

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[94] *FMP*, 78.
[95] Hunter, 164.
[96] *FMP*, 87.
[97] *GO*, 40, 38.
[98] *GO*, 39.
[99] *MSLB*, 66.

Many white and black theologians convinced themselves that only the white experience is an appropriate context for theology—because it claims to be absent any form of contextuality. "Indeed [white theologians'] insistence upon the universal note of the gospel," he writes, "arises out of their own particular political and social interests." Further, "They do not recognize the narrowness of their experience and the particularity of their theological expressions. They like to think of themselves as universal people."[100] Theology, despite any claims to universality, cannot be uprooted from human experience, he says; there is no objective theology. This means that white theology is not only just as contingent as any other, but its situatedness in regimes of white supremacy and oppression reveal its complicity in contributing to these regimes. "White theology is not Christian theology because it is a language derived from white supremacy," he claims. "To understand Christian identity from a white dominant point of view is like trying to understand Jesus from a dominant Roman point of view."[101]

As a corrective, Cone proposes that African American Christians must allow their theological reflection and practice to "emerge consciously from an investigation of the socio-religious experience of black people," an experience reflected in stories of God's dealings with black people in the struggles for freedom.[102] "As long as I remained preoccupied with the white theologians who tricked me into believing that the truth revealed in the black experience was worthless," he notes, "I could not find my voice."[103] This is because, importantly for Cone, "theology is not rational discourse; it is poetic discourse."[104] And here the concept of story emerges once again for Cone. The gospel is "not a rational concept to be explained" but, according to Cone, "a story about God's presence in Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed."[105] This means that theology is about, and must continually engage with the concrete. Even when it pretends to universalization, that pretension is grounded in some concrete reality. If theology and the community of which it is part is understood in terms of story, it is important to identity the concrete particular within which theology is done—the community from which it emerges. He recalls:

> The civil rights and black power movements taught me that God is found in the midst of blacks fighting for dignity, justice, and respect. . . . God is present in our lives, not in the abstract metaphysical world of reason which only theologians and philosophers and other privileged intellectuals inhabit. The Christian God is not the God of philosophers, of Plato, Kant, and Hegel, but

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[100] GO, 126.
[101] James Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood," Martin Luther King Lecture at Duke Divinity School, April 1, 2015.
[102] GO, 15.
[103] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood."
[104] Cone interview.
[105] CLT, 150.

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rather, the God of the Exodus the prophets and of Jesus. If God is in the midst of people being exploited, what then is God doing? These were the questions that I had as I wrestled with the fire that was burning inside me.[106]

This trope of particularity—or the social conditioning of thought and identity, or the communality of theology and practice—becomes a driving theme for Cone's thought and draws limits on who is able to participate in that practice. About the project of black theology, he says there is a deeper experience of research that is only available to "those who share the spirit and participate in the faith of the people who created these songs."[107] Black being is possible only in community, he says. The social and cultural environment of a people determines not only the answers a people come to but also the questions they ask. For blacks in American, the situation of being a slave created certain kinds of theological problems, but not the same ones dealt with by whites.[108] Both black and white theology are contingent upon different mental grids, though Cone asserts that the social *a priori* of Black Theology and the black experience is "closer to the axiological perspective of biblical revelation,"[109] and thus better able to reflect spiritual truths.

On a more specific level, it means that theology is not neutral, but must always take the side of the oppressed; it's sole reason for existence is to assist the oppressed in their liberation. For Cone, this particularity is expressed in a specific point of departure for all theological talk. It has an anthropocentric point of departure, not in the sense of 19th century white Protestant liberalism and it's focus on the "universalized man," but by concerning itself with "concrete man, particularly with oppressed man."[110] This means that it does not begin with a neutral and universalized notion of God that is somehow able to transcend all human talk about God. But it understands the situational conditioned nature of all theological talk.

In sum, all theology is particular theology, its hermeneutical limits circumscribed by the experience of the people doing the talking. Even revelation is not a general divine self-disclosure, for Cone, but has a specific content: God's self-disclosure to humanity in a situation of liberation.[111] This means that all Christian theology must strike a balance between a focus on Christ and the black experience/liberation as its guiding norms. In his book on ecclesiology, *For My People,* Cone reflects upon the social contextualization of all theology. He contends that, contra popular notions, theology does not begin with divine revelation "as if the God of our faith is separate from the suffering of our people." We cannot understand

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[106] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood."
[107] *SB*, 4.
[108] *SB*, 65.
[109] *GO*, 41.
[110] *BTL*, 47.
[111] *BTL*, 91.

revelation to be a deposit of fixed doctrines, because there is no truth outside of the concrete historical events in which people are engaged as agents.[112] In this sense, theology is critical reflection upon a people's prior affirmations and political commitments. In other words, theology is not primary, but second order reflection on prior cultural/political positions. This leads Cone to three significant and concrete claims about theology (interestingly, points that are meant to be universal claims about the non-universality of all thought).

First, "Every theology is a product of its social environment and thus in part a reflection of it." Here he appeals to Gustavo Gutierrez, who claims, 'Theology is done by persons who, whether they know it or not, are caught up in particular social processes. Consequently, all theology is in part a reflection of this or that concrete process. Theology is not something disembodied or atemporal.'"[113] Recognizing that all theology is situated in history means understanding that theology is performed by human beings, and as human discourse, it must begin with "the human situation as perceived from a particular standpoint of a given people" as its point of departure.[114] It reveals more about the theologian and her context than it does about God.

This means that, second, every theology should aspire to move beyond its own particularity, while still rooted firmly within it, to the concrete experiences of others. "In our efforts to accent our particularities," he says, "we must be careful not to limit God to them or to remain enclosed in them ourselves. The encountering of the God of biblical faith draws us beyond ourselves to the poor of the world."[115] He challenges black churches to develop a theology that is both particular and universal, particular in relation to its own ethnic history and universal in its accountability to the experiences of other Christians who are also suffering. But he laments again that currently, "the theology of black churches is particular in the worst sense (and not universal at all!), because it is white—that is, derived from the history of white . . . denominations. It is sad that for many black Christians 'universal' means advocating the religious beliefs of the whites who enslaved them."[116]

And third, every theology needs some instrument of social analysis that will help theologians uncover and name the causes of injustice and push it to explore the structural roots and connectivity of its position as oppressed, oppressor, or both. "As long as theology remains ignorant of the causes of exploitation, it will not be able to effectively fight it," he argues.[117]

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[112] *FMP*, 148.
[113] *FMP*, 172.
[114] *FMP*, 172.
[115] *FMP*, 173.
[116] *FMP*, 154-155.
[117] *FMP*, 174. See also, Cone, "Christian Faith and Political Praxis."

3.2 Christological Particularity and the Black Experience

This focus on the communal particularity of theology that cuts across claims to universality present in most privileged, white, European, and imperialist theologies would appear at first glance to be antithetical to a Christological center. That is, a focus on Christ who came as the universal "new Adam"[118] in order to bring salvation and demonstrate the contours of a faithful life to all of humanity would seem to play into the non-contextual tropes of the theologies that Cone is trying to dismantle.

And yet, Cone, as a good Barthian, claims over and over that theology must have Christ as its point of departure. Cone circumvents the universalist overtones of imperialist, white theologies by holding in tension both the Christological center of theological thought as well as its particular communal nature. In other words, for Cone, all theologies have two primary "points of departure" to employ one of his favorite terms: Christ and community. He asserts that theology's task is to analyze the changeless gospel in a way that it can be related to changing situations.[119] In words again reflecting Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it must express the "concreteness of Christ's continued presence today."[120]

This concrete Christology, proffered eloquently by Bonhoeffer, enables Cone to link a Christological center with his focus on the communal norm of theology. Christology, in these terms, is not a vague or abstract notion of otherworldly salvation or a universally spiritual force that meets everyone on equal (and equally content-less) terms. Instead, Christology begins with humanity, even the particular humanity of Jesus: "the particularity of Jesus' person as disclosed in his Jewishness is indispensible for Christological analysis," Cone offers. "He was not a 'universal' man but a particular Jew who came to fulfill God's will to liberate the oppressed."[121]

3.2.1 The Black Christ

This leads to one of Cone's more controversial, and often-misunderstood, claims: Christ is black. For Cone, this means simply that Christ identifies himself with the oppressed of society, and in an American context, the oppressed are African Americans.[122] This is not as exclusive a claim—or as biological a claim—as many of his detractors like to think. It is a claim about Christ's identification in life and death with the oppressed of the earth. But still, Christ does not address and engage with all the oppressed in an abstract and universalized way.

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[118] 2 Corinthians 15:45.
[119] *BTL*, 202.
[120] *BTL*, 219.
[121] *GO*, 109.
[122] *BTBP*, 68.

Rather Christ, as a particular human, meets the oppressed in their particularity and identifies with them in their particular hardships, sufferings, and hopes.

Cone explains, therefore, blackness is an ontological symbol and a visible reality that best describes the situation of oppression in America; but it stands for all victims of oppression.[123] "God has made the oppressed condition his own condition" through the actions of electing the oppressed people of Israel as God's people and becoming the Oppressed One in Jesus Christ. Christ is known to be where people are oppressed, and "to receive [Christ's] revelation is to become black with him by joining him in his work of liberation."[124] The task of black theology, then, is to "analyze the black man's condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ with the purpose of creating a new understanding of black dignity among black people, and providing the necessary soul in that people, to destroy white racism."[125] This focus on the concreteness of Christ's presence in the form and midst of the oppressed means that "thinking of Christ as non-black in the twentieth century is as theologically impossible as thinking of him as non-Jewish in the first century." The Christ event inaugurated a new age in which all oppressed people are incorporated into the life of Christ. All oppressed people become Christ's people: "In America, that people is a black people."[126]

Still, we see that this Christological focus is always filtered through a community's experience. Cone insists that theology must arise from within an oppressed community—it has from its beginnings.[127] The reality of black people and the black experience is the point of departure for all God-talk. But this does not mean that black theology prioritizes the experience of black oppression over Christ, but that black people have come to know Christ through their experience of oppression because he has identified himself with black oppression. Cone concludes by integrating Christology and concrete communal experience. The two— communal experience and Christ—are the same reality and one cannot become secondary to the other.[128]

3.3 Cone's *Ad fontes*

Cone became increasingly aware of the contextual character of theological language in critical responses to his *Black Theology and Black Power*. Many black critics said that even as he was

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[123] *BTL*, 27, 28. I will analyze this concept of blackness and its theological grounding in the "Black Christ" in chapter five. There I argue that blackness for Cone take on a moral framing as opposed to an ontological one, in order to include all oppressed humans and those who stand in solidarity with the oppressed within its scope.
[124] *BTL*, 125.
[125] *BTBP*, 118.
[126] *BTBP*, 69.
[127] *BTL*, 23.
[128] *BTBP*, 120.

criticizing it, he was too dependent on white theology and the conceptual categories that came from Europe and not Africa. He was, after all, at first a Barthian scholar. This propelled Cone's shift, emerging between the writings of *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed*, to focus on black sources of theological inquiry and to move away from white and European theological foundations, beginning with *The Spirituals and the Blues*. Here he began to recognize the significance of sources for both the answers a scholar offers and the questions that animate the scholar's inquiry. After this point no longer did he rely on the more abstract commentaries of white theologians, and their pretension to universality, but turned to the more organic and native sources of black theology. In the words, of James Baldwin, whom Cone appeals to frequently, whites created an environment:

> which has led us all to believe that in Negro life there exists no tradition, no field of manners, no possibility of ritual or intercourse, such as many, for example, sustain the Jew even after he has left his father's house. But the fact is not that the Negro has no tradition but that there has as yet arrived no sensibility sufficiently profound and tough to make this tradition articulate. For a tradition expresses, after all, nothing more than the long and painful experience of a people; it comes out of the battle wages to maintain their integrity or, to put it more simply, out of their struggle to survive.[129]

Later reflecting on this shift toward the exclusive resources of the black tradition, Cone contends, "The sources for [black] theology are not found in Barth, Tillich, and Pannenburg. They are found in the spirituals, blues, and sayings of our people. We must go back to black churches so as to authenticate our vocation by helping them to move closer to their calling to be God's instrument of liberation in the world."[130] One cannot test the truth of the black story by using intellectual categories that are not native to the black experience itself, he says.[131] He comments:

> In [*The Spirituals and the Blues*] I began my journey back home. . . . I wanted to wash my theology in the blood of my people. To write an authentic black liberation theology I would have to let the blood of the people speak. Since for many people the spirituals and the blues create hope out of a hopeless situation. If one wants to create an American Christian theology, one must begin with the experience of the slaves, the crucified people in American history, because the religion of the slaves is the closest analogy to the religion of Jesus.[132]

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[129] Baldwin, *Notes*, 36.

[130] *FMP*, 118.

[131] *GO*, 113.

[132] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood." In our interview, Cone pointed to a similar moment in James Baldwin's career, narrated in *Notes of a Native Son*, as describing his own experience: "The most crucial time in my own development came when I was forced to recognize that I was a kind of bastard of the West; when I followed the line of my past I did not find myself in Europe but in Africa. And this

During this shift, Cone did not drift from his previous Christological focus—as some have critiqued—but nuanced this Barthian approach with a more contextual, communal focus. ""I returned to the Bible and reread it in light of the black experience that I had learned as a child at Macedonia AME Church in Bearden Arkansas. I discovered that the God of the Bible is the liberator of the oppressed of the land."[133] He claimed, controversially in a 1997 "Preface" to *God of the Oppressed*, that theologians can no longer do theology as if Jesus Christ is God's sole revelation. God speaks to people through many persons, events, and methods, he says, and no one people's experience or language is capable of capturing the full reality of God.[134] While these comments were certainly a reaction against white theologians who behave and write as if they alone set the rules for thinking about God, these also speak to the new focus on particularity that began to order Cone's thought. Unadulterated Christological thought—universal in its truth, reach, and applicability—is simply not possible. As he learned from Marxist theory, all thought is contextually contingent. Theological thought, therefore—even Christological thought—must be local.

After *The Spirituals and the Blues* Cone begins appealing to more explicitly black sources for black theology rather than white/European sources and categories—sources like slave stories, folktales, and spirituals. The textual sources of intellectual thought as well as the categories of interpretation themselves must arise out of the thought forms of black experience.[135] In this vein, he lists the sources of black theology as black experience, black history, black culture, revelation, and scripture. Black experience takes priority as a critical textual and hermeneutical source for black theology in his insistence that theologians relate biblical revelation to the situation of black people in America. This line of thought leads to some of his more famous, and infamous claims, that one cannot speak of God and God's activity without identifying God with the liberation of the black community.[136] It is black experience itself that requires scripture to be a source of black theology—the black experience in America is inextricably intertwined with the experience of reading, leaning on, and deploying scripture

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meant that in some subtle way, in a really profound way, I brought to Shakespeare, Bach, Rembrandt, to the stones of Paris, to the cathedral at Chartres, and to the Empire State Building, a special attitude. These were not really my creations, they did not contain my history; I might search in them in vain forever for any recollection of myself. I was an interloper; this was not my heritage. At the same time I had no other heritage which I could possibly hope to use—I had certainly been unfitted for the jungle or the tribe. I would have to appropriate these white centuries, I would have to make them mine—I would have to accept my special attitude, my special places in this scheme—otherwise I would have no place in *any* scheme" (*Notes*, 7).

[133] Cone interview.

[134] Cone, *God of the Oppressed,* 1997 ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), xiv.

[135] GO, 17, 29.

[136] *BTL,* 57.

as a source of comfort, hope, and revolution—but scripture is still predicated on black experience. Black theology cannot ignore the tradition and history of western Christianity, but its study and incorporation of that tradition must be done "in light of the Truth disclosed in Scripture as interpreted by black people."[137]

This also applies to white eschatologies, and even "theologies of hope." He argues for a turn away from the European models of Jurgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz.[138] Though these theologians sympathize with the goals and methods of black liberation, they have just as easily been adopted and appropriated by the white theologians Cone was trying to resist—most notably as a substitute for taking seriously the claims of black theology. Instead, the songs of hope, the 'Negro spirituals,' were the "logical place to turn for any North American theological reflection on hope."[139] Cone believes it was naïve for him and other early black theologians to expect "that theological salvation could come from Europe." Similar to Franz Fanon's turning away from Europe in his philosophy, black theology should involve a "turning to the resources found in the victimized peoples of the world."[140] This application of Fanon's realization and change in methodology to black theology shifted the focus of the black theological task, as well as its ecclesiological task.

4 Salvation, Eschatology, & Reconciliation

One important implication of this change in sources, as noted in the previous paragraph, concerns his view of eschatology, salvation, and reconciliation. Cone, like Hauerwas, holds to an immanent leaning view of salvation. Whereas Hauerwas located salvation within the life of the church, Cone focuses on this-worldly liberation and liberatory action on behalf of the

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[137] GO, 29. For an example of the consequences of this move toward focusing more exclusively on black sources, Cone examines white insistence on nonviolence. Arguing that there is no absolute ethical guidance from Jesus—that is a white abstraction to universal applicability—he claims we cannot solve ethical questions of the 20th century solely by examining what Jesus did in the first century. This move signals the preference he grants to the particulars of the situation and interpretive experience of the community seeking normative guidance (BTBP, 139, 143).

[138] See especially, Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) and *Ethics of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); and Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (Crossroads Publishing, 2007) and *Love's Strategy: The Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz*, ed. John K. Downey (London: T & T Clark, 1999); as well as Metz & Moltmann, *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).

[139] *FMP*, 69.

[140] *FMP*, 71. Writing to black church leaders, Cone now insisted that black church organizations like the National Conference of Black Churchmen should no longer depend on money from the same white churches they critiqued; they must rely on and cultivate their own financial resources. This is not a call to complete racial sectarianism, but a calling to focus locally and communally on the particular community from which theology emerges and to which it is accountable.

world. Both scholars may be accused of eclipsing a strong notion of transcendence in their understandings of redemption and salvation. Cone's particular views of salvation and reconciliation begin in his concept of eschatology.

In his first monograph, *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone charges black churches with a focus on eschatology that enervates any work for justice or freedom in this world. Drawn from their reliance on white theology, the spiritual, otherworldly focus of black faith inhibits liberatory work here and now. As I outlined earlier, Cone insists that this is a matter of black churches blindly adopting white versions of eschatology, or theology in general, that at best have no need for a more immanent sense of redemption due to their privileged location and at worst are intentionally deployed as a power device to maintain control over the oppressed classes—Marx's critique of religion as a "opiate for the masses." In light of this situation Cone concludes *Black Theology and Black Power* with the claim that "the idea of heaven is irrelevant for Black Theology."[141]

Cone's attitude toward eschatology begins to shift in inflection—a redirection linked to his turn from white to organic black sources for theological reflection around his publication of *The Spirituals and the Blues*. As he moves away from white European theological sources that image heaven as an otherworldly phenomenon or a sense of inner divine peace, he turns to the ways black spirituals configured eschatological reality and discovers a more revolutionary inflection on the kingdom coming. Eschatology cannot become untethered from the realities of history, he argues, in the ways that white theologians have often configured it. We can only speak of eschatology in light of what God has done and is doing: "With a black perspective, eschatology comes to mean joining the world and making it what it ought to be."[142] Cone discovered a liberatory soteriology, bolstered by an eschatology rife with historical, immanent implications in the black spiritual tradition. While the spirituals are often understood to be songs that comforted slaves with recitations of a future, otherworldly salvation, Cone points to studies that portray a more complicated eschatological vision in the songs. The appeals to transcendent locations like heaven or the River Jordan operated on two levels simultaneously. They were spiritual referents, literally recalling the Sabbath rest and reconciliation of the afterlife promised to believers. But they also served as references to specific earthly places like Canada or the Ohio River—places of earthly redemption and salvation, locations on the

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[141] *BTBP*, 125. This is evident in J. Deotis Roberts' criticism of Cone's dismissal of eschatology in *Black Theology and Black Power*, writing, "It is my understanding that the only future Cone believes in is our future in this life. . . . An eschatology without a future dimension is only partially complete. It may include the cross, as Cone has done, but it does not include the Resurrection" (Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 162).
[142] *BTBP*, 126.

Underground Railroad, or lands of earthly, physical emancipation.[143] Some of these were coded references for those planning escape, or at least reminders that earthly places of liberation existed. In this way, the spirituals narrate the "attempt of black people to define their present history in the light of their promised future and not according to their past miseries."[144] The promised future and present history comingle and overlap in ways that provide not an otherworldly eschatological hope, but a this-worldly eschatological hope—an immanent eschatology that provides a challenge to the present realities and a charge to work for a present redemption. The partly revealed future of God—the eschatological reality disclosed in the cross and resurrection—enabled black people to resist the condition of slavery because slavery was revealed to be not an ultimate reality, but a reality that could legitimately be resisted in this life.

From this perspective, hope in the future did not require acceptance of the status quo but animated resistance to it. If the Kingdom was within the midst of this earthly community of God's chosen, then God's people have both a motivation and a responsibility to resist the present order. "To accept the future of God as disclosed in the present means that we cannot be content with the present political order," Cone writes. "God's eschatological presence arouses discontentment and makes the present subject to radical change."[145] The concept of heaven then did not generate passivity but revolution against the present racist and oppressive order and resistance to the white values and politics that sustained it.[146] Black stories and spirituals about heaven became a "revolutionary judgment against the systems of oppression. The future becomes a present reality in the slave's consciousness, enabling him or her to struggle against the white system of injustice."[147] Knowledge of a future beyond this world meant that the rulers of the state—and the plantation—are not indeed master. Seeing beyond history can turn the "sigh of oppression" into a cry of revolution against the established order.

The spirituals generated not an other-worldly eschatological perspective, but also one not fully this-worldly. Cone describes it as an "over-worldly" eschatology that both pervades and transcends present realities, in which the transcendent aspects actually inspire immanent action rather than enervate it. This "over-worldliness" sustains the oppressed in their struggle against injustice.[148] "Eschatology then," he claims, "was primarily a religious perspective on the present which enabled oppressed blacks to realize that their existence transcended historical

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[143] *SB*, 80.
[144] *SB*, 79.
[145] *SB*, 85.
[146] *SB*, 86.
[147] GO, 147.
[148] GO, 147.

limitations." [149] The knowledge of a redemptive future affirmed their earthly, tangible humanity, their somebodiness, and animated the fight to achieve that during this life.[150]

In this way a concern for present liberation is actually predicated on eschatology. Eschatology animates human agency and liberatory efforts. This is not a distorted hope in another life, not a platonic dualism between soul and body in the way white theology often configures eschatological hope. Looking to the future is a means of making us dissatisfied with the present. In light of the future Kingdom of God, present injustice cannot be tolerated; eschatology is not an otherworldly longing, but a call to action to achieve that reality. [151] "As long as we look at the resurrection of Christ and the expected 'end,'" he says, "we cannot reconcile ourselves to the things of the present that contradict his presence." Cone asserts that this is the eschatology of black theology: "to believe in heaven is to refuse to accept hell on earth."[152] The eschatological theme of the 'home over yonder' serves not as an opium but a stimulant. It is the good news of the gospel, he writes, assuring us that "our ultimate future is in the hands of the One who made us all."[153]

Cone's soteriology is also linked to the church, though in a different way than Hauerwas. Whereas for Hauerwas, ecclesiology seems to be identified with soteriology, for Cone, the chief mission of the church is to bring about this salvation—to work for the liberation of victims in order to bear witness to God's coming kingdom. This means that when the church engages in activity that turns against this purpose—like preaching an overly-spiritualized gospel or otherworldly eschatology that counters present work for justice—that church is not a church.[154] In such cases, the Kingdom may be located elsewhere—in the "secular" Black Power movement or in struggles for liberation among the poor of Central America—and these parables of the Kingdom will reflect back to the church its own shortcomings and challenge it to pick up God's mission once again.

Finally, Cone's understanding of eschatology and salvation lead to his thought on reconciliation. Cone grounds his emphasis on reconciliation theologically and configures liberation and reconciliation as "a single soteriological event." In fact, the in the same way that salvation takes on the earthly dimensions of liberation "God's reconciliation is God's

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[149] *SB*, 95. Cone calls this, perhaps, the most important contribution of black religion as reflected in the spirituals.
[150] *GO*, 178.
[151] *BTBP*, 126.
[152] *BTL*, 246, 247.
[153] *FMP*, 188.
[154] *MSLB*, 85.

liberating work."[155] God is the primary agent of reconciliation, and the work of reconciliation begins with the "objective stage" of reconciliation. For Cone, this means grounding the temporal work of reconciliation in an acknowledgment that God has already reconciled sinful, disobedient humanity to God's self through the Black Christ's work on the cross.[156] God's active work of liberation and reconciliation to God's self has already been secured "through the cross and resurrection of Jesus," and this forms the basis of God's continuing work of temporal reconciliation between oppressed and oppressor, black and white, through earthly liberation.[157] Yet, next to this "objective reality" of reconciliation is the subjective reality that requires the work of the oppressed to be obedient to God and affirm their own freedom and actualization.[158] Like his soteriology, reconciliation is generated by God's metaphysical work of reconciliation, and drawing of all of humanity to God's self. But it takes on a decisively immanent dimension and is conditioned by the earthly liberation of the oppressed. Any hope of earthly reconciliation between oppressed and oppressor, black and white, is contingent upon the liberation of those who suffer and must occur on terms defined by the oppressed.[159] I will return to Cone's understanding of reconciliation more thoroughly when I begin my constructive account of costly reconciliation in chapter seven.

5 Conclusion: Cone's Church Community

In this way, all theology—black theology included—must be what Cone calls a "church discipline"— validated in the context of the community of God's people struggling for freedom.[160] In a statement similar to those of Hauerwas, he reflects: "The truth of my story is dependent upon the truth of the faith of the black church."[161] Theological truth is contingent upon, validated by, and bound to the faith and witness of the church community. Ultimately,

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[155] GO, 216-217.

[156] Paul writes to the Corinthians, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). It seems for Paul, reconciliation is a cooperative effort between God and humans: it begins with God's salvific work in Christ, to be sure, but Paul also implores the church to "be reconciled with God." As Paul express in Ephesians 2, God's radical work of reconciling all humanity to God's self opens the path for reconciliation within a humanity divided by ethnic and racial difference. He writes that Christ's work will overcome those divisions and make us "one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it" (Ephesians 2:16). But this requires work on the part of humanity, now commissioned as "ambassadors for Christ," to overcome the enmity that separates us as God's good creature (2 Corinthians 5:20).

[157] GO, 214.

[158] GO, 213.

[159] BTBP, 145.

[160] *MSLB*, 77.

[161] *MSLB* ,12.

this means that theology is not a matter of abstract or universal truth claims about God or God's people, but is dependent upon the witness of a particular community with a particular way of interpreting its foundational texts and with particular cultural sources employed in their hermeneutical work and lived practice. Theology is tethered to ecclesiology in terms of its source, its justification, and the direction of its claims and criticisms: again, "There can be no genuine Christian theology without prophetic self-criticism of the Christian community that gives birth to it."[162]

For Cone, these claims about the epistemological and hermeneutical significance of community arise from his own experience in the black church. Growing up and raised in the faith at Macedonia AME Church in Bearden, Arkansas, Cone explains that he was "given a faith that sustained my personhood and dignity in spite of white people's brutality."[163] He continually claims that the church was and still is extremely formative for his life and work: "It was the world I grew up in. My identity as a human being comes out of the church. It kept me safe in the South."[164] In his memoir he continues:

> After being treated as things for six days of the week, black folk went to church on Sunday in order to affirm and experience another definition of their humanity. In the eyes of the Almighty, they were children of God whose future was not defined by the white structures that humiliated them. . . . Everybody became somebody and there were no second-class people at Macedonia.[165]

In these passages, Cone recognizes the importance of the black church experience during his childhood for shaping his theological development, and this acknowledgment helps to fuel his theological attention to the particularity of theological claims and sources, as well as the manner in which he tethers theology to ecclesiology. This leads him to posit other claims that ring similar to the communitarian leanings of prominent postliberal and traditionalist theologians like Hauerwas. "It is incumbent on all members of the community to define their existence according to the community's essence," he writes.[166]

When this fails, a community loses its sense of its own past. This is particularly true for oppressed communities, like the black church, that risk accommodating to the sense of

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[162] *FMP*, 116.

[163] *MSLB*, 18.

[164] Cone interview.

[165] *MSLB*, 23.

[166] The communal nature of sin becomes a prominent example of this. Sin is a communally-defined and communally-dependent phenomenon. "It is man's existence in community that defines the meaning of sin. To be in sin means to deny the community" (*BTL*, 187). There is no sin in the abstract; no universal analysis of sin is possible. One can only normatively evaluate sin according to the values of a particularly located body of people. He continues: "To be in sin, then, is to deny the values that make the community what it is. It is living according to one's private interests and not according to the goals of the community."

identity and purpose bestowed upon them by their oppressors. This can happen directly—white slave holders offering a passive gospel pivoting on notions of submission and afterlife to keep their slaves in check—or in a less overt but equally sinister manner of gradually eroding one's own agency and sense of self through the pulsating power dynamics of colorblindness. Either way, he argues, "Without a knowledge of one's past, such things cannot sustain one's sense of worth in a racist society. A person without a past is a person without an identity."[167] And when a people lose a sense of their own history "they have no other alternative but to assume the identity of the group that conquers them."[168]

Accommodating to the universalized gospel of white theology has eroded the distinctive identity of the black community. This can only be overcome, Cone claims, by turning away from alien sources for the community's identity and mission, and to reclaim its own particular history by relying nearly exclusively on sources drawn from its own experience. This means that black sources that are not explicitly Christian take priority over white sources that claim to be Christian—a method legitimized by Christ's identification with the oppressed (i.e. black) community and Cone's idea of the sacredness of some secular sources.

The next chapter will signal a turn in this dissertation. In the first four chapters I have identified and analyzed the problem of race, especially in terms of colorblindness, white supremacy, and whiteness, and demonstrated the strategies white theologians and churches employ to evade dealing with the issue and reckoning with their own complicity within it. In the previous two, I specifically located the problem of race and racism within the church, analyzing the ecclesiologies of two of the most prominent white and black American Protestant theologians of the last fifty years. They provide radically different ecclesiological visions, though I have attempted to identify the core concepts they share. I will compare and contrast these core concepts in more depth in the ensuing chapters as this dissertation now turns more directly to its critical and constructive work. Specifically in the next chapter I will position Hauerwas and Cone next to each other and more closely analyze the ecclesiological resources they share, distinctions they embody, and tensions they create when juxtaposed in this way.

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[167] *MSLB*, 28.
[168] *MSLB*, 89.

Part ii. Reconciling Race | *The Possibility of Costly Reconciliation*

Chapter Five | *Race & Tradition*

What is impossible to do is for white people to really hear blackness talk.[1]

Introduction

This chapter marks a turn in this dissertation, from analysis to criticism. It addresses the multilayered issues I identified in chapter one: the myth of colorblindness, the inarticulacy of many white theologians when it comes to race, and general (and legitimate) despair about the prospects of reconciliation. In Part One of this project, I mapped the current state of racial relations in the United States (and especially in churches), posited the key issues underlying our difficulty in fruitfully addressing such a complex and "wicked" moral problem,[2] and identified the current tendencies toward a myth of "colorblindness" and a failure to reckon with "whiteness" as the sites for theological attention. In chapter two I introduced Stanley Hauerwas as a representative of white theology (specifically of white post-liberal theology), and an example of the reluctance of white theologians to address race and racism as moral issues. In Hauerwas's case, explicitly, this is a failure to adequately integrate race as an essential part of his ecclesiological ethics.

In chapters three and four, I analyzed the core concepts of the ecclesiologies of both Hauerwas and James Cone to uncover the ecclesial resources that each holds—often in common—to address an issue as complicated as race, racism, and racial oppression. As representatives of the two most significant theo-ethical movements in the last half-century, these two theologians are both committed to the importance of the particularity of the community, the role of narrative in community formation, and the significance of attending to concrete reality. Both build their projects on an aversion to the universalizing and abstracting tendencies of modernity (the blame resides in liberalism for Hauerwas and in white theology for Cone). This attention to the concrete, and especially the concrete in community, holds the resources for forging a path forward.

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[1] James Cone, Interview.
[2] See reference to Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, in chapter one.

This chapter will focus on these shared core elements of their ecclesiological visions to illuminate the important challenges and hopes we have for any fruitful project of racial reconciliation. My argument is that the emphases of black theology in Cone critically sharpen, illuminate, and extend these important resources already latent in post-liberal theology—specifically narrative, particularity, and concrete reality. Theological attention to these concepts can help white theologians like Hauerwas and myself become more conversant with race. In this chapter, I'll begin with an analysis of the continuities of these two thinkers and discontinuities. I will finally put Hauerwas and Cone in direct conversation (through interviews), allow them to critique one another, and then address the fundamental challenge I see to the work of each. This dialogue will help refine the key distinctions in their approach to race as well as how they see race as part of their larger theological and ecclesiological projects. The bulk of the chapter will then illuminate the ways each thinker allows for abstract thinking when it comes to race, despite their stated goals of attending to the concrete. Hauerwas allows his ecclesiological dependence on Alasdair MacIntyre's concepts of narrative and tradition to seep into the ways he configures racial relations, and Cone risks promoting a moral concept of blackness that diverts attention away from skin tone in a way that might be misread by those in favor of colorblindness. I will examine both of these criticisms in depth, and then push, in the next chapter, toward an ecclesiological vision that overcomes these shortcomings by attending to the concrete and particular factors of embodied existence and practice.

1 Continuity & Discontinuity: Hauerwas and Cone In Dialogue

As I walked up the stairs of the Gothic tower to the office of James Cone, the similarities between these two scholars were striking. Both men, caught in the stone tower of academia, but hoping the challenge of their theologies are not contained within these walls. Both men, septuagenarians, frail and thin, yet boasting a zealous energy that prevents them from letting go, and compels them into the classroom, even at the horizon of retirement. Both men, humble and unassuming, but carrying the burden of a career that places them at the center of key developments and movements of Christian theology and ethics, and the inevitable substantive criticisms and *ad hominem* attacks that come with such—dare I say—prophetic prominence. Both men, sharing scratching, shrill voices that betray the enormous gravity of their writing and conviction, yet offer a strangely welcoming warmth and care that invites you into their stories—as far apart and as closely tethered as those stories may be. They began their careers in the same historical moment; the year that Cone published his hallmark *Black Theology and Black Power*, Hauerwas wrote his first article, also on Black Power. Both thinkers are considered the leaders in their respective branches of Christian theological ethics. Despite a brief exchange at a session of the American Academy of Religion years ago (recalled by Hauerwas), these two have never engaged one another's work. In this short opening section I

will place them in direct dialogue through my interviews with them from the fall, winter, and spring of 2015-2016.

1.1 Hauerwas (in his own words)
Duke is a university that has had its sordid racial relations and history revealed in several incidents over the past few years. One month prior to my first visit with Hauerwas, students discovered a noose hanging from one of the trees next to the student union. I intended to question Hauerwas on his individual pieces on race, as well as his general reluctance to talk about the issue.[3]

I pressed him on the central question of this project: Why has he found it difficult to write about race? And more specifically, for a thinker so focused on the significance of narrative, and the importance of narratives for social and personal formation, why claim that the African American story is "not my story," and identify this as your central reason for not engaging in a discussion of race?[4]

Now, twenty years after this claim that subsequently shaped the range of his theological attention, he admitted that, yes, maybe this was not the most appropriate way to articulate his hesitancy. "To say it's not my story I mean there really is white privilege and I've enjoyed it even though I came from working class people," he responded. "African Americans had to endure discrimination in a way I never did. The story of civil rights ... I always worried that there is such a desperate need for whites to have a moral identity and you could show that by siding with those in the struggle." He worried that writing about it might be using or instrumentalizing their struggle, or at least perceived that way. "I didn't come to terms with the agony of not being able to know how to be on the right side without using the right side. When whites are part of a black movement we take over!"[5]

With this, Hauerwas recalled an occasion during his time at Yale. Malcolm X came to speak at Hillside High School in New Haven. He, of course, went to listen, and remembers Malcolm chastising his largely black audience to stop black-on-black urban violence, to take control of their lives and find employment, to stay faithful to their families. Hauerwas observed, "He was saying all the things to his black audience that we were taught by racists to say about African Americans. And what do you do as a white man in that? I just wasn't clear what voice to use to

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[3] When he left Duke in 1991, African American English professor Henry Louis Gates referred to the university as "the plantation." Stanley Fish, "Henry Louis Gates: Déjà Vu All Over Again," *New York Times*, July 24, 2009, www.fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/07/24/henry-louis-gates-deja-vu-all-over-again.
[4] Hauerwas, *WW*, 225.
[5] All Hauerwas interview quotations and comments come from an interview conducted with the author in Durham, NC February 25, 2015.

write about that." When I asked him if he knew of any good way that white theologians could write about race, he said, "Racism hasn't gone away. It's just gotten more flexible, and how to [connect with] that has become a real challenge. I try to think about how to narrate Christian complicity with slavery in a manner that recognizes its horror. But I don't pretend that I'm adequate in knowing how to do it." And this fear of inadequacy has led him, for the most part, to avoid it altogether—a point that he now recognizes. "I probably haven't given enough space to the issue of race."

I asked Hauerwas why he found it easier to write about others whose "story" was also not his "story;" Hauerwas has often and very effectively written about persons with disabilities, especially. "Being pulled into the world of the disabled," he said, "and knowing whom I'm writing about makes it much easier." He pointed to example of former student Mike Broadway as a white person teaching at the historically black Shaw Divinity School and a member of a predominantly black church. "He can speak in a way that I cannot. And you could say 'Why aren't you a member of [a black church]?' and my only answer is that I'm Episcopalian." This answer reveals Hauerwas's logic, and a point that Cone would seize. Hauerwas found it easier to write about persons with disabilities because he was in their "world"—he is in relationship with these persons. "Knowing whom I'm writing about makes it much easier." The implication of this statement is that he is not in the same intimacy of relationship—friendships—with persons of color. He continued, "That we continue in separate [ecclesial] worlds is a deep sadness, but also a certain sense that white/black names different worlds that need to be respected. But the white world is morally problematic just to the extent that we don't know how to be with African Americans."

Finally, I turned to his most recent piece on race, the essay "Race: The More It Is About," and asked if naming race as primarily an issue of misunderstanding God's sovereignty in that essay risks abstracting the issue? "All that sounds right to me," he admitted. "What I meant to say was that racism reflects an idolatrous faith that allows for the presumption that my position as a white person doesn't need justification. But I'm sure that Cone thinks I'm far too Barthian and ecclesially-centered. He's a thinker in service of a people who are under the threat of extinction. And I appreciate his patience with someone like me, who is concerned first and foremost with the recovery of the significance of the church as the first politics for the formation of Christian lives." He confessed, "My work may seem far too slow from his perspective."

1.2 Cone (in his own words)

A few months later, as I sat with James Cone in his office on the top floor of another Gothic tower, at Union Theological Seminary, we began one of our several conversations about white theology and race. While our interactions had begun several months prior, on this occasion, I

wanted to have the two theologians respond directly to one another—something they have never done in printed form. Cone was especially interested in my conversations with and research on Hauerwas, and his reasons for not writing about race as a theological matter. I explained some of the reasoning I outlined in chapter two of this dissertation, and Cone responded with a weary indignation. "He knows the brutality his people did to black people, and he ain't writing about it," Cone said. "There is no way anyone can write theology with the Christian identity of Jesus of Nazareth in an era of white supremacy and slavery, lynching, Jim Crow segregation, and police brutality today without engaging that. I'm not telling you what you have to say, but you have to engage with that. You can't get off the hook."[6] He implied that it was the responsibility of a people descended from slave owners and segregationists to address this history, especially the responsibility of those writing within the Christian tradition that shaped these practices, and the complicity of the that tradition in perpetuating oppression—now often through its silence.

The black story and white story are not two separate stories, he contested. You cannot write about or within one story and avoid the other. "It is [Hauerwas's] experience; he can't separate that from himself. . . . White people have no sense of their own identity without their black brothers. He has no sense of who he is without me. I'm his bastard brother." Hauerwas's excuse is typical of white theologians, and white Christians in general, Cone claimed. White theologians are afraid to ask what kind of theology comes out of a people that are capable of enslaving others.[7] Then alluding to Bonhoeffer—the one white theologian that remains an important interlocutor for Cone (along with, perhaps, Niebuhr, in a more ambivalent manner)—he said that refusing to talk about race is a "cheap silence." "I would prefer a white person talk about it and screw it up," he said, "and then I can tell you that you screwed up. You can't stay together unless you talk about it. The longer you don't, the more separate you will be. This is why we haven't made any movement on race, because we won't talk about it."

This charge echoes the challenge of another of Hauerwas's black critics. James Logan, in his book *Good Punishment*, that owes much conceptually to Hauerwas's theology, still challenges him to address race in the same manner as Woodard-Lehman. Referencing the claim Hauerwas makes about incommensurable stories in his essay on Martin Luther King, Jr., Logan writes, "Since Hauerwas appears to understand that the habits of racism and White supremacy have been deeply written into the story of his life, he ought to also know then, that

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[6] All Cone interview quotations and comments come from a phone interview conducted with the author on February 16, 2015 and in New York City, April 12, 2015.

[7] As I noted in chapter two, this claim resonates with the experience of Willie Jennings, who laments "the resistance of theologians to think *theologically* about their [own] identities" (*The Christian Imagination*, 7).

the story of 'the struggle; is as much his story as it is King's story." It is "one and the same story," he says, "because even Christian disunity is part of a common story."[8]

Cone continued, explaining that these supposed "two stories" of race are inextricably intertwined in ways other groupings of people are not. (I had asked him why he thought white theologians like Hauerwas often found it easier to write about other "stories" that are not their own—like physical disability, immigration, poverty, or feminism.) The stories of blackness and whiteness were formed together; they are more accurately two sides of the same story. Echoing a point he has made several times in his writings, Cone said that one cannot properly understand white identity without black identity and vice versa. "Black people were there when white people achieved their identity. We were always there from the beginning, in their fields, in their kitchens. There is not black experience without the white experience right with it." Therefore, it does not make logical sense for whites to say they cannot engage with it, because it is their own story. When white theologians look at black people and the black experience, "it is like looking in a mirror"—but perhaps looking in a mirror darkly, and seeing the terrible and oppressed upside-down version of the same story. According to Cone, it is fear of recognizing and grappling with a part of their own story that whites want to avoid; so they call that part of the story the "black experience" in order to elide it and face the guilt that surely accompanies that discovery. In Cone's mind, with any attempt to separate the story of blackness and whiteness in theological writing, "theology becomes justification for white supremacy."

I offered the most charitable reading of Hauerwas's reluctance to talk about race—one that he explains in the endnotes of that King essay. Hauerwas is concerned, from his lived experience in white liberal congregations and political bodies, about the white tendency to take over a movement or cause that is not their own. As I explained in chapter two, he worries that lending his voice strongly to the cause of black theology could be an attempt to work out his own guilt and salvation on the backs of an "Other" people whose backs have already been broken and lashed by the prerogatives of white people (at best!) and a gentle patriarchy that strokes the white proclivity to be master of all (at worst). Cone was not sympathetic, claiming that Hauerwas does not seem to be talking to the sorts of black people that would not let him take over, or perhaps talking to black people at all. "Talk to the people in the Black Lives Matters movement," he suggested, claiming that it was a desire to control, not fear of taking

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[8] James Logan, *Good Punishment*, 222. Fulkerson and Mount Shoop call these the "dis-membered stories of race": "Our unique experiences, our shared social contexts, and our bodies' idiosyncrasies create in each of us particular and shared 'tellings' of dis-membered stories of race" (Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 14).

control that motivated him. "We blacks can handle ourselves, but you don't want to [talk to anyone] unless you can control it."

Cone identified friendship across color boundaries as an important step past this obstacle. One reason that white people, and white theologians, maintain a hesitancy to talk about race is because they are not in real relationship with people of color. Friendship would not allow one to run over the other, or take over. White people must encounter the rage and understand why that rage is there, he said, and they can't do that in a monochrome bubble. Cone stopped short of saying all white Christians must leave white churches and go to black-majority churches, but he suggests that encounter is the only way forward.

1.3 Hauerwas (responds)

In relaying some of Cone's concerns, Hauerwas again admitted a sense of inadequacy. "I guess I haven't done more with it because I didn't see how. Perhaps one of the hesitations behind it is that I'm not an egalitarian," he said, surprisingly, "and I often think the liberal rhetoric—the freedom of the individual and all—that informs much of the civil rights language, I have deep problems with it. But I want what they want," he said. "One of the problems with the civil rights struggle in terms of 'everyone gets to choose their own destiny' is that that is not true. How they can negotiate demands for justice in a way that enriches liberal rhetoric is the challenge that I would like to help them with, but you would have to be very careful with that," he says, alluding to his previously stated concern of "taking over."

And though he admits this struggle, he also worries that Cone's rhetoric is not constructive. "Cone has made it difficult for white theologians to know how to talk about being on the right side. What I need to know more is what it means for black theologians to be different than white theologians, how does that help us know how to be a faithful church for the future?" He also worries, more theoretically, that Cone collapses the Gospel into the contextually immanent. For example, in Cone's most recent book, "The particularity of the significance of the cross gets lost in the lynching tree. It is a powerful re-narration, but I worry that in the process the lynching tree becomes a generalized symbol of which the cross of Jesus just becomes an instance. Jesus' cross narrates the lynching tree and what happened in the lynching tree is not what happened to the Son of God. Those that died on the lynching tree are great witnesses to what happened on the cross," but Hauerwas worries that Cone reverses the correlation.

Still, Hauerwas concedes that his hesitation to write about race has caused him to avoid one of the most significant theological and moral issues of his time. His and Cone's careers began at the same time, at a significant time of transition in the civil rights movement following the assassination of King. Their careers followed a similar rise and now are fixed continually

deferred retirements. With all of this, it is odd that their work and careers have never intersected. Hauerwas concluded our conversation by admitting that he does not know how he would begin such a project now. "I think race is the central challenge before the moral character of this social order. Race is our greatest moral challenge," he said. "The fundamental issue is how do you go on when what has been done is so wrong there is no way to make it right. So there is a tragic character to my work finally that I think I learned from the racial problematics of our work."

Cone's criticism of Hauerwas, directly, and Hauerwas's responses, indirectly, identify a major lacunae in Hauerwas's work—a lacunae that resides in much of post-liberal theology, and the work of white theologians generally, for that matter. This exemplifies what Emilie Townes calls "uninterrogated whiteness"[9]—a failure to examine the ways that one's race determines the issues one addresses, the questions one asks, and the answers one derives from those questions; the ways that the particular opportunities, experiences, challenges, and successes afforded to one have been largely determined by one's racial location, and in the case of white folks, likely a privileged racial location. Hauerwas offers reasons for this absence—reasons grounded in a complicated concern. Another reason for the tendency of white theologians like Hauerwas to avoid the issue of race, I argue, lies at a deeper level: 1) an inadequate concept of blackness and whiteness (that is, perhaps an inadequate concept of race), 2) a thin and constricted view of the ways people are able to engage in dialogue about race, and 3) an insufficient understanding of the robust potential of reconciliation. I also argue that this deeper register of problems resides with both sides of the tension. In other words, all three problems listed above reside in the work of both Hauerwas and Cone to some degree—though by no means equally, let me be clear. At the same time, both provide the resources to draw the other into a mutually beneficial attention to these deficiencies and resources to forge a way beyond them.

1.4 Continuities

Thus far, in drawing out the contrasts between Hauerwas and Cone, specifically in terms of their ecclesiology and attention to race (and the intersection of these themes), I have also attempted to identify key similarities and resonances between them, identified in the opening paragraphs of this chapter. Again, one goal of this project is to identify the ways in which Hauerwas and Cone as representatives of two larger theo-ethical, and practical, Christian movements—post-liberalism and black liberation—have more in common than meets the eye. They share important conceptual, philosophical, and theological assumptions and often operate within the same language systems and work toward related goals.

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[9] Townes describes this as the avoidance of asking "how whiteness has been constructed and how it is maintained as a largely uninterrogated phenomenon of alleged neutrality, or worse of being the norm" (*Womanist Ethics*, 72).

Here again, it is important to note that both Hauerwas and Cone offer a bounded concept of the church community, one with easily definable insiders and outsiders. Hauerwas's ecclesiology aligns more closely with orthodox doctrinal images of the church, whereas Cone is more likely, in a more Barthian sense, to find the church wherever one discerns that God is moving (for example, the Black Lives Matter movement), even if they do not know that they are advancing the cause of God. These parables of the kingdom, to employ Barth's term, then reflect on the self-identified orthodox church, and chastise and instruct it in faithfulness. Cone's vision of the church is intentionally more ambiguous than Hauerwas's, though it is never far from the influence of his formation at Macedonia A.M.E. Church in Bearden, Arkansas.

Both Hauerwas and Cone share important conceptual and theological elements that will be helpful in contrasting, and critiquing, their approaches to race, as well as forging a path forward. These are specifically commitments to the formative concepts of narrative, concreteness, and the moral and epistemological particularity of communities. These theological emphases are grounded, for both theologians, in a core epistemological assumption that shapes their work: there is no "man from nowhere" with "no point of view" from which one can objectively observe and adjudicate between differing truth claims and moral claims;[10] the very idea that one could occupy a neutral view from nowhere (or view from above) is already a view that emits from a particular location, or tradition of inquiry, and has been shaped by a particular social context. That is, any position that maintains a pretension to do so will ultimately "itself be embedded in, supported by, and articulated in terms of some set of theoretical and conceptual structures."[11] Therefore, no systems of thought exist in universal terms or possess some objective and universal claim to truth.[12] As finite creatures and moral agents, we are unable to see the world clearly or in whole; we see partly, through a glass dimly, restricted by the contingencies of our subjective experience and provisionality of our communal commitments. One is never able to escape one's own parochial particularity, because one is always and everywhere concretely embedded within a constellation of social locations that have shaped one's outlook on the world, reality, and one's self.

As I outlined in chapters three and four, this aversion to universal rationality lies at the core of both Hauerwas and Cone's commitment to a distinctive communal vision of theological and ethical formation and activism—their respective ecclesiologies. Hauerwas laments the

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[10] *Pace*, The Beatles.

[11] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 172

[12] I have found the strongest challenge to this position in my hatred of Hauerwas's dearly loved Duke Blue Devils basketball team. Opposition to this team must be founded on some neutral and objective ground.

modern temptation to "demand a universal standpoint so that the self may reach a point from which it can judge and choose objectively among competing particularistic stories."[13] He repeatedly criticizes modernity's attempt to produce a people who believe that they should have *no story except the story that they chose when they had no story.* And likewise, Cone insists that all human inquiries into truth—like theology—must begin with "the human situation as perceived from a particular standpoint of a given people" as its point of departure.[14]

It is important to note that Hauerwas and Cone arrive at the significance of these concepts from different sources and employ these concepts in different ways. Still, understanding their foundational epistemological framework will help us also to more clearly identify their differences when it comes to talking about race. The remainder of this chapter will address my criticisms of the ways in which Hauerwas and Cone both overly-constrict our view of race and inter-racial dialogue, and the next and final chapter will construct a path forward toward racial flourishing, commensurate with the theologies of both thinkers.

2 Hauerwas's MacIntyrean Captivity

In my analysis of Hauerwas's ecclesiological understanding in chapter three, I addressed several important criticisms of his project. These were challenges sharply critical of his bounded, triumphal, and supposedly non-theological vision of the church community. Since I covered these criticisms there (and they are in no short supply in other resources), I will not repeat them in this critical section. Now I will focus on a new series of criticisms, my own, targeting Hauerwas's dealings with race.

One of the driving observations of this dissertation is Hauerwas's claim that the story of African Americans is not his story, and as I discussed in chapter two and earlier in this chapter, this constitutes his most substantive reason for avoiding the issue of race in his writing. I take this claim, and reason for avoiding the complication of race, as representative of the general lack of rich attention to race in much post-liberal theology and, more broadly, white theology in general. Whites have had difficulty entering into the story of a group they have historically subordinated—into the narrative of a group that has been forced to exist on the invisible margins of white privileged spaces. As James Baldwin has noted, "White America remains unable to believe that black America's grievances are real; they are unable to believe this because they cannot face what this fact says about themselves and their country."[15] Expanding on Baldwin's insight, it seems this aversion exists for a variety of reasons: some from a point of hostility and explicit white supremacy, some from a more insidious point of

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[13] *HR*, 250.

[14] *FMP*, 172.

[15] Baldwin, *Name*, 165.

colorblindness, and some (like Hauerwas) perhaps from a well-intentioned while neglectful concern about perpetuating more harm than good. It could be argued that Hauerwas's aversion to universality itself precludes him from stepping into another's story. He worries that in accepting what he calls the "standard account" of universal and objective rationality, "we accept the odd position of viewing our stories as if they were anyone's or at least capable of being lived out by anyone."[16] This sense that we float above the particular narratives of our histories and contexts and can simply dip into other's narratives as we choose reinforces his reservations about claiming the black story as his own.

Still, even if his reasoning is coherent, Hauerwas perpetuates the problem of white alienation from the stories and struggles of African Americans. The claim that it is not "my story" can have the effect of releasing whites from accepting culpability and responsibility for black oppression in a time of colorblindness. Baldwin again identified this tension sixty years ago: "the assumption—not entirely unsound—that Americans who evade, so far as possible, all genuine experience, have therefore no way of assessing the experience of others and no way of establishing themselves in relation to any way of life which is not their own."[17] To address this issue and venture into these invisible spaces carefully and productively, however, requires not only the proper motivation, but as apparent from Hauerwas's claim, also a particular set of skills and practices—and perhaps, a particular understanding of the concept of "story."

What is important is that this claim about the black story not being "his" story is also the primary point at which Cone criticizes Hauerwas. Cone counters that the "two" stories are intertwined—indeed, two sides of or perspectives on the same story; thus, failure to address them is a theological, moral, and professional failure. Again, this claim reflects the reasoning of many other white theologians who fail to address race because of thoughts of experiential inadequacy, lack of urgency, colorblindness, or other reasons associated with their detachment from the story—the lived experience—of persons of color. In an attempt to examine the reasons for this avoidance at a deeper level, I will turn to Hauerwas's reliance on the concepts of narrative and tradition employed by Alasdair MacIntyre. I contend that Hauerwas's MacIntyrean framework for conceptualizing story and community also frame the way he views race—race as a tradition—and, therefore, fund his reticence in avoiding the issue.

2.1 Rival Racial Traditions
I believe that Hauerwas's claim that the black story is not his own is influenced by his MacIntyrean disposition to see the two stories of white American and black America (or the white church/theology and black church/theology) as two "rival traditions." That is, for

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[16] *TT*, 23.
[17] Baldwin, *Notes*, 42.

Hauerwas, blackness and whiteness become two rival and incommensurable traditions of moral inquiry. Each contains its own internal coherency and grammar, evident by his confoundedness at the way Malcolm X deployed what appeared to be the same language as white racists to goad his mostly black audience to action and self-sufficiency. The same words operated in different and incommensurable registers, or language games, because of the skin color of who was speaking. Cone's appeal to distinctively black sources for theological reflection—black theologians, Negro spirituals and the blues, and native folks stories—would also only contribute to this sense that black experience constitutes a bounded culture and tradition that is not porous or comprehensible. Thus, the "white" story and "black" story cannot be integrated or viewed as two sides of one same story, but must be negotiated within their own incommensurate grammars in the competitive and agonistic manner MacIntyre charts. In order to better understand this impact, it will be beneficial to outline MacIntyre's thought on this issue a bit more deeply—why systems of thought and practice do not exist within a structure of universal rationality, but within a "tradition," and how then these divergent traditions might relate and negotiate their diverse, and often competing, moral and truth claims.

2.2 MacIntyre and Tradition

The central claim of MacIntyre's classic, *After Virtue,* is that the project of modernity to construct a universal and impersonal ethic failed.[18] All questions of truth are situated; they are constrained by the social context in which they are asked. In this sense, all moral questions and judgments are bound within a tradition. MacIntyre famously defines a tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition."[19] Every tradition maintains its own conception of the good, inherent to its own modes of reasoning, with no common reason—no universal rationality—by which to adjudicate claims between traditions; thus, most traditions will hold rival and incommensurable conceptions of the good.

Despite this inevitable incommensurability, MacIntyre still recommends a method by which diverse traditions might engage with one another, through a process of immanent critique. In this scenario a member of one tradition would need to learn to think immanently within a tradition not her own, adopting this alternative tradition like a "second first language." After gaining fluency in the moral claims and reasoning of this alternative, rival tradition, the member could then identify the problems "unresolved and unsolved by the standards of that [other] tradition" and determine within the logic of this other tradition why those problems

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[18] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, x.

[19] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 222. Each tradition must "be open to having to give an account of what one has either said or done, and then to having to amplify, explain, defend, and if necessary, either modify or abandon that account" (*Three Rival Versions*, 201).

cannot be adequately resolved by employing the language of that tradition.[20] If the problems are irresolvable precisely because of some shortcoming or shortcomings in the other tradition, and the member's own tradition possesses the means of overcoming them, then it is "possible for one such tradition to defeat another in respect of the adequacy of its claims to truth and to rational justification," whether or not adherents of that other tradition ever realize it.[21] The first tradition must "[identify] as its failures and limitations what are failures and limitations in [the other's native] terms, not in its."[22] Ultimately, and important to highlight for my purposes, in this mode of moral inquiry in which rival, potentially incommensurable truth or moral claims are adjudicated, one system of thought and practice—one tradition—emerges as rationally superior by revealing that a counter standpoint fails in its own terms and by its own standards.[23]

Also important, for MacIntyre and then for Hauerwas, the concepts of tradition and narrative and inextricably intertwined; the coherence and explanatory power of a tradition's narrative is what constitutes that tradition. A tradition "not only embodies the narrative of an argument, but it is only to be recovered by an argumentative retelling of that narrative which will itself be in conflict with other argumentative retellings."[24] Thus, the moral inquirer of one tradition must uncover an epistemological crisis, or narrative incoherence, within another tradition.[25]

MacIntyre posits this model as an alternative to the "encyclopaedic" view of the Enlightenment moderns that coincided nicely with the colonialist impulse that helped trigger the racial imagination as outlined by Willie Jennings (see also, however, Jennings' criticism of the concept of "tradition" below). MacIntyre says these encyclopaedists' theory and practice of moral inquiry precluded them from entertaining the notion that, "for example, a Polynesian

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[20] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, xii.

[21] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, xii.

[22] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 181.

[23] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 5.

[24] MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 146. The injection of a new narrative is able to resolve the epistemological crisis of a tradition if it 1) provides a solution to previously intractable problems within a tradition, 2) furnishes a explanation of the problem, that is, what rendered the tradition incoherent, and 3) does so in a way that suggests the continuity of these new concepts and structures with the tradition's previous ones (MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 362.

[25] "The rational superiority of that tradition to rival traditions is held to reside in its capacity not only for identifying and characterizing the limitations and failures of that rival tradition as judged by that rival tradition's own standards, limitations, and failures which that rival tradition itself lacks the resources to explain or understand, but also for explaining and understanding those limitations and failures in some tolerably precise way" (MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 181).

view of Europeans might be rationally superior to a European view of Europeans."[26] His implicit point is that in the modern, enlightened, "encyclopaedic" ethos, a cultural (and hence, racial) hierarchy already preexisted and gave form to the model of adjudicating truth claims or competing moral claims between two sets of people. One set was already deemed superior. A "traditioned" approach levels the initial epistemological playing field, so to speak. MacIntyre believes his model is more amenable to those of us seeking a more inclusive, more just, and less hierarchical mode for assessing critiques and claims and ultimately arriving at some form of reconciliation. Any tradition must be reflexive enough to be open to full critique from other communities and traditions, and pliable enough to be accountable to those other communities, and willing to adapt to new contextual circumstances. Willis Jenkins slightly augments MacIntyre's notion of tradition to claim, "Traditions endure by producing change. They are not static repositories of beliefs and symbols, but embodied patterns of life, the meaning of which is carried through ongoing response to contextual changes." Traditions host negotiations over the meanings and histories of those patterns, and the legitimacy of responses to new contexts and new crises.[27] In this sense, this model of tradition appears commensurate with not only the epistemological assumptions, but perhaps also amenable to the goals of both Hauerwas and Cone. A tradition, and thus a community of people, must be willing to account for its failures and modify or abandon practices deemed to be a failure. This would also seem to be agreeable to claims that the white church and white theologians must accept accountability for the wrongdoings—and surely they are now deemed to be failures by all accounts—perpetuated by a culture of white supremacy that they helped to compose.

Still, one observes in this description, the hyper-competitive language and goal of seeking rational superiority. One tradition/community must attend to the rival tradition's strongest claims and present one's own claims with full transparency in order to be vindicated—and vindication or victory is the goal. While each tradition proceeds in vulnerability, it still proceeds competitively, like a team of linemen on a football field, searching out the points of weakness in its rival group of linemen across the line of scrimmage.[28] At his most agonistic, MacIntyre describes the encounter between rival traditions with a quote from Dante: "that narrative prevails over its rivals which is able to include its rivals within it, not only to retell their stories as episodes within its story, but to tell the story of the telling of their stories as

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[26] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 182.
[27] Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, 21.
[28] Lest this metaphor cause confusion to any misguided British reader, I want to reinforce that this is an image of an American football game, in which players do not run around for 90 minutes often with nothing of substance on the scoreboard to mark their efforts.

such episodes."[29] In other words, there is a hegemonic impulse at work here. There will be winners and losers.

2.3 Criticizing "Tradition"

Willie Jennings argues that the notion of tradition already exhibits a racially coded language. Especially in the way that theologians like Hauerwas have adopted MacIntyre's comparative model of tradition, they enter into the performance of white, masculine hegemonic subjectivity, since this modern concept developed alongside the notion of race. "I am reading current deployments of tradition in theology and philosophy as a signature within a wider coordination of semiotic spaces that enable modern meanings of men, white and black and all those in between," he argues. "The idea of tradition in this regard functions like a gun in masculine imaginaries as a technology of subject and racial formation."[30] As tradition signifies a coherent vision for evaluating people, their cultural goods, and their rationalities, and allows for ways sort people into insiders and outsiders—that is, to imagine people existing inside and outside of traditions—it is predicated on masculine and racially charged notions of comparison that developed alongside the modern capitalist market economy. Despite the abstruse nature of Jennings' argument, I suspect that he has the hyper-competitive, agonistic methodology of MacIntyre's concept of tradition in mind when he makes these claims. Communities are rivals always out to defeat and conquer one another, to win out over against the 'other', even if MacIntyre's model allows for flexibility, development, and immanent self-criticism within a community.

In *The Christian Imagination*, Jennings analyzes MacIntyre's concept of tradition in light of the theologically-infused New World colonialism that triggered white supremacy. Initially, he doesn't criticize the concept of tradition as much as he criticizes the ways that MacIntyre is blind to the impacts of colonialism and imperialism on the tradition of European Christianity: "not seeing the effects on the Christian tradition triggered by the modernist elements" at the beginning of colonialism.[31] His does not seem to be a criticism of the notion of tradition as such, rather specifically a criticism of the imperialist formation of the (white) Christian tradition. As he puts it evocatively, "The inner coherence of traditioned Christian inquiry was grafted onto the inner coherence of colonialism."[32] He warns that, in light of the way Christianity was captive to a colonialist and racist logic from this point forward, theologians need a new calibration of the Christian tradition that accounts for its ascendance to hegemony, one that ought to throw Euro-American theology into the type of

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[29] MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions*, 81.
[30] Willie Jennings, "The Traditions of Race Men," *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 112 no. 4, Fall 2013, 613-624. This quotes appears on 616.
[31] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 70.
[32] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 83.

epistemological crisis MacIntyre describes in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*[33] Jennings' critique points to the failure of the Christian tradition to recognize this internal crisis and reform itself in light of its racist vestments, and this perhaps signals the failure of MacIntyre's confidence in the ability of a tradition—as an ongoing argument—to correct its own course. But it is important to note, again, that here the failure does not lie in the concept of tradition as such, but only in traditions' tendencies to be radically blind to its own shortcomings, failures, and incoherencies. Later in this mongraph, however, Jennings returns to the criticism he proffered previously and identifies a dangerous flaw in the concept: the evaluative power MacIntyre grants to traditions. He observes that "according to MacIntyre, tradition, in this case Christian tradition(s), carries within itself the apparatus of judgment," that is, the ability to judge its practices, practitioners, and tools of evaluation. But once European theology adopted a colonialist impulse and lens, its apparatus of judgment became defined and determined by this colonialist and racist moment: tradition served as a tool for sorting and evaluating the degree of normativity among groups of people, based on characteristics like skin color. The ability to judge now turned European Christianity's evaluative gaze comprehensively onto the bodies of the new, native, and darker bodies it encountered in the new worlds.[34] This judgment-gone-awry dimension of tradition abets the agonistic nature of tradition that I am attempting to highlight here.[35]

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[33] See pp. 361-362.

[34] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 107.

[35] In a recent article in defense of MacIntyre ("Alasdair MacIntyre and Radically Dialogical Politics," *Political Theology* vol. 17 no. 3 (2016), 243-263), Ryan Andrew Newson attempts to soften this hyper-competitive description of MacIntyre in an effort to make him more palatable to critics like Jennings. He argues that granting more attention to MacIntyre's often-neglected later work in *Dependent Rational Animals*, rather than the famous trilogy (that I, admittedly, have focused on in this project as well), depicts a more sanguine MacIntyre. In this later work, MacIntyre is more hopeful about cross-traditioned dialogue based on a recognition of our dependence on one another. He advocates for forms of local politics that approach conversation leading to agreement about the goods we share in common across traditions through a lens of mutual dependence. And while this does not necessarily "save" MacIntyre from these criticisms, it does suggest that allowing the notion of tradition to shape how one perceives communities and stories does not damn those communities to siloed enclaves of agonistic rivals. The notion of tradition does not necessarily preclude constructive dialogue across diverse communities in search of a common good. And here, if I were to attend in greater detail to this question, the work of radical democrats like Romand Coles or Sheldon Wolin may be helpful (as Newson recommends), or even the writing of John Howard Yoder on moral practical reasoning, as I have argued elsewhere. Yoder outlines the elements of proper communal "moral practical reasoning" as an open context, freedom of speech for both parties, non-coercive deliberation, the intention of reconciliation, inclusion of external voices from outside the community for mediation, as well as special attention to minority opinions and the "voiceless" (see Norris, "Democracy & Church: Barth and Yoder on Democratic Practice," in *Theo-Politics*, as well as Yoder, *Body Politics*, 61, 66; and *The Priestly Kingdom*, 28.

2.4 The Witness of Whiteness

Now having explored the competitive, agonistic nature of MacIntyre's concept of tradition, I will turn more directly to the way Hauerwas's adoption of this tradition model impacts his avoidance of race. One consequence of viewing whiteness and blackness as incommensurable, and perhaps rival, traditions is Hauerwas's concern that the white tradition/story will win out. Hauerwas's traditioned perspective on the white and black story is meant to be descriptive: this is the way the world, and its disparate cultures, societies, and ethnicities operate. The world has made them inherently disparate and competitive—and history has certainly proved this to be the case. In this situation of inescapable rivalry between these stories, Hauerwas is concerned that whites will take over, at worst, and use the black story for their own agenda, at best. It seems for him, whites can do no other; they never have. Even the best-intentioned white liberals cannot shed this unconscious tendency. Hauerwas's eschewal of any language that smells of liberalism adds to this constrained imagination. Evident also in his disavowal of egalitarianism earlier in section two, this polemic against liberalism appears to constrain his confrontation with racism, rather than permit him to see that the racism within the church has been more damaging and malformative than liberalism. Yet surprisingly, even his high view of the church and disposition toward sanctification do not seem capable of overcoming this compulsion toward violence toward non-whites. Therefore, his solution to this inevitable impasse of race is avoidance.

But this account of race relations is simply too agonistic. A tradition necessarily strives to out-narrate and defeat another. Jeffrey Stout observes this astutely, arguing that for Hauerwas, "rational discourse must proceed within a framework that accords [his] own point of view legitimacy over against its competitors." This is true, he indicates, both in Hauerwas's polemical rhetoric, but also in the content of that rhetoric. That is, according to Stout, for Hauerwas there is no possibility of a noncompetitive inter-traditional discourse, or what Stout calls, a "loosely structured democratic conversation in which variously situated selves tell their own stories on their own terms."[36] Such a practice is impossible on Hauerwas's terms. Despite the fact that Stout also eschews appeals to universal grammars that might mediate such discussions when he makes claims about "democratic conversations," Hauerwas does not seem to have a framework for engaging this type of dialogue that would not lean on some foundational universal rationality. And while these concerns about a larger, universal, pre-negotiated canon remain justified, Hauerwas's MacIntyrean captivity limits his imagination of cross-cultural and interracial co-narration. MacIntyre's concept of tradition is not a helpful framework for conceiving of race. And a captivity to a MacIntyrean model seems to lead only to these two responses: avoidance of the issue in order to prevent a clash of cultures or a posture of colorblindness that seeks to mitigate these culture distinctions but glosses over all

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[36] Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 179.

difference in the process. And though Hauerwas chooses the former, they both originate from the same underlying conceptual structure.

In addition, Hauerwas's MacIntyrean understanding of narrative is too agonistic to be faithful to Christianity, even to the Christian apologetic tradition. Apologetics, as Nicholas Healy argues, has historically been the work of demonstrating the attractiveness of the Gospel.[37] Jesus calls his followers to "Come and see."[38] This is consistent with Hauerwas's ecclesiology, which suggests that the truth of the Christian community's claims can only be verified by the life of the community itself. There is no need, Healy suggests, for Hauerwas to take another, more aggressive, step forward and claim that Christianity as a tradition of inquiry must out-narrate and demonstrate the inferiority of all other traditions. This is too defensive for a tradition that believes God works everything out for the good,[39] and too defensive (or driven by fear) to offer any possibility for reconciliation with other traditions. And this seems to apply to Hauerwas's configuration of race as well. A side effect of this MacIntyrean captivity, according to Healy, is that this also causes Hauerwas to not adequately reflect on the concrete lives of congregations, an abstraction that he himself would criticize it, if he had eyes to perceive it.[40] Perhaps more attention to worldly, concrete reality would help to overcome a rather abstract notion of the possibilities of inter-tradition (and thus, interracial) dialogue and agreement.

Cone's project pushes Hauerwas to circumvent this MacIntyrean paradigm of social analysis and attend to the concrete realities of whiteness and blackness—to see that the witness of whiteness that Hauerwas projects is not a neutral avoidance of the issue but a witness that contributes to the dangerous colorblind racism pervading society. Such attention would involve, perhaps, seeing that the MacIntyrean model that he employs, as Jennings insists, is itself a product of whiteness, and his captivity to that model is a consequence of his uninterrogated whiteness. The invisible witness of Hauerwas's whiteness is a theological ethics that occasionally addresses racism (and admits his own racism) as a symptom of liberalism, or a consequence of an insufficient accounting of God's sovereignty, but is reflexively unable to illuminate the ways its embeddedness in whiteness has sculpted the story he tells. This is surprising for a scholar as self-reflective as Hauerwas, who models the vulnerability that MacIntyre prescribes, but emits a blindness to the morally, epistemologically, and theologically formative consequences of his own whiteness. This betrays the particularity that Hauerwas himself prescribes, which we can understand as a deep attention to the complexities of our formative narratives in distinction from the universal narratives that attempt to eclipse these

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[37] Healy, 107.
[38] John 1:39.
[39] Romans 8.28.
[40] Healy, 109.

particularities. The particularity of Hauerwas's witness becomes a white-washed universalism incapable of digging deep enough to uncover the points at which that whiteness takes over and blinds him—and most white theologians—to our own particularity of privilege. This is one of the lessons of Cone for white theology: even Hauerwas cannot escape the pretension to universality that plagues all of white theology. And Hauerwas's predisposition toward MacIntyre's model simply posits a language and structural mechanism that helps to justify his—and our—avoidance.

Cone's insights also press on an ecclesiological concern for Hauerwas. If the stories of the white and black church are so far apart that Hauerwas understands himself incapable of engaging in the black story without taking it over, doesn't that signal an insufficiency in his notion of church?[41] Hauerwas's racial evasion relates back to the criticisms of Hauerwas's methodology and ecclesiology that Willis Jenkins issued in chapter one, and actually propels Hauerwas into another type of unhelpful abstraction. Jenkins notes, "Because concrete responsiveness to social context does not matter for the church's performance of itself, Hauerwas's church seems not just alien but disembodied."[42] That is, Hauerwas's church appears to be the closed-off culture that Tanner and others criticize him of proffering—or at least a concept of church that floats above the concrete and lived reality of people in the pews. The reality of the church is much more textured than he often allows, and admits of an internal pluralism—the intersection of many formative stories interacting in various ways to shape a particular community (see my fuller comments on this in chapter three). For Hauerwas's ecclesiology to be able to engage more fully with non-white dimensions of the church and not veer into these abstractions, he needs to attend to the embodied and empirical reality of the church—its real struggles (and not just against liberalism), real practices, and real bodies marked in real ways. However, as I will argue in the remainder of this chapter, Cone himself is not immune to abstractions when it comes to his conceptualization of race.

3 Cone's Blackness: Ontological and Open
3.1 The Story-Formed James Cone

If Hauerwas's MacIntyrean influence is evident in the way in which he argues that communities are story-formed, and thus continues to shape the way he envisions the difficulty of cross-narrative dialogue (and thus racial dialogue) as I have attempted to argue here, then it is equally important to uncover this emphasis on story in Cone's theology. I argue that this theme is actually more native to Cone and has been a driving influence in his theology from

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[41] I thank Joe Lenow for pressing me on this point.
[42] Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, 101.

the beginning because of his upbringing in the black church.[43] One of Cone's students, James Evans, writes that the black religious experience has been "story-shaped" from its beginning.[44] And Cone is often eager to note his indebtedness to the spiritual and theological influence of Macedonia A.M.E. Church in Bearden, Arkansas. Cone was reared in a spiritual environment in which *story* was key. Recall his words from chapter four: "The Christian life is not identified with doctrine but with story–in fact, with the story of Jesus. And that story is what black people could access."[45]

Cone highlights the theological importance of narrative–and the narrative formation of community–at many points. This is especially true when he begins his turn to organic African American sources for his theological reflection during the writing of *The Spirituals and the Blues*. His most succinct elucidation of this point comes in an article on story and black theology a few years after the publication of this text. Cone begins the article by reiterating the situatedness of theology: "Because Christian theology is human speech about God, it is always related to historical situations." Theological speech is always culturally limited by history and time, and thus, "it is not universal language; it is interested language, always reflecting the values and aspirations of a particular people in a particular time and place."[46] This means that black theology must organically follow the form and style of the community that gave birth to and continues to shape it. And for black theology, this community is the black church. "The form of black religious thought is expressed in the style of story," he observes. "White theologians built logical systems; black folks told tales."[47] The problems inherent to black liberation–that is the problems of slavery, Jim Crow, and surviving white supremacy–could not be resolved through philosophical debate; these problems were more urgent and had to be addressed at the level of concrete history. Cone describes how slaves spoke through the language of story because that was the form commensurate with their social situation. "Through the medium of stories," he writes, "black slaves created concrete and vivid pictures of their past and present existence, using historical images of God's dealings with his people and thus breaking open a future for the oppressed not known to ordinary historical observation."[48] But this appeal to story was not only out of necessity, because other grammars were closed off. Rather, it was also itself a form of rebellion because it allowed them to "defy conceptual definitions that justif[ied] their existence in servitude" by forming stories that humanized them while it also was "deceptive to those who stand outside the community

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[43] I thank Mike Broadway for helping me to focus on the role of story in Cone's work.
[44] See James Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
[45] Cone interview.
[46] Cone, "The Story Context of Black Theology," *Theology Today*, vol. 32 no. 2 (July 1975) 144-150; 144.
[47] "Story Context of Black Theology," 145.
[48] "Story Context of Black Theology," 146.

where it was created."[49] This language game is sometimes called 'signifying' in the African American community because it expressed truth through innuendo or indirection while identifying a symbolic historical marker with a present reality. For example, Cone writes about the ways appeals to biblical locations like heaven or the Jordan River in slave songs were actually references to specific earthly places like Canada, the Ohio River, or locations on the underground railroad, where slaves might physically escape.[50]

Story formed the medium through which these truths were communicated and became part of the truth itself. In words similar to Hauerwas, Cone claims that the reality of the story is revealed in the telling of the story.[51] This is why the story-teller is so important in black faith: the preacher in black churches must be able to recite God's historical dealings with his people and relate these biblical stories to contemporary black stories. In the sermon, "The past and present are joined dialectically, creating a black vision of the future."[52] And similar to Hauerwas's insistence that "the test of each story is the sort of person it shapes,"[53] Cone also claims that the truth of the story is dependent on the transformative effect it has on the community that hears the story.[54]

Therefore, while Cone and Hauerwas arrive at the prominence of narrative from different sources and via different routes, they both arrive at a point where story is a central aspect of their theology. And while Hauerwas has garnered more attention for this focus as a narrative theologian, it could be argued that Cone's insistence on story is more native and organic to his theological community. Andrew Prevot argues that the slave spirituals are integral to Cone's theology, "foundational to his overarching perspective and inseparable from his sense of his own identity." The doxology of the spirituals is constitutive of his theology, and this is a narrative doxology. The spirituals not only sustained the self-narration of African American history through the trauma of slavery, but also helped create that narrative in very concrete ways, Cone argues, by narrating specific paths of escape and upholding particular stories of redemption.[55] Even more, Cone understands himself as an internal participant in the

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[49] "Story Context of Black Theology," 150.

[50] *SB*, 79. For more on 'signifying' see Tim Sensing, "African American Preaching," *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry* 7 (Winter/Spring 2001), pp. 38-53, as well as the classic text by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[51] "Story Context of Black Theology," 150.

[52] "Story Context of Black Theology," 147.

[53] *TT*, 35.

[54] "Story Context of Black Theology," 149.

[55] For the way spirituals signposted actual paths of slave escape (locations of stops on the underground railroad, for example) see Cone's *The Spirituals and the Blues*.

narrative of the slave spirituals. These are not texts from the past, but a "form of living memory," that make up the story of which he is part.[56]

In this section I identified the central role story plays in Cone's theology, as well as the organic path by which Cone arrives at his emphasis on narrative. For both theologians, this emphasis on story focuses their attention on the particularity of the community and the concrete realties and practices of that community. In the final chapter of this dissertation I will show how this mutual communal focus engenders specific church practices capable of a deep racial reconciliation. Still, it is important to note the different origins of their respective foci on story. Earlier in this chapter I argued that Hauerwas's notion of narrative, derived from MacIntyre, while potentially helpful for racial reconciliation, has actually enabled his move toward abstraction and avoidance of race. Here I wanted to show that Cone's vision of story, developed from and within the black church community, avoids the problematic agonistic nature of Hauerwas's account. Yet, Cone is also not immune to abstraction. Like Hauerwas, despite his best intentions and commitments to the concrete, Cone's notion of race also veers into abstraction—in different ways. The remainder of this section will explore this issue.

3.2 Race in the Making

Most criticisms of Cone's project generally follow a similar thread. And like my criticism of Hauerwas, these also deal with Cone's configuration of race. Catholic womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland identifies the crux of this criticism by suggesting that the concept of race in Cone's project functions ambiguously. It is difficult to pin down what he means by race or what race represents in his work. She is particularly concerned that sometimes he seems to refer to it as an objective condition or essential attribute.[57] In order to better understand the general critique I will offer in this chapter, and before investigating it more deeply, it may be necessary to illuminate what Copeland means when she refers to Cone's offering an objective or essential view of race.

Many scholars point to two dominant historical conceptions of race. It was during the Enlightenment that Europeans first encountered darker skinned people during their colonialist ventures. In their new negotiations with human alterity, Enlightenment thinkers quickly correlated mental and moral capabilities with skin tone, positing their own skin color as normative. Any deviance from this normalized white skin was deemed degenerative, and a racial ordering was quickly generated that encompassed all aspect of human being and configured them by skin color. "Africans, depicted as dark-skinned, having typically thicker

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[56] Andrew Prevot, *Thinking Prayer: Theology and Spirituality Amid the Crisis of Modernity* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), 293.

[57] M. Shawn Copeland, "Race," *Blackwell Companion to Modern Theology*, ed. Gareth Jones, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 508.

lips, broader noses, and more coarse hair, were far from [the] ideal form," writes Anthony Pinn. "By implication, Africans were inferior in beauty to Europeans, who more closely resembled this subjective ideal." Physiognomy connected physical attributes to moral character and capabilities, and during the eighteenth century, the development of "phrenology (the reading of skull shapes) argued for a connection between the size of the skull and the depth of character."[58] White skin and black skin took on normative meanings—intellectual, moral, and aesthetic: "White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the devil."[59] Enlightenment and colonialist logic rendered race an objective reality, awarding it scientific, biological merit. Race was an independent factor from any social and historical conditions that may shape our perceptions of a person's race, and, it began to "function as a universal evaluative tool to measure human hierarchy."[60] However, as many scholars have now contested, this concept of race was too simplistic, and failed to account for problems of categorization within its purview—persons with mixed ethnic heritage, ways that race has been imposed on other cultures to account for vocational difference (as in the Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda, to disastrous effect)[61]—as well as the ways that social and historical elements are always shifting the definitions within this fixed, biological objectivity.

An alternative, even opposite, account of race, is to explain it as an "ideological construct;" race has no basis in reality and is simply the result of biased thinking.[62] It does not scientifically, objectively exist. We are all the same beneath the skin. While it may seem that this concept of race was a well-intentioned effort to avoid the essentializing problems of thinking of race biologically, this rendering of race as an illusion risks marking racism and the concrete effects of racism as illusory as well. It leads to unfounded criticisms of works like Affirmative Action and undercuts efforts at racial justice. This concept, the progenitor of

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[58] Anthony Pinn, *Terror and Triumph: The Nature of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 3.
[59] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 7-8.
[60] Copeland, "Race," 501.
[61] "The antagonism between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi is not a tribal conflict. It is not, properly speaking, an ethnic conflict. By all the most common definitions, Hutus and Tutsis are the same people, which makes their violent history even more tragically incomprehensible to outsiders. Yet outsiders may be partly to blame. Differences between the communities were greatly emphasised by the European invaders of Rwanda and Burundi, first Germans then Belgians, as an instrument of colonial rule. Hutus and Tutsis have the same language; the same religion; the same culture. They have lived intermingled for centuries on the same land, in the most densely populated part of sub-Saharan Africa. Before the coming of the Europeans, the minority Tutsis were mostly, but not all, aristocratic herders of cattle; the majority Hutus were mostly, but not all, peasant tillers of the soil" (John Lichfield, "The difference between a Hutu and a Tutsi," *Independent*, Nov. 15, 1996, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/guide-to-the-zaire-crisis-the-difference-between-a-hutu-and-a-tutsi.
[62] Copeland, "Race," 501.

contemporary "colorblindness," proves insufficient to resist the effects of "epidermalized thinking." It is a disembodied concept of race that may be inadequate to deal with the concrete effects of racism—the responses people inflict and endure because of skin tone.

In contrast to the two poles of race as an objective reality or an "ideological construct," Copeland among others advocate for the concept of race understood as a social construct. Michael Omi and Howard Winant labeled this third, mediating concept racial formation.[63] Copeland defines racial formation as "the complex, historically situated process by which human bodies and social structures are represented and arranged, and how race is linked to the way in which society is organized and ruled."[64] Understanding race as a social structure and manner of cultural representation escapes the twin extremes of race as either essence or illusion. Race, rather, is the result of a process of racial habitus: the perception of phenotypical distinctions reduced these perceived differences in culture and skin tone to the concept of "race." Jennifer Harvey, whom I referenced in the opening chapter as a core foil and ally for my project, offers a clear summary of this account of race. She suggests that race exists at the meeting point of certain bodily features and the act of seeing and profiling based on these features. "Race becomes real—it is built, or constructed—as physical attributes are *given* meaning."[65] It is not that skin tone or hair type per se are meaningful themselves; rather they gain meaning insofar as they are the reference point for the allocation of power and resources.[66] This sense is captured in James Baldwin's claim: "[They] have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white. Because they think they are white, they do not dare confront the ravage and the lie of their history. Because they think they are white, they cannot allow themselves to be tormented by the suspicion that all men are brothers."[67] But this perception of racial formation still acknowledges race as a category that has real effects in the everyday lived experience of human beings. This accounts for race as a shifting, complex concept, while also admitting that race is something that we see, that we have been taught to see. Howard Winant contends that society is "so thoroughly racialized that to be without racial identity is to be in danger of having no identity."[68] Every intense to mundane interaction becomes racially coded and then this social conditioning determines

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[63] See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States, from the 1960s to the 1990s,* 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge Publishing, 1994).

[64] Copeland, "Race," 502.

[65] Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2014), 46.

[66] Harvey, 47.

[67] James Baldwin, "On Being White and Other Lies," *The Cross of Redemption: Uncollected Writings*, ed. Randall Kenan (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010), 137.

[68] Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 5; quoted in Copeland, "Race" by chapter title, "Theoretical Status of the Concept of Race."

how we respond to people and institutions. Therefore, it is a social construct, but one that represents significant meaning in the world, and has real effects. Emilie Townes agrees with this notion of "racial formation," arguing that race "is a complicated and interstructured set of social meanings that are always being transformed by political struggle."[69]

What is important to see here is that race and racism began simultaneously in a symbiotic relationship that continues to be uncoupled today. This is especially true when it comes to the history of the church and theological justification for a racial system that was inherently "racist" from the beginning. The concept of race was a product of white supremacy from the start. From the time that Europeans began encountering darker skinned people during their colonialist ventures, and theologians began reflecting on this expanded sense of anthropological alterity, Christian formation has been configured around white bodies. As Willie Jennings argues, this "ordering of existence from white to black . . . signifies much more than the beginnings of racial formation on a global scale." It creates a "distorting vision of creation [that] will lodge itself in Christian thought, damaging doctrinal trajectories." All elements of theology, properly understood as white theology from this point on, are inextricable from this "diseased imagination." This is Cone's crucial point, and one that Hauerwas and most white theologians fail to deal with sufficiently. Out of this distortion of creation, "whiteness emerges, not simply as a marker of the European," Jennings argues, "but as the rarely spoken but always understood organizing conceptual frame. And blackness appears as the fundamental tool of that organizing conceptuality. Black bodies are the ever-visible counterweight of a usually invisible *white* identity."[70]

With this history of the making of race and racism in mind, now turning back to James Cone, Copeland worries that race functions ambiguously in Cone's work, that he often shifts back into the essentializing notion of race.[71] In his treatment of blackness as something inherent to the particular experience, culture, and suffering of a specific group of people, Cone may fall prey to the same concept of race that white supremacists used initially to oppress darker skinned people in the first place.

3.3 Criticisms of Cone: Victor Anderson, J. Kameron Carter, and Ontological Blackness
Victor Anderson and J. Kameron Carter have provided the most thorough critiques of Cone along these lines, challenging what Anderson deems Cone's promotion of "ontological blackness."[72] "Ontological blackness," Anderson claims, "is a covering term that connotes

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[69] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 65.

[70] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 25.

[71] Copeland, "Race," 508.

[72] While numerous criticisms of Cone have been levied from scholars of black theology and black religion, I will focus almost exclusively on these two for the way they set the terms fro my own

categorical, essentialist, and representational languages depicting black life and experience."[73] It is a racial reification, a retreat back to the early objectivist conceptions of race, treating race as if it exists independent of "historically contingent factors and subjective intentions" and "admit[s] no possibility of transcendence or mediation."[74] While Anderson commends Cone's understanding of black collective consciousness as revolutionary and liberatory, he worries that Cone's concept of blackness is identified exclusively with black experience, and black experience is identified as the experience of suffering, along with occasional black resistance to oppression. Black theology, then, becomes a theology of crisis and one fully encapsulated within the immanent frame.[75] The dialectic of black suffering and survival became the substantive content of black theology, and if survival and struggle are the sole objects, any notion of transcendence fades to the background. This is because, Anderson argues, ontological blackness is bound to whiteness and the objectivist sense of blackness that white supremacy nurtured: "Black existence is without the possibility of transcendence from the blackness that whiteness created," and therefore, fails to demonstrate how cultural transcendence over white supremacy is possible.[76] Further, this grounds black experience completely in whiteness and therefore "requires whiteness, white racism, and white theology for the self disclosure of its new black being and its legitimacy."[77] In sum, whiteness determines the being of blackness. As Anderson argues:

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assessment to follow. It is also worth noting that since the publication of his *Race: A Theological Account*, in which he criticizes Cone, Carter has retracted this critique and changed his mind about Cone. He is currently working on a new project on Cone, but has yet to publish anything revealing this new position.

[73] Victor Anderson, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay in African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (New York: Continuum Books, 1995), 11.

[74] Anderson writes, "Ontological blackness is a philosophy of racial consciousness. It is governed by dialectical matrices that existentially structure African Americans' self-conscious perceptions of black life. Under ontological blackness, the conscious lives of blacks are experienced as bound by unresolved binaries dialectics of slavery and freedom, negro and citizen, insider and outsider, black and white, struggle and survival" (14).

[75] Anderson, 103. Cone comes close, Anderson worries, to identifying black culture with the Christ event by placing it as the central element of black theology (Anderson, 90). Brian Bantam also worries that Cone "positions Black Theology as a perpetual space of self-preservation." And like Anderson, he contends that Cone "distill[s] the totality of Jesus' person and ministry into the negotiation of a politically oppressive reality" in such a way that Jesus' redemptive work is overwhelmed by Cone's experiential framework" (Bantam, *Redeeming Mulatto*, 5, 4.

[76] Anderson, 92.

[77] Anderson, 91. This is a criticism that Cone has acknowledged and even pursued against his earliest writings. Cone admits that black theology at first was too much of a reaction to racism in white churches and society. It "was being created out of a negative reaction to whites rather than as a positive reaction to the history and culture of blacks" (*FMP*, 87). This doesn't completely ameliorate Anderson's concern, however, because retreating to the opposite—an identification of blackness solely with black experience—merely reformulates the same problem from the other side.

When black life is fundamentally determined by the totality of a binary racial dialectic that admits no possibility of cultural transcendence, then African American theologians hold few prospects for effectively ameliorating the social and existential crises that bind black life. Talk about liberation becomes hard to justify where freedom appears as nothing more than defiant self-assertion of a revolutionary racial consciousness that requires for its legitimacy the opposition of white racism.[78]

In other words, Cone's concept of blackness is a blackness produced by whiteness, which actually delimits the range of possibilities for black identity formation.[79] It is deeply and inescapably embedded within the white Euro-American racial reasoning, and unable to transcend its captivity to a dialectical relationship with whiteness, even when it attempts to return to distinctively African American and African sources.

According to J. Kameron Carter, this problem arises because Cone remains a dialectical thinker (he began as a Barth scholar), wherein the *I* (that is, whiteness) still and always maintains its dominant and determining power.[80] Carter laments this as a "settlement with whiteness, not its overcoming." But it is also a settlement with blackness—"a settlement with the blackness that whiteness created."[81] If black existence "reveals the human condition such that whites lose themselves as oppressors by entering into the horizon of black existence"—that is, whites can "become black" in Cone's terms by identifying themselves with the black struggle for freedom—"and, conversely, blackness itself is transformed by receiving into itself those exiting the status of whiteness, then it follows that the framework of binary separateness in an *I-Thou* structure is too deeply impoverished to even begin to explain the kind of miscegenation toward which black theology seems to gesture."[82] Put another way, Cone reduces divine transcendence to the immanent horizon of earthly struggle. Carter worries, according to Prevot's analysis, that "while reasonably seeking to validate the creaturely conditions of theology in a manner more adequate that Barth's dialecticism, Cone makes an

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[78] Anderson, 117. "Black theology constructs its new being on the dialectical structures that categorical racism and white racial ideology bequeathed [it]" (Anderson, 87). Its self identity is bound by white racism and the goal of survival, not flourishing. Anderson asks, if suffering and resistance are the goals, how does transcendence ever into the picture? "At what point do thriving and flourishing enter the equation of suffering and resistance? An existence that is bound existentially only by the dimensions of struggle and resistance or survival, it seems to me, constitutes a less than fulfilling human existence. We all want more than to survive: that is a minimal requirement of a fulfilled life. We also want to thrive and flourish" (112).

[79] This conclusion by Anderson fails to recognize the ways blackness also anterior to white supremacy, for Cone, and cannot be reduced to its product. Anderson himself later disputes this conclusion by identifying the way race works both literally and symbolically for Cone—a point I will address below.

[80] Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 171.

[81] Carter, 190.

[82] Carter, 190.

overcorrection and ultimately collapses the mystery of God into a creaturely struggle for being and authenticity."[83]

Cone inherits the problems of his early influencers Tillich and Barth—of white theology—and struggles to envisage the *I* as someone who exists apart from her oppositional relationship to the other. The relationship is necessarily set up in dialectic, perhaps even agonistic and competitive terms. The relationship, framed in this way, necessarily maintains an "oppositional struggle for the right to be hegemon"[84]—interestingly, the very concern that Hauerwas claims keeps him from engaging the black "story" due to his MacIntyrean framing of race. By envisaging race, and racial social relations in this dialectical and intrinsically competitive manner (even MacIntyrean manner) Cone trades in "zero sum terms" that he is incapable of transcending. As Anderson worries, "As long as black theology remains determined by ontological blackness, it remains not only a crisis theology but also a theology in a crisis of legitimation."[85]

This crisis of legitimation points to another concern identified but not developed fully by Anderson or Carter. Anderson observes the following contradiction in Cone's work. Cone's conception of blackness is closed off and often falls victim to the objective and essentialized notions of race promulgated by a European imperialist ideology. By collapsing metaphysics into ontology, "blackness is reified into a totality or a unity of black experience." At the same time, however, Cone's concept of blackness maintains a fluidity, a symbolic character, "so that anyone who can participate in its meaning can also said to be black."[86] Race is both an objective reality entailed by the black experience while also an abstract ideology that persons regardless of their skin color can opt into or out of. This signals again the concern of Copeland that race functions ambiguously for Cone.[87] Timothy McGee argues, more charitably, that in Cone's work, blackness is neither purely racial essence or social construction, "yet, it is linked to both, as something that traverses and unsettles the essentialist and anti-essentialist discourses of race."[88] He identifies a four-fold index of Cone's

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[83] Prevot, 297. Prevot also contends, however, that Carter is mistaken. While Cone appears ostensibly to be held captive by the immanent frame, the creatureliness of his theology is only an analogical to the doxological underpinning of his theology—its source is the concrete action of the biblically revealed God of Moses and Jesus and the prophets who liberates the oppressed (298).

[84] Carter, 191.

[85] Anderson, 87.

[86] Anderson, 91.

[87] Cone oscillates between referring to blackness and whiteness in literal and symbolic ways, yet claims he does this intentionally as a disruptive force to the way race is often employed in reductionistic modes in racial discourse.

[88] Timothy McGee, "Against (White) Redemption: James Cone and the Christological Disruption of Racial Discourse and White Solidarity," *Political Theology* (January, 2017), 9.

usage of racial terms: Blackness and whiteness as 1) identifying characteristics, 2) historical experience, 3) identification, and 4) representative symbol.[89] The first two categories lean toward a literal register, speaking of actual black-skinned people or those who have experienced anti-black violence themselves. The second two entail the symbolic register as categories of moral identification and action. Cone's oscillation between these registers lends itself to confusion over what he means precisely in any one instance. While Carter and Anderson focus on the first, ontological, register in what Anderson labels a contradiction (and their criticisms have been forcefully challenged), I believe the latter, fluid and symbolic register produces a more important—yet under-criticized—aspect of Cone's thought. I will develop this criticism in the next section.

3.4 My Analysis of Cone

Cone's dialectical thinking about race produces a concept of blackness that is concrete and objective (bound to black experience and culture), while at the same time fluid and abstract, an ideology or practice that is only morally bound (by whether or not a person chooses to enter into the black struggle for justice and liberation).[90] But, significantly, this second meaning, or blackness as ideologically or morally bound, tends to sever blackness from skin color. (In a positive sense it helpfully avoids reducing blackness exclusively to skin color, but as I will argue, it sometimes goes further and actually creates a gap between them.) While undertreated in most commentaries on Cone's work, this concept resides in his work from the beginning. Cone concludes his first published manuscript with this claim:

> Being black in America has very little to do with skin color. To be black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are. We all know that a racist structure will reject and threaten a black man in white skin as quickly as a black man in black skin. It accepts and rewards whites in black skins nearly as well as whites in white skins. Therefore, being reconciled to God does not mean that one's skin is physically black. It essentially depends on the color of your heart, soul, and mind.[91]

Cone operates simultaneously with these two meanings: the literal/physiological and the "ontological" as he calls it (though his use of the term ontological is the opposite of Anderson's use—referencing a general symbolism not a reified objectivity). He writes, "Blackness is [both] an ontological symbol and a visible reality which best describes what

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[89] McGee, 7.

[90] McGee contends that Cone's use of the universal is not an abstraction, but a movement between two particulars: the particular experience of oppression and particular revelation of Christ (9). This reading may indeed be true, and aligns with Cone's theological commitment to the particular, though I worry that this may still not shield his concept from those prone to abstraction who read this as an avenue to become black too easily.

[91] *BTBP*, 151.

oppression means in America." Therefore blackness stands in for all victims of oppression, those in need of liberation from the hegemonic and oppressive features of white America.[92] In contention with Anderson, Renee Leslie Hill claims that Cone does not offer an "ontological" blackness but an "ideological" one, by which she means a concept, not defined by struggle, but designed to cultivate a new consciousness that affirms black humanity in response to the social reality of white supremacy.[93] This seems right to me, but I want to press this claim even further, from the ideological register to the moral register.

Cone's concept of blackness is open and capacious enough not only to include those suffering from white oppression, but also those who choose to participate in the work of liberation—even on behalf of others, even if one is not oppressed herself. He claims, "all those who participate in liberation from oppression" are *black*.[94] Cone, as early as *Black Theology and Black Power* and *A Black Theology of Liberation* claims that anyone can "become black," even whites. He defines the "concept of black" as "both what the world means by oppression and what the gospel means by liberation."[95] Therefore, "a black man is anyone who says he is black despite his skin color."[96] Cone invites whites to become black because this is in fact the purpose of Christianity, or at least the purpose of theology, to draw others to "become black with God!"[97] But this means more than lip service, more than simply claiming to be black, but a joining with God in the work of liberation.[98] Becoming black is a conversion whereby whites are to reject their whiteness (i.e. tendency toward oppression) and submit to accountability to blacks

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[92] *A Black Theology of Liberation, 20th Anniversary Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 27, 7.

[93] Renee Leslie Hill, "Disrupted/Disruptive Moments: Black Theology and Black Power 1969/1999," *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 140.

[94] *BTL*, 20th ed, 204n5.

[95] *BTL*, 217.

[96] *BTL*, 124. Later, in *God of the Oppressed*, he allows that this conversion event is indeed rare (GO, 221). Becoming black requires repentance, which he, quoting Alan Richardson, defines as a "reorientation of one's whole life and personality, which includes the adoption of a new ethical line of conduct, a forsaking of sin and a turning to righteousness" (GO, 221; Alan Richardson, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1960), 191). This is not sympathy, but solidarity and sacrifice—a dying to one's self. He writes, "White converts, if there are any to be found, must be made to realize that they are like babies who have barely learned to walk and talk. They must be told when to speak and what to say, otherwise they will be excluded from our struggle" (GO, 222). However, in our interview in 2016—almost forty years after he wrote those words—he dropped the condition that whites must be told what to say. Simply their effort to speak now seems to be enough.

[97] *BTL*, 124. In his call for whites to become black Cone seems to be drawing on a tension noted by James Baldwin: "The white man's unadmitted—and apparently, to him, unspeakable—private fears and longings are projected onto the Negro. The only way he can be released from the Negro's tyrannical power over him is to consent, in effect, to become black himself" (*Fire*, 96).

[98] *BTL*, 125.

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until their "value system is now defined by the oppressed engaged in the liberation struggle."[99] This requires destroying whiteness, which means active identification with and work alongside the oppressed—the active choice to become black. In our interview, Cone insisted:

> As [James] Baldwin said, "There ain't no black and white. Ain't no race." I'm black only because you are white, you forced that. That is whiteness. Whiteness is an ideology. Skin color matters only because white people made it matter. It's white supremacy. Theologically it doesn't. We are all children of God. That's what white people, and theologians, do; that's what they want because it keeps them in power.[100]

Cone grounds this understanding of blackness theologically in his claim that Jesus was black. This is not a claim about biology, he insists, but theology.[101] Reflecting on this famous claim in a later lecture, Cone observes, "Jesus and the whole story of the Christian message is about God's solidarity with the poor and oppressed anywhere in the world."[102] The Gospel reveals that Jesus is the man "for others . . . disclosing to them what is necessary for their liberation from oppression. If this is true, then Christ must be black with black people so they can know that their liberation is his liberation."[103] Jesus in his context of living in Roman occupied territory is similar to the status of African Americans today: "Jesus is black because Jesus was a Jew in Rome." Therefore, the claim that Jesus is black is an analogy for anyone who lives under the oppression of others. To reinforce his claim about the capaciousness of blackness, he says, "It's not a literal blackness but a symbolic blackness; to say that God is a God who makes liberation possible for those who are marginalized and oppressed no matter where they are. God takes on the identity of the oppressed. That's why you can say that God is red, God is brown, God is yellow, God is gay—anything that symbolizes the victim. I chose 'black' because black identified my experience."[104]

Cone goes to lengths to explain that his claims about blackness, that Jesus is black, and that the gospel requires that people become black are not meant to exclude: "In fact whites can become identified with the black Jesus."[105] When I asked him about this in our interview he

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[99] GO, 242-243.
[100] Cone interview.
[101] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood."
[102] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood."
[103] *BTL*, 214.
[104] Cone, "God is Black in 2015." In support of this claim, he wrote: "This understanding of blackness can be seen as the most adequate symbol of the dimensions of divine activity in America. And insofar as this country is seeking to make whiteness the dominating power throughout the world, whiteness is the symbol of the Antichrist. Whiteness symbolizes the activity of deranged men intrigued by their own image of themselves, and thus unable to see that they are what is wrong with the world" (*BTL*, 20th ed., 7-8).
[105] "God is Black in 2015."

explained, "There are [white] people who have become black. Look at John Brown, those students in SNCC in Mississippi and Alabama with Stokely Carmichael and Robert Moses. They became black." I asked Cone if this was truly "becoming black" even in his symbolic sense, since white people could simply opt out of being black whenever they chose to. (I may join a Black Lives Matter march, but then I could simply drive back to the safety of my home without the same fears of being pulled over by a racist police officer or given a suspicious look by the clerk when I stopped by the convenience store.) He simply replied, "But they didn't. . . . I'm hopeful because I'm a Christian. The Gospel won't let you walk away from this." In fact, the Gospel is what gives us the power to break through our privilege and tendency to oppress and actually engage in and endure the long and difficult work of liberation. This reveals a deep and transcendent hope in the Gospel, the work of God, perhaps even the Spirit in the lives of those who attempt to follow this Black Christ—a commitment that is often overlooked in scholarship on Cone. The complicated task is to figure out what this hope looks like, the ways it is helpful, and ways it may be harmful.

Because Cone believes that blackness is an ontological symbol for all who participate in liberation from oppression,[106] my worry can be understood as the flip side of the same coin as Anderson's and Carter's criticisms. Identifying blackness with oppression opens it to be easily misinterpreted as a universality in which all could conceivably "become black" by siding with the oppressed. Cone includes liberation in this ontological blackness, which helps to avert Anderson's critique that blackness becomes identified simply with oppression or suffering, but it does not avert mine. I worry that Cone's flexible account of blackness potentially opens it up to others appropriating and insufficiently identifying with blackness.[107]

My criticism, therefore, is directed more to those who might misinterpret Cone to allow for a cheap conversion to "blackness," that is, a cheap identification with the suffering of African Americans. What I am highlighting in Cone illuminates a larger tendency that I see in many white liberals and evangelicals to associate on the side of the oppressed, or to join in solidarity with the black struggle (to become black), without the same experience, history, and culture.[108] These white Christians are eager to join in solidarity, and confident in their ability to align

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[106] *BTL*, 204n5.

[107] Andrew Prevot argues that Cone's thought is better articulated as a doxological blackness, rather than an ontological account, one that affirms the beauty of blackness and as well as aspects of black culture that affirm its relation to God (Prevot, *Thinking Prayer*, 310). This may be true—though I suspect that Prevot over-highlights the spiritual aspects of Cone's thought for his own purposes more than those aspects warrant. Still, this does not meliorate my concerns about the flexibility of his moral concept of blackness.

[108] Many thanks to Paul Jones, Ashleigh Elser, Joe Lenow, Matt Elia, and Mike Broadway for conversations which helped to clarify the argument that follows. Whatever unclarity remains is solely the fault of the author.

themselves, with the oppressed but often do not take seriously enough to power that whiteness holds, and will always hold, over them. I worry that the attempt to put on blackness without enduring the same experience and cultural history of racial oppression—to "[take] on the symbolic register of blackness severed from its particularity"[109]—may cause more harm than good.

To give an example, the danger I have in mind is similar to the literary exchange between Norman Mailer and James Baldwin in the late 50s. In his essay "The White Negro," Norman Mailer describes the post-World War II "hipster"—a figure of the beatnik culture in which Mailer includes himself—as one who "having abandoned society, finds a new set of values among Negroes" and therefore "[lives] by what he believes to be Negro values."[110] Mailer writes that the hipster has "absorbed the existentialist synapses of the Negro, and for practical purposes could be considered a white Negro."[111] Mailer's friend James Baldwin responds to Mailer's description of the "White Negro" in an essay titled "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy." According to African American literature scholar Douglas Taylor, Baldwin identifies and criticizes the ways that Mailer tries to "erase his ethnicity, often writing from the position of a racially pure, nonethnic white 'we.'"[112] Simultaneously, Baldwin counters this universalization and racial over-identification by highlighting the importance of race and ethnicity, describing himself as "a black boy from the Harlem streets," and Mailer as "a middle-class Jew."[113] Though Baldwin contests Mailer's romanticized racialism, according to Taylor, he "shuttles back and forth between a mimetic identification with Mailer based on their common status as ethnically marked writers, and a critique of Mailer for attempting to erase the mark of Jewishness."[114] Taylor concludes that despite Mailer's best attempts at identifying as Negro, "Baldwin has the black authenticity about which Mailer has claimed intimate knowledge, and can, thereby, challenge Mailer's pretensions. Mailer has the power to dominate and control; Baldwin, the power to unmask."[115]

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[109] McGee, 16.

[110] These quotes come from a review of Mailer's work by African American literature scholar Douglas Taylor, "Three Lean Cats in a Hall of Mirrors: James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, and Eldridge Cleaver on Race and Masculinity," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 52, no. 2, 2010, pp. 70-101, www.muse.jhu.edu/article/374955. I draw on Taylor's analysis and citations of the two figures in this section.

[111] Mailer, "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster," *Dissent* vol. 4 no. 3 (1957): 276-293, 278.

[112] Taylor, "Three Lean Cats in a Hall of Mirrors."

[113] James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948-85* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 289.

[114] Taylor, "Three Lean Cats in a Hall of Mirrors."

[115] Taylor, "Three Lean Cats in a Hall of Mirrors."

In fact, in an early dialogue about black theology with a former teacher, Cone himself identifies this concern. He claims, the "difficulty with white students is that they appropriate black symbols without encountering the concrete experiences which gave rise to them."[116] This statement, that closely approximates the worry that Hauerwas claims deters him from writing about race, identifies the colonizing tendency of even well-meaning white Christians eager for reconciliation. Whites are prone to move too quickly to, or more often simply abide in, the universal. We refuse to linger in the messy tensions of the particular. And it is these sorts of over-identifications without the authentic experience, even for those who have also experienced suffering—the experience of the unique suffering, history, and struggle of African Americans—that I worry may hinder any efforts at a true, deep, and costly reconciliation. And in our current state of activism and protesting in light of recent events and atrocities, I worry that this temptation is and will be even greater for well-meaning white Christians. My concern is akin to James Baldwin's critique of Uncle Tom's Cabin, that "the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience." [117] The white Christian eager for reconciliation wants unity without maintaining difference, forgiveness without repair, reconciliation without the experience of suffering. To do so, Baldwin warns, is to leave unanswered the question of what moved people to inflict such suffering in the first place—the power of uninterrogated whiteness.

3.4.1 Moral Blackness

Cone offers an open and capacious account of blackness that incorporates anyone who experiences suffering and oppression at the hands of a dominant group, or even members of that dominant group that choose to identify with the oppressed and join them in their struggle for liberation. While Cone often trades in conceptions of race that reinforce the antiquated notion of an objective reality or essential feature (as Carter, Copeland, and Anderson all note), it seems that more than often—and consistently throughout his career—he offers a generous account of blackness, not identified with an objective or ontological reality, but a subjective, symbolic, phenomenological account based on self-identity, solidarity, and the ethical practice of active resistance to injustice. To many of his white cultured despisers, this Cone is not the angry caricature they eagerly depict. This is a Cone concerned with the gospel, proffering a theological account that points to the possibility of racism, and illuminating a Kingian theological anthropology that professes that when one suffers injustice, all suffer injustice—even the white supremacists with their feet on the necks of the oppressed. This is an optimistic Cone, who may allow blackness to be defined by whiteness, but claims to define both, ultimately, by the highest ideals of our common humanity. But I worry that this generous Cone offers a too-capacious account of blackness. Does he allow for an over-

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[116] James Cone and William Horden, "Dialogue on Black Theology," *The Christian Century*, September 15, 1971, 1085; cited in McGee, 14.
[117] Baldwin, *Notes*, 14.

identification with blackness, and make it too easy to "become black?" Despite the hardened depiction of Cone we observe from his detractors, does Cone actually propose a reconciliation that is too easy to be real—not costly enough? If whites can become black by identifying and working alongside the oppressed, but can still enjoy the benefits and safety of their privilege simply because they cannot shed the color of their flesh—of my flesh—can this really be said to be a true "becoming black"? Is that really solidarity, or reconciliation?

One reading of this suggests that Anderson and Carter are doubly correct: Cone's captivity to the immanent not only locks him into an ontological concept of blackness that can only exist dialectically in response to whiteness, but that eclipse of the transcendent also locks him into a moralistic account of blackness. Blackness is determined by where one identifies in terms of Cone's chief moral criterion—standing on the side of the oppressed. With this, Cone falls into the same criticism of contemporary liberal religion—that transcendence is collapsed into immanence, metaphysics into the physical, and dogmatics into ethics. Without a sturdier doctrinal or theological foundation (or even philosophical foundation, according to Hauerwas), Cone only has the resources to frame race in moralistic terms. In this sense, while race is not objective, it is still ontological if one's "being" is determined by one's moral personhood. With this, Anderson and Carter are correct—blackness exists only in relation to whiteness, as those who make the moral choice to reject that whiteness and its evils.

Even more, and perhaps more importantly, Cone does not offer white Christians an account of how one actually becomes black; that is, what practices and virtues are required for one to attain the moral status of "blackness." And Cone has no responsibility to do so. He is concerned with the liberation of African Americans, not with holding the hands of whites as they figure out how to be good Christians. Still, without an account of formation into blackness Cone leaves open the possibility that whites pretending to colorblindness may assume an easy and quick route to identification with blackness.

3.4.2 Black Christology

Another way to configure Cone's concept of blackness is through his Christology, which Cone claims, must serve as the point of departure for all theology.[118] For Cone, the idea of the Black Christ is not to be understood solely in the symbolic or the literal sense. Rather, he intends it as a theological statement about Christ's identification with the oppressed. Cone's Christology is founded on the historical Jesus, in "the early Christian community's historical knowledge of Jesus as a man who defined the meaning of his existence as being one with the poor and outcasts."[119] Thus Christ's blackness, his identification with the oppressed of the

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[118] *BTL*, 23.
[119] *BTL*, 204.

world, is based in Jesus' Jewishness, his embodiment as a member of an oppressed community in first century Palestine. "He was not a 'universal' man," Cone asserts, "but a particular Jew who came to fulfill God's will to liberate the oppressed."[120] The Black Christ, then, identifies Jesus' racial identity as part of his existential condition. Cone argues, "It is on the basis of the soteriological meaning of the particularity of his Jewishness that theology must affirm the Christological significance of his present blackness. He is black because he was a Jew."[121] Thus, according to James Evans, for Cone, "blackness is a symbol in the Tillichian sense of the term; that is, it both points to and participates in a reality outside itself."[122]

Evans argues that the Black Christ functions in four ways for Cone. First, it expresses both his victimization and his victory, and work of liberation. Second, it serves as the bridge between the historical Jewish Jesus and Christ proclaimed today. Third, it proclaims a theological truth about Christ's relationship with the oppressed. It is not merely a comforting symbol for black people today, but because Christ chooses to side with the oppressed. And fourth, it points toward the future and requires all to choose the side of the oppressed with Christ.[123]

Evans contrasts Cone's Christology with that of J. Deotis Roberts. While Roberts also proclaims the concept of the Black Christ, for him this is a mythical construct for the sake of African Americans, but ultimately points toward a "colorless Christ."[124] The Black Christ is a particular symbol for the black Christian, but points to the universal Christ of the Bible who "meets all men in their situation."[125] Thus, for Roberts, the particularity of Christ gives way to a spiritual and universal truth. Christ must exist above and beyond the particularity of culture for his redemptive goals. In other words, for Roberts this universality is necessary because reconciliation is the goal—liberation is only a penultimate goal—and for Roberts only a universalize Christ can achieve reconciliation for the oppressed and oppressor. [126] (While Cone disagrees with Roberts, it is important to note that he does not dismiss the idea of reconciliation altogether, only his perception that Roberts' account of reconciliation does not include the necessary first step of liberation.)

For Cone, this dialectic between the particularity and universality of Christ functions differently, but I believe that it still remains in another form. Cone's Christology focuses on and begins in the particular—Christ's Jewishness manifests his blackness. However, this

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[120] GO, 109.
[121] GO, 134.
[122] Evans, 103.
[123] Evans, 103-104.
[124] Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation*, 139.
[125] Roberts, 140.
[126] Evans, 102.

blackness takes on a universality—not the spiritualized universality of Robert's Christ, but a moral universality. That is, the black Christ reaches out and welcomes all who are oppressed to join Christ in his blackness: "Christ inaugurates a new age in which all oppressed people become his people."[127] This is a universal call to join the particular, but a universal call nonetheless. Again, Cone reflects:

> It's not a literal blackness but a symbolic blackness; to say that God is a God who makes liberation possible for those who are marginalized and oppressed no matter where they are. God takes on the identity of the oppressed. That's why you can say that God is red, God is brown, God is yellow, God is gay—anything that symbolizes the victim. I chose 'black' because black identified my experience. . . . I don't use blackness as a way of excluding anyone. In fact whites can become identified with the black Jesus.

And since Cone's concept of blackness is predicated on his Christology of the Black Christ, this Christological openness—that Christ welcomes all who are oppressed and all who identify with and side with the oppressed—creates a more open and capacious conception of blackness.

3.4.3 Racial Retention

And finally, on a third register, it may be helpful to reconfigure this critique by employing the same framework I used in my criticism of Hauerwas—MacIntyre and tradition. I argued that Hauerwas was too MacIntyrean in his account of race, making it too difficult for dialogue or identification with another incommensurable racial "tradition." Here I claim that Cone may not be MacIntyrean enough. One cannot simply take on the practices of another community or tradition with its own particular history, its own formative stories, and its own cultural elements and claim to be a fully-paid member of that tradition.[128] One will always retain vestiges of one's own history, experience, and formation. Whites will not have fully paid; that is, a white person coming to the black experience still comes as a white person and retains elements of that whiteness—most likely, elements of privilege and elements of a particular epistemology. Evangelical pastor and Black Lives Matter activist Michelle Higgins says that the key to racial harmony is "learning to see blackly."[129] And while one can work toward seeing the world truly, we will always see through a mirror dimly on this side of the eschaton.[130] As Maurice Carlos Ruffin puts it, at best whites "only [visit] our world from time to time and

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[127] *BTBP*, 69.

[128] With the problems of an abstract notion of "tradition" previously noted (Jennings' criticism), James Baldwin offers a concrete notion of the black experience as a tradition that appears helpful for retrieving and fruitfully employing this concept as I have attempted to do in my analysis of Hauerwas and Cone. He writes, "For a tradition expresses, after all, nothing more than the long and painful experience of a people; it comes out of the battle wages to maintain their integrity or, to put it more simply, out of their struggle to survive" (*Notes*, 36).

[129] Michelle Higgins, "Race and America," *Q Ideas* interview: http://qideas.org/videos/race-and-america.

[130] 1 Corinthians 13:12.

despite their best efforts, the effects of white supremacy are non-transferable."[131] One must consider seriously the way the "white gaze" has been shaped, narrowed, and twisted by a history of looking at black flesh as inferior. I cannot truly "see blackly" nor be seen as fully black; I can always verify my own whiteness, and most significantly, will surely have it verified for me by those in positions of power. These are concrete realities that seriously jeopardize any prospect of me fully "taking on" the experience of the black community (as MacIntyre would have it) and constrain my best-laid plans, intentions, and efforts to "become black."

4 The Problem: Abstracting Flesh
4.1 Why Color Matters
4.1.1 The Universal & Particular
We know that Cone offers such an account of race because his concern is a global one. Over the years, Cone increasingly became interested in a global project, and wishes to identify with all oppressed peoples, regardless of color. In this case, all oppressed peoples across the globe are black, and all oppressors across the globe are eligible to become black by joining with the oppressed. This is what he and Gayraud Wilmore identified as the third stage of black theology: the turn toward dialogue with womanist, African, and Latin American theologians, and all oppressed people around the world.[132]

This global focus, however, leads Cone to operate on both a universal and particular level, as I mentioned in my discussion of his Black Christology. In *For My People*, he says, "Black churches can begin to develop a theology that is both particular and universal. It will need to be particular in relation to its own ethnic history and universal by being accountable to the experiences of other Christians in the Third World."[133] But this seems to be a tension that allows him to slip into potentially problematic universal concepts of "whiteness" and "blackness," what it means to "become black," and who can and how one can do so, while still advocating for the particular and contextually-dependent nature of moral and religious thought.[134] Cone slips between these literal and symbolic definitions without warning, and as the years progressed and his focus turned more global, the literal meaning seems to drop out

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[131] "The Effects of White Supremacy Are Non-Transferable," *Literary Hub*, November 17, 2016, www.lithub.com/the-effects-of-white-supremacy-are-non-transferable.

[132] Wilmore and Cone, eds. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 4-7. The three stages are 1) theological reflections on the civil rights and Black Power movements and promotion of radical social interpretations of the gospel, 2) the academic writing and teaching of theology in response to the African American experience, 3) the turn toward a global perspective on oppression (outlined more extensively in Duffy, 129-130).

[133] *FMP*, 154.

[134] Alistair Kee worries that Cone's symbolic, universal usage of blackness becomes an imperialism that subsumes other oppressed groups, assuming it can represent their sufferings and liberation (*The Rise and Demise of Black Theology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2006), 61).

significantly. For Cone, becoming black is a process of conversion. As Prevot has it, "Cone contends that this conversion to a practically embodied black spirituality is not only necessary but also nearly sufficient to bring about genuine fellowship among white and black people."[135] Blackness operates primarily on this universal level for him, which risks abstracting it from the particularities of fleshly reality and the particular experiences that embodying dark skin elicits.

4.1.2 Color Caste

To clarify, I am not suggesting that this problem lies in Cone's thought per se, but, more significantly, that it may allow white theologians the resources to do the exact types of abstracting and avoiding that I have discussed throughout this project. Proffering a blackness that exists apart from skin color and framing it as a moral identity may lend credibility to white theologians and Christians who claim that we live in a post-racial society and that a colorblind option is the only path toward racial reconciliation. Simply, ignoring skin tone in our concepts of blackness (and whiteness) allows white people to assume that—and act as if— they are just like people of other colors: they face the same challenges, experience the same injustices, deserve the same benefits. It may contribute to cheap reconciliation.

Yet, as Emilie Townes effectively argues, "color is the least rigorous way to determine race."[136] She notes how geneticists calculate only a 5% genetic variation between races, meaning there is at least as much variation within races as between them. What we understand now to be race was already determined in large part before humans even understood genetics. The category of skin color, she argues, is an antiquated way to distinguish persons: "The error of race is that it is designed to mark discrete divisions of human beings based on visible characteristics."[137] And despite the appearance of what I have argued, I agree. I am not arguing in this project for a proper definition of race. I am concerned with the praxis of justice, love, and reconciliation. And a proper practice of reconciliation, one that encompasses repentance, reparation, and resistance, must attend to the way race is currently perceived. And in our society, and in our churches, racial difference pivots on skin color. We are sorted and treated differently based primarily upon skin color. We can conceptually argue for a truer account of race and racial difference—and this is important work—but in the meantime, any effort to undercut white privilege, resist white supremacy, and seek reconciliation must take into account the concrete realities of skin color.

In the American experience with its distinct species of American racism, I argue that skin color must be an imperative constituent of blackness—and whiteness. That is, skin color, and the history of violence directed against and animated by hostility to particular skin tones,

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[135] Prevot, 321, italics mine.
[136] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 63.
[137] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 63.

accounts for our specific species of oppression—this is, after all, a racism promulgated by the "one-drop" rule.[138] To employ a biological metaphor, Cone is dealing on the level of genus, which incorporates all types of oppression (some which have to do with ethnicity but some which do not). Dealing on the level of genus is helpful for some of the ends Cone desires: genus is important because it raises the question of how Jesus' Jewishness speaks to the black experience by linking that *particular* experience of suffering with more *general* and related experiences all across the world and through time. However, an account of race must be more concrete and specific in order to deal with the specific species of racist oppression in which pigment is all-important, as in the American experience.[139] In Townes' words, we must "reckon the intractability of color caste that is foundational to our understandings of and reactions to race."[140]

To be sure, I am not suggesting a retreat to the essentialized notion of race as an objective condition. Asserting that race is a social construct rather than exclusively biological or ideological, means that the concept retains vestiges of both. I believe Cone's fluctuation between different concepts of race accomplishes much and avoids many of the pitfalls of either. Still, I worry that Cone's wish that all will join his struggle for liberation may too easily accommodate the intellectual abstraction that he so vehemently loathes. He risks promoting a concept of race untethered from the concrete reality of flesh and skin color that actually does determine the concrete opportunities, vulnerabilities, struggles, and hopes of people of all skin shades. One need look no further than the scenes of white police violence inflicted on black bodies, because of their black bodies (it is all they knew about them), as evidence of this. As a white person I can become black in Cone's terms, but my flesh and subsequent privilege will always follow me and allow me to opt out, or will arrange for particular social benefits even without my knowledge and consent.[141] Despite Anderson's and Carter's concerns that

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[138] See Winthrop D. Jordan, "Historical Origins of the One-Drop Racial Rule in the United States," *Journal of Critical Mixed-Race Studies*, vol. 1 no.1 (2014), 98-132.

[139] Gayraud Wilmore provides an important ally to my argument in this section, in his concept of "color prejudice." He claims that Christology cannot be understood apart from the way color symbolism and prejudice inflected the way Christ is received and perceived. "It was not the Jews of the Old Testament period," he writes, "but the Jews and Gentiles of medieval Europe—especially of Northern Europe and Great Britain—who were repelled by black skin color and African physiognomy and gave renewed vigor to the color prejudice that had been sporadic and peripheral in the ancient world" (Gayraud S. Wilmore, "The Black Messiah: Revisiting the Color Symbolism of Western Christology," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 2 (Fall 1974), 8, 9). Thus color prejudice indicts Christianity in the oppression of black people, as it oriented its theology as a weapon of domination. "Black color and calamity cannot be separated in the history of the West" (Wilmore, 12, 13).

[140] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 64.

[141] Writing about the racial *allies* of white "flower children" in the late 60s and early 70s and the disaffected white civil rights allies, James Baldwin insightfully observes a similar reality: "Black trouble

his concept of blackness and whiteness are too reified and too objective, I contend that the greater worry ought to be that an overly-capacious account of becoming black, of blackness severed from fleshly reality, may subvert attempts to reckon with the difficult work of overcoming white privilege by undermining white privilege. It is difficult to overcome white privilege if whiteness and blackness are abstracted from the concrete realities and effects of skin color.

Thus while Cone himself may avoid many of the most pernicious pitfalls of such an abstraction, in the hands of white people (and in this case, white theologians and Christians), such an abstract concept of blackness and whiteness paves a course toward sentiments of colorblindness and encourages the avoidance of the hard work of racial reckoning.

4.1.3 Abstracted Whiteness

I have discussed whiteness quite often in this project and identified the way that it functions as a blinding agent to structures of oppression and one's complicity within them. Yet it poses a similar difficulty of definition. Emilie Townes defines whiteness as "a concept and a reality that reveals and explains the racial interests of Whites and links them collectively to a position of racial dominance."[142] She helpfully identifies it as both concept and reality, and again, it is the reality of whiteness that I want to focus on. It may indeed be a social construct, but like blackness, it has real concrete effects. The concept of whiteness, again, like blackness, has a way of becoming abstracted from the reality of the light skin tone of those who first perpetrated the wickedness of white supremacy—and continue to do to. To quote Townes at length:

> Whiteness has not been adequately recognized or defined. . . . In many ways, whiteness has been made into an abstraction—it has been distanced from our immediate concrete material experience. We see it, we experience it, but we cannot define it or codify it like we do so easily with darker-skinned peoples. As abstractions, whiteness and White supremacy are amorphously transcendent in the case of the former and intractable in the case of the latter. . . . These projections are abstractions—neatly if not completely disassociated from the history of strife, death, and annihilation that White supremacy and uninterrogated whiteness have left as their gruesome legacies.[143]

Allowing such an abstract notion of whiteness to pervade—both in society and the academy—encourages both churches and theologians like Hauerwas to avoid reflecting upon the ways that whiteness shapes and forms their practices, to detrimental ends, as we have seen.

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was of a different order. . . . They had to be aware that this troubled white person might suddenly decide not to be in trouble and go home—and when he went home, he would be the enemy" (*Name*, 188).

[142] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 65.

[143] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 73.

Yet, a few difficulties with defining whiteness in more concrete terms come to mind. Is the concept of whiteness, then, reducible to white supremacy? Some claim that whiteness is simply a way of describing the evilness of white supremacy, especially the way this supremacy has become enmeshed in the dominance of political, legal, and social institutions. And this is for good reason. While one could make a convincing argument that all white people benefit from white supremacy or white privilege, not all intentionally do so. And especially not all attempt to inflict it. Many will contend, with good reason, that there has to be something good, true, and beautiful about being white: that Euro-American cultures have produced social goods throughout history. Linking whiteness, as the evil of white supremacy, to all things white prevents one from designating anything good within the history, cultural production, or intellectual/moral insights of those who are white. Totalizing whiteness as evil risks a type of Manichean racial dualism. In many ways James Baldwin, Coates, and others trade in the same abstracted notion of whiteness—this mythology extracted from the concrete realities of skin tone—when they uses descriptions like "those who think they are white."[144] Again, just like my ambivalence toward Cone's oscillation between the universal and particular, the moves of these intellectuals helpfully serves to identify the artificiality of race, and of whiteness. But it also abstracts it in just the way I am arguing that blackness ought not to be.

However, again, the alternative seems to preclude any good thing from begin generated by people with white skin—including, therefore, this very dissertation. This is a complicated issue. Just as blackness cannot be reduced to the experience of suffering, but must take account of the realities of skin tone, so whiteness cannot be reduced to white supremacy, but must still account for skin tone and the ways it simultaneously generates privilege and blindness. Whiteness, therefore, must include the reality that all who are white do benefit in concrete ways from a privilege given to their skin tone. All white people, therefore, do participate in white supremacy even if they simply benefit from it—as in my example of returning home from a Black Lives Matter march above. This does not mean that white people are incapable of good, beautiful, and true cultural production, but it does place an imperative on all people who benefit from the current systems of white supremacy—which is *all* white people—to reflect on all of their cultural productions and uncover the ways in which these goods are impacted by this privilege. Acknowledging the role that whiteness, tethered to white skin tone, plays in our mundane realities better illuminates the structural dimensions of racism—the way racism

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[144] Baldwin: "[They] have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white. Because they think they are white, they do not dare confront the ravage and the lie of their history. Because they think they are white, they cannot allow themselves to be tormented by the suspicion that all men are brothers" ("On Being White and Other Lies"). See also Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*.

structures our political, social, and religious order. Linking whiteness to skin tone in the same way I have argued for blackness, allows no white person the opportunity to avoid challenging the normativity of whiteness and disrobes any assumption of colorblindness. It makes whiteness visible to itself.

In the end, this is not meant to be a satisfying or conclusive word on whiteness. I can offer no such word. It is simply a recognition of the need for a concrete conception of both blackness and whiteness—grounded in the realities of suffering, prejudice, and privilege—that is not reductionistic, abstract, or totalizing. This is a difficult task, beyond the bounds of one dissertation. But is a core element of any attempt to imagine a deep and costly form of reconciliation.

4.2 Summarizing My Critique

4.2.1 Epistemology

Before moving to the beginnings of my constructive account, I want to summarize this critique by distilling it into two specific concerns with an abstracted conception of race. First, I contend that the act of white persons identifying as black, or persons of privilege fully identifying with the oppressed, is epistemologically impossible. It fails to recognize the fleshly limits of our reason and experience. Suggesting that one has done so creates a new universal rather than actually creating a space where many particulars can thrive, in their particularity, and where this particularity can lead to the flourishing of all. The prescription for whites to do this, and belief that they are able to actually shed this privilege, ironically, doesn't seem to take seriously the power of white privilege. Whites can join in solidarity (like marching in Selma or protesting police brutality) but we are always able to opt out in ways that people of darker skin color cannot, and still benefit from certain advantages even in the midst of solidarity despite our best intentions. Many consequences of privilege are subterranean, not outward economic, political, or social advantages, but subtle, tacit reactions to our skin color that we did not intentionally elicit. In other words, people respond to and treat people with lighter skin differently than they do people with darker skin in concrete social situations. Most of the time, this treatment is objectively better. This may not be a privilege that the lighter skinned person asked for or even wished for. But this privilege happens nonetheless, despite our best efforts to shed it. This raises the Hauerwasian question of whether it is possible for whites to actually enter into the black experience or ever understand it to the point of being conversant with or in solidarity with black brothers and sisters?

Blackness and whiteness, therefore, must have something to do with skin color. Even in his lecture at Duke Divinity in 2015, Cone himself seemed to suggest this epistemological

difficulty. He asserted that when Pilate asked Jesus "What is Truth?"[145] he had no way of knowing what truth Jesus was talking about because he was embedded in the dominant oppressive culture. He couldn't enter into Jesus' experience.[146] "White theology is not Christian theology because it is a language derived from white supremacy," Cone argued. "To understand Christian identity from a white dominant point of view is like trying to understand Jesus from a dominant Roman point of view."

4.2.2 Colorblindness

Second, I worry that an account of blackness (and whiteness) that hovers above concrete fleshly embodiment may grant perceived legitimation to the current dominant form of racism in the U.S. that goes by the codename, "colorblindness." I remarked on this phenomenon in chapter one; and while I by no means believe that Cone or Hauerwas think that colorblindness is less sinister a form of systemic racism than any other, a porous account of what it means to be black and white as well as white evasion of the issue altogether provide those who contend that we live in a colorblind society conceptual tools to maintain their mythical universe.[147] If one is able to become black and completely shed one's whiteness and identify fully with blackness, then skin color no longer matters just in the way that the advocates of colorblindness suggest. Again, this is not to say that race is an objective reality; rather, it is to say that even in our current society the perception of skin color matters in how one is treated in many social settings and situations. As James Baldwin says, "It has been vivid to me for many years that what we call a race problem here is not a race problem at all: to keep calling it that is a way of avoiding the problem. The problem is rooted in the question of how one treats one's flesh and blood."[148] Here, I am not advocating for the agonistic account of racial traditions as incommensurable rivals, in the manner in which I argue Hauerwas views them. But I am questioning the extent to which races do retain elements of this concept of tradition. One can surely enter into another's story as a second native speaker, but one cannot fully shed the elements of one's native tradition that one brings to one's inquiry with another's story.[149]

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[145] John 18:38.
[146] "The Cry of Black Blood," James Cone.
[147] Here I draw on the language of sociologists Peter Berger & Thomas Luckman in *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), 94-95. They contend that meaning-making theoretical traditions of knowledge or myth (like colorblindness), or what they call symbolic universes, "legitimate institutions and roles within a system of order by locating them within a comprehensively meaningful and normative 'world.'" These universes occasionally require "conceptual machinery for universe maintenance" to re-legitimate the universes to their public.
[148] Baldwin, *Name*, 185.
[149] One can think of this in terms of an image: attempting to submerge a beach ball in water. The ball enters the water, but due to its buoyancy, it will always resist becoming fully submerged. The ball

5 Conclusion

In sum, both Cone and Hauerwas reflect, or leave themselves open to, a common theological tendency to address race as a concept abstracted, from concrete fleshly reality. Hauerwas's avoidance of addressing race and inability to reflectively uncover the impact of his own whiteness in this theological ethics (the proposals he makes, the questions he thinks to ask, the issues he chooses to deal with), leave race as an abstract theological problem (as I argue in chapter two). It is fundamentally a problem of misunderstanding God's sovereignty or a problem for those more fully involved in that story to deal with. It is an abstract theological concept that has been separated from the concrete reality of black bodies, white bodies, and who and how we can talk about and treat those bodies.

My concern over Cone is that a particular reading of his account of blackness may lead to cheap reconciliation—that is, reconciliation without liberation. Cone does not himself wish for whites to cheaply convert to blackness. But in an era in which racism manifests itself most insidiously in white people's dedication to colorblindness, any proposal that teaches us that we can identify with the suffering of blacks by joining in solidarity with them is prone to gross misinterpretation leading to the cheap forms of reconciliation that have received such searing critiques. His insistence that whites can become black, and lack of an account of what practices or virtues are entailed in this conversion may permit a too quick identification—a cheap conversion to "blackness." Now, to be clear, I do not see the absence of an account of the virtues or practices necessary to cultivate blackness as a lacuna in Cone's work. Cone writes for the liberation of black people and has no interest and certainly has no responsibility to tell white Christians what they need to do in order to be good Christians. In fact, Cone says the process of conversion from whiteness is a long process over which whites have no control.[150] White people must concede that our identification *vis a vis* blackness is not under our control and relinquish the desire to name our own identity—to call ourselves black. It must be bestowed on us by those who have truly experienced it.

And all of this seems true. Yet, as white Christians we cannot allow this to lead to passivity. And here Hauerwas's insistence on virtue and Christian formation provides a helpful

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retains the properties of the ball when it enters the water. But it is those very properties, the basic elements of its composition—its buoyancy—that resists being submerged into the water. Likewise, because whites in America do not have the same history (including pigment, practices, culture), this buoyancy (history) will always resist fully entering into the other tradition. One always joins another tradition with that history intact. Reconciliation cannot be transubstantiation; it is more akin to consubstantiation. We will always retain elements of our own tradition, culture, and privilege.
[150] GO, 222.

complement to Cone's caution. We need not insist that we control our identity or how we can achieve conversion from whiteness to blackness—conversion is always a process of which we are not the primary agents—while also engaging in practices that allow our whiteness to be destroyed more easily. In light of Cone's cautions, McGee suggests that conversion could mean "something less than the destruction of whiteness and the work to put one's socially given identity to death." Instead the process of conversion may look "much less heroic and therefore all the more difficult for us white people, for it requires us to live with the ways our whiteness cannot be brought under our control." He helpfully proposes that one could imagine practices "not intent on producing or seizing another mode of being *after* white . . . not toward other ways of becoming good white people but engaging in all sorts of practices that would be conducive for and oriented toward black liberation."[151] In the current absence of such practices, I propose to fill this gap by suggesting, for white Christians, a few practices that may help lead to a costly process of reconciliation with black Christians.

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[151] McGee, 16, 15.

Chapter 6 | *Seeing the Body Wounded*

Not all flesh is alike but there is one flesh for human beings.[1]

1 Introduction: 'Seeing' the Problem

In the midst of the theological and ethical abstractions of race I described in the previous chapter, I propose a return to the core commitments and insights of both Hauerwas and Cone: to attend to the concrete and the particular. When it comes to addressing race, this means a return to fleshliness. In this chapter I will argue that theological attention to race must be ecclesiological attention. Framing race ecclesiological both recognizes it properly as a theological and ethical issue (in many ways the problem of race originated as a theological problem).[2] But it also embodies the complex issue of race within a concrete and particular community.[3] Speaking of race in an ecclesiological register entails the best wisdom and insights of Hauerwas and Cone while avoiding departures from these insights into abstraction. It keeps the concept of race and practices of reconciliation as fleshly realities with embodied problems and solutions, bound and advanced by the fleshly, wounded Body of Christ.

This is a complicated challenge. I want to simultaneously affirm the worries Hauerwas maintains about thinking one can too quickly and too easily enter another's story, while challenging his resistance to trying, and affirm Cone's hopefulness of racial solidarity, unity, and reconciliation, while challenging the ways his appeal to become black can be twisted into abstractions from the consequences of skin tone. What we need is an account of race and racial reconciliation that avoids the cheap grace often associated with reconciliation, and also avoids the abstracting tendencies of a concept of race that does not account for skin color. A

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[1] 1 Corinthians 15:39.

[2] On this see especially Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*; J. Kameron Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*; and Luis Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*.

[3] To put this somewhat colloquially, in the wake of white people's overly-spiritualized "corrections" to angry people of color that racism is a *sin* issue and not a *skin* issue, this chapter forcefully argues that it is indeed both—though the latter condition is in much more need of reflection.

costly reconciliation will be an embodied reconciliation that takes seriously the role of bodies and flesh in the dehumanizing effects of racism and the ecclesial hope of healing.

Only a fleshly theology of race will undercut the Docetic tendencies to avoid attending to the body in most white hetero-male theological anthropologies, and will highlights the importance of skin tone in this racial formation. And it must do so by first teaching us to *see* skin and race. Catholic Womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland argues that skin "morphs into a horizon funded by bias."[4] By this she means that skin tone becomes a field of vision emanating from a determined standpoint. This standpoint—the privilege and normalization of white skin—then constricts the horizons of white people: it imposes the borders of our field of vision and elides, hides, or eliminates those outside of that horizon (those with darker skin tones) from epistemological, social, and moral consideration. This racial bias inherent to one's horizon, determined by a normatively limited field of vision, renders some bodies and their voices invisible.[5] "A white, racially bias-induced horizon defines, censors, controls, and segregates different, other, non-white bodies," Copeland observes.[6] The apprehension, conception, and judgment of human beings become a racial apprehension, conception, and judgment. And this "epidermalized thinking" (referencing a phrase from Franz Fanon) produces and maintains relations of power and oppression.[7] The vision of white people is a bifurcated white gaze that sometimes fails to see black bodies, or ignores them, as the white horizon of vision marginalizes these through dismissive questions like, "Why does it always have to be a race issue?" Other times this white gaze sees black bodies as an objectified and threatening other, while their own racial identities remain invisible, normative, and uninterrogated.

Ironically, epidermalized thinking still pervades our current context of colorblindness—wherein white people claim not to see color, but in reality are simply blind to their own color. We fail to witness our own whiteness. One of the key progenitors, and perpetuators, of color-blind racism is abstract liberalism, according to Copeland (and Hauerwas). This generally involves a belief in equal opportunity, individual merit, and free choice. The inability of white people to see ourselves as having a color or belonging to a race, while African Americans do, leaves open the possibility for remnants of biological conceptions of race, and resultant racism to continue unnoticed—if blacks have not achieved full freedom and equality despite the possibilities of liberalism, perhaps the problem lies in their natural capabilities.[8] As Jennings

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[4] M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 15 (hereafter just Copeland).

[5] Copeland, 13.

[6] Copeland, 15.

[7] Copeland, 15. From Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 116.

[8] Copeland, 68.

claims, "Whiteness must be analyzed not simply as substantiation of European hegemonic gestures but more precisely in its identity-facilitating characteristics, its judgment constituting features, and its global deployments of embodied visions of the true, the good, and the beautiful."[9] In other words, even in the abstract version of colorblindness that claims to not see color for the benefit of social harmony—that is to not see bodily difference of skin color— we still cannot avoid the reality of fleshly racism despite the protests of those in power. The body remains, and remains at the core of our biases, our assumptions, and our avoidances. Attending to the body, then, means attending to whiteness, attending to the blindnesses that attributes *race* to others and *normativity* to ourselves—a post-racialness that we think frees us from dealing with any "race problem."

This diagnosis seems correct to me: if race and racism are primarily a matter of seeing bodies, of vision limited and biased as M. Shawn Copeland suggests, then an attempt to directly confront racism in its explicit, systemic, or "colorblind" forms must contend directly with how we see bodies.[10] For racial reconciliation to avoid the cheap and shallow aspects that many now charge it with, it must take flesh seriously. It must not sidestep the embodied and epidermal elements of the concept of race and racism, but provide a new way of "seeing" bodies that attends to the ways some are continually elided, burdened, and outright discarded.[11] This may not mean that white people like me are ever able to "see blackly."[12] But it does mean that we are diligent to heed Cone's call to see our own whiteness and the way that whiteness pervades all aspects of our lives, relationships, privilege, and power. Such an account of embodied race and embodied reconciliation must fully see the realities of our fleshly existence and the real consequences of living in black and white flesh. To say that whites cannot fully identify with blacks, or the privileged with the oppressed, is not to say that there is nothing white people can do. The call for whites, within the particularity of their privilege, is to take advantage of opportunities to undercut and subvert that privilege on a systemic scale. This is the beginning of the work of reconciliation.

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[9] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 290.

[10] Copeland, 15.

[11] I will refer to the terms "flesh" and "body" interchangeably in this project. There are good theoretical reasons not to do this. As Mayra Rivera notes, in critical discourse the concept of body tends to connote "an entity complete in itself and visible to those around it" while flesh is more formless and permeable, and in theological language σάρκος is often identified with humanity's sinful nature whereas body is a more neutral term (Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015). I will follow Rivera in connecting the terms as constitutive of each other (7). In doing this I suggest that it is not just flesh that is vulnerable and receives injury; the body is an incomplete and vulnerable entity. In Christian discourse it is the body of Christ that is wounded, and it is that wounded body that we as the church become.

[12] See chapter five.

In this chapter I argue that returning to the particular and concrete means placing the hope of reconciliation in the embodied and wounded Body of Christ, the church. The chapter begins by returning to the point where Hauerwas's and Cone's theologies converge—a commitment to concrete reality and particular community. Then, in section three, it turns to examine the concreteness of fleshly existence in the history of American racism, and then, in section four, argues for the fleshly embodiment of the church as the wounded Body of Christ as the community that maintains the resources necessary for such challenging work.

2 A Way Forward: Commitment to Community and Concrete Reality

The theologies of Hauerwas and Cone converge at several points, as I have outlined already in this dissertation. However, two critical points of this convergence form the bedrock for the constructive account of reconciliation that I will lay out in the remainder of this dissertation: 1) their commitment to the particularities of community and to the communally-dependent nature of moral truth and 2) their commitment to attending to the concrete realities of moral truth.

2.1 Particularity

For Hauerwas truth is knowable only within the context of particular traditions and communities. Truth must correspond to the vision of reality of the tradition-bearing community that proclaims that truth. For him, the truth of Christianity is validated only by a community that embodies the truth it professes. This epistemological commitment leads him to critique the modern, liberal tendency of fragmentation—the tendencies to live into an atomized, individual notion of truth or locate a least common denominator of "universal" truth; both tendencies sever persons from communities and moral traditions and the stories that give their lives meaning. In contrast, he claims that people need these stories to make their lives intelligible, and these stories are discovered within the communities in which we locate ourselves. "All ethical reflection occurs relative to a particular time and place," he claims, "(and) the very nature and structure of ethics is determined by the particularities of a community's history and convictions."[13] Communities train members in the virtues necessary to embody the truths that their stories make meaningful, offering members a teleological vision of their life together. This life together is then a witness to wider society of the truth of Christian claims.

Cone, while operating with a different language, also understands truth, and thus theology, as contextual. In contrast to Hauerwas, he validates only those truth claims that come from communities under oppression; or perhaps it is more accurate to say that he finds the truth

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[13] *PK*, 1.

claims of oppressive communities invalid (though Hauerwas might rejoin that the church is always meant to be a community on the margins even when it sinfully seeks positions of power). For Cone, the church is also an alternative society, and even a witness to the wider society. But more importantly, the church fundamentally struggles on behalf of the poor and oppressed. This is evident for Cone in the way his home church community of Macedonia A.M.E. in Bearden, Arkansas shapes his thinking: "the way it enters my thinking, controlling my theoretical analysis, almost forcing me to answer questions about faith and life as found in the experience of my early years. It is as if the people of Bearden are present, around my desk as I think and write. Their voices are clear and insistent: 'All right, James Hal, speak for your people.'"[14]

One may pose the ecclesiological question of whether it is participation in the work of liberation that makes the church (Cone) or whether it is the church that enables appropriate social participation (Hauerwas)?[15] However, the fact that this question can be asked of both theologians reveals that both are fundamentally communitarian theologians, and I would contend, ecclesiological ethicists. As Michael Duffy argues, "In Hauerwas's terms, the lack of a unifying story, and in Cone's terms, the acceptance of an oppressive story, divides people."[16] He explains, "They tell us two versions of what has gone wrong, and they pose to us the question of whether the community we seek looks like the communities which they believe reflect the healing possibilities God offers to our divided and violent society."[17] These issues for both theologians are rooted in the modern inability to speak truth to one another and accept the particularity of the other who is different. Thus any constructive proposal for addressing racism must be a proposal involving the moral deliberation and active work of the community.

The importance of this attention to particularity is nowhere more important than when it comes to addressing the history of racism—one that is often glossed over in broad strokes that tend to sideline or silence particular voices who wish to tell a more particular story. Considering a couple examples of this. In 1975 President Gerald Ford reinstated the citizenship of Robert E. Lee. During the signing ceremony, Ford pronounced, "General Lee's character has been an example to succeeding generations, making the restoration of his citizenship an event in which *every American* can take pride."[18] It did not occur to him, and likely many other white Americans who have come to think of Lee as a man with high moral integrity and honor that there would be a portion of the American citizenry that would not, in

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[14] *MSLB*, 17.
[15] Duffy, 210.
[16] Duffy, 214.
[17] Duffy, 220.
[18] http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2005/spring/piece-lee.

fact, take "pride" in this event. In this case, Ford's particular opinion of Lee (and likely the opinion of many white southerners) became universally projected onto all Americans, including African Americans. The whitewashed universal version of history engulfed the particular dissent. Similarly, in my town of Charlottesville, Virginia, citizens in the 1920s decided to erect memorial statues of their Confederate leaders to commemorate this important part of their history. Today, within its downtown district, Charlottesville boasts three statues commemorating Confederate soldiers, while one small plaque embedded in the sidewalk acknowledges the location of the slave auction.[19] This dimension of the city's history remains hidden—literally stepped on—by the larger universalized history of the lost cause and white supremacy. The particularity is hidden within a whitewashed and presumed universality. Cone's and Hauerwas's relentless insistence on returning to the particularity of communities and their voices provides a strong resistance to such efforts.

2.2 Concreteness

This first commitment to particularity leads both theologians to commit to an ethics that deals with concrete reality. They are both concerned about a Christianity reduced to belief in doctrine or to other-worldly obsession, as well pretensions toward universalities and abstractions. This was also a core commitment of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who claimed that when theology remains at the level of abstraction, "no genuine encounter with life, with actual people, has taken place. Indeed, in this kind of failure, something alien, inauthentic, contrived, fictitious, and at the same time highly tyrannical is [let loose on society] without human beings themselves, in the core of their being, really having been touched, transformed, and forced to make a decision."[20] And as Reggie Williams warns, drawing on Bonhoeffer, abstract reasoning is a particular temptation for the privileged—those who can afford to avoid the messiness of dealing in the concrete: "Reasoning in the abstract," he argues, "traps one's moral reasoning within a feigned universal objectivity while remaining narrow-minded. Abstract moral reasoning is especially pernicious toward historically marginalized people, who are typically rendered invisible in the process."[21] Similarly, Emilie Townes warns that because these theological moves toward abstraction have often proven to fund hegemony, the challenge for the church is to "consider the radical nature of particularity as foundational for ethical reflection."[22] Heeding the admonitions of these thinkers, and in contrast to this universalizing tendency, both Cone and Hauerwas commend to us a focus on the immanent,

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[19] These examples were given by John Mason and Lisa Woolfork at a National Endowment for the Humanities event "Confronting Race and Memory in the Charlottesville Heritage Landscape," September 15, 2016.

[20] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics: DBWE* vol. 6, 48; quoted in Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 127.

[21] Williams, 126.

[22] Emilie Townes, "To Be Called Beloved," in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 186.

practical, concrete, and contextual nature of Christianity. We learn from them that as Christians we must remember the truth that we already find ourselves in the world; we are not its creators, but we are agents who have been shaped and morphed by the world we already find ourselves in. We are decidedly worldly creatures, beings and agents within the bounds of our world, so we have no choice but to think and act in the concrete.

Here, Cone in particular invites us to understand the importance of concrete thinking on a racial register. In fact, it is this hidden abstraction that Cone identifies as the perennial problem of white theology and Euro-American racism. Recall William Barber's insight that white power employs strategies of abstraction in order to commit its invisible violence in the name of a generic "colorblindness."[23] Reflecting on this, J. Kameron Carter suggests that because white theology does not entail concrete living it "is neither a practice of reflecting on God's concrete relationship to humans nor a concrete reflection on how humans relate to one another."[24] White theology is an abstract mode of thought, just as the white church is an abstract mode of life. It is this commitment to the concrete that defines Cone's theology. While he and Hauerwas both tirelessly rage against the abstract universalizing of modernity—Hauerwas placing the blame on the shoulders of liberalism and Cone targeting whiteness (and white theology more specifically)—Cone's entire project is oriented toward regaining a connection to the concrete realities of earthly life.

2.3 Concrete Christology: The Particular Jewishness of Jesus

Here it is important to follow Cone one more step. This commitment to the concrete in Cone's work is grounded in his Christology. Carter argues that Cone modifies Barth's dialectical theology—entailing God's qualitative distinction from creation alongside God's intimate relation with humanity—with a strong cultural critique while still retaining Barth's Christological point of departure. And this is the foundation for Cone's commitment to concrete thinking: concrete theological thinking, for Cone, requires putting Jesus Christ central. "For he is the concrete; indeed, he is *concretissimum* [the most concrete]," Carter observes. As Cone contends, knowledge of God can be attained only through God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ, because "God has become immanent in our history, transforming human events into divine events of liberation."[25] In fact, it is Christology that keeps Christian thought from veering into abstraction.[26] Alongside Barth, Cone can claim since humans only have knowledge of God through the revelation of Christ "we can [therefore] speak of God

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[23] William Barber, 120.
[24] Carter, 160. Carter goes on to argue that modern racial reasoning, through its abstraction, figures "the black body [as] an abstracted terrain for mastery by oppressors" (170).
[25] *BTBP*, 37.
[26] Carter, 162.

only in relationship to human history"[27]—though Cone projects a more circumscribed and immanent notion of human experience when he says "history."

A concrete Christology, then, further leads to an emphasis on Jesus' Jewishness: "[Jesus] *is* black because he *was* a Jew. The affirmation of the Black Christ can be understood when the significance of his past Jewishness is related dialectically to the significance of his present blackness."[28] The flesh that God assumes in Christ is specifically Jewish flesh. And as Carter argues, "For Cone, the Jewishness of Jesus is tacitly invoked as a means of moving away from imaging others in abstract terms and toward viewing and engaging them concretely."[29] That is, for Cone no Christology can sever the Christ of faith from the Jewish flesh of the Jesus of history. It was white theology's abstraction from Jesus' Jewishness that led to supersessionism, which was the predecessor to white racism. In fact, as Willie Jennings has noted, "The election of Israel never significantly entered into the social imagination of the church. Israel's election has not done any real theological work for Christian existence."[30] And this allowed the church to read Israel not as God's people but as an ethnic group, plowing the soil for modern day racism. According to Jennings, "Christians are, through Jesus the Christ, brought into the history of Israel, which is indeed God's story. What is at stake is not simply particularity and certainly not the dialectic between the particular and universal, but rather the scandal of particularity."[31] It is only by beginning with an understanding of Jesus as part of Israel's particular election to be a blessing to the world that the church can open the "possibilities of boundary-shattering love between strangers and enemies," Jennings argues. "The election of Jesus turns Israel's election outward. This election enabled desire to be formed between Jew and Gentile, a desire that drew them together in longing for him and in turn invited them to desire one another."[32] Christology does not begin in the abstract or the universal; rather it begins in the concrete, in the particular skin of the incarnate Redeemer. Therefore, any hope of reconciliation—that is, with God and others—must begin in this particular flesh that enfolds other particular fleshes.

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[27] *BTL*, 82.

[28] GO, 123.

[29] Carter, 166.

[30] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 254.

[31] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 160. He continues, "The story of Jesus never leaves Israel. This is not the denial of the universality of Jesus' life. However, universality, as we have seen . . . is a highly dangerous concept that, bound to the legacies of supersessionism and whiteness, did and continues to do strange things to the story of Jesus. I suggest a commitment not to an abstract idea of the universal or even of the universal applicability of Jesus, but to follow Jesus' own trajectory toward the many in Israel and through Israel to the many in the world" (265).

[32] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 267.

3 Why Flesh Matters

This commitment to addressing concrete reality, and deep attention to the particularity of communities, for both Cone and Hauerwas, suggests that it is impossible to talk about theology without talking about fleshly reality, about actual bodies as they relate to Jesus' Jewish body and to other raced bodies. Cone's focus on the particular Jewish flesh of Jesus, and Hauerwas's reflections on the church as the *body* of Christ converge at this point to focus our attention on the social and theological significance of human flesh.

3.1 Not All Flesh Is Alike But There Is One Flesh

"Not all flesh is alike but there is one flesh for human beings."[33] The Apostle Paul reminds his Gentile readers at the church in Corinth that God gave each person a body according to God's own choosing. God created a rich tapestry of diverse bodies, a multichromatic creation of humankind. Yet these various distinctive fleshes constitute one flesh. He tells them, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" and "the body does not consist of one member but of many."[34] The eye is not the whole of the body, but it is constitutive of it; "if all were a single member, where would the body be?"[35] Paul does not override the particular here; not all flesh is alike, the body has many parts.[36] The various particulars create and constitute the universal—one flesh and one Body. In his long discourse about the resurrection of the body, Paul places the particular and universal, alterity and intimacy, in dialectical tension; in the way each star has its own glory so too does each individual, enfleshed body,[37] yet these bodies in all their multiformity retain their uniqueness just as they share in one common flesh through the flesh and blood of the cross of Jesus, according to Cone. "What God joined together," Cone says, "no one can tear apart."[38] The diverse bodies and fleshes of humanity make up the one Body of Christ in all its commonality and all its heterogeneity.

Flesh becomes flesh through the multiple and diverse relations of our lives. Our flesh carries the histories of our relations and experiences, and forms us through the way we are seen by others. "Our flesh carries traces of the histories of our communities," theologian Mayra Rivera claims.[39] Our flesh is tethered to the stories that give our communities their identity. Here flesh and narrative are bound. Our literal embodiment not only witnesses to the

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[33] 1 Corinthians 15:39.

[34] 1 Corinthians 12:12, 14.

[35] 1 Corinthians 12:12.

[36] Paul uses a similar image to begin his discussion of spiritual gifts: "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

[37] 1 Corinthians 15:41.

[38] *CLT*, 166.

[39] Mayra Rivera, *Poetics of the Flesh* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 114.

formative narratives of our lives and communities, but those stories constitute our bodies; they enflesh us. The story of Christ forms us into the community of the Body of Christ with all of its various histories, experiences, and particularities.

Yet, the universal often overrides these particularities. The social body often constrains and determines the way the physical body is perceived. Linda Martín Alcoff notes, "There is no perception of the visible that is not already imbued with value."[40] The cultural and social histories that inevitably shape the way we see other bodies grant those bodies meaning, valuing or devaluing them based on the characteristics of those bodies. As noted in the previous account of the making of race as a concept, this project of normalizing and othering various skin tones has a long history. This history of protecting the integrity, or purity, of some bodies while discarding, using, or fracturing others is one worth returning to briefly here. We remember that Enlightenment thinkers began to couple mental and moral capabilities with skin tone. Referencing Hume, Kant, and Hegel, Copeland argues that Enlightenment thinking "correlated white skin with reason, intelligence, civilization, goodness, and creativity [and] correlated non-white skin, black skin with unreason, ignorance, savagery, depravity, and mimicry."[41] Those whose skin tones that deviated from this norm were deemed degenerate. The institution of slavery and the terror of the auction block were constructed to reinforce this normalization. It continued the process of deconstructing particular human beings into functional bodies—bodies useful and available for manipulation, economic exploitation, and sordid pleasure—and further assigned moral significance to bodily difference. Slave merchants and traders "transformed African bodies into perishable goods and fragile services."[42] And at the auction block slave prices were often based on particular bodily features or characteristics: "Hands were opened and shut and looked at inside and out. Arms and legs were felt to decide whether slaves were muscular and regular. Backs and buttocks were scrutinized for the welts that heavy blows with a whip usually left. Necks were rubbed or pinched to detect any soreness or lumps. Jaws were grasped, fingers were run into . . . the teeth and gums could be seen."[43] As Toni Morrison describes, a slave was reduced to "The dollar value of his weight, his strength, his heart, his brain, his penis, and his future."[44] As the auctioneers and slaveholders touched, manipulated, controlled, and punished black flesh in a liturgy of domination, black bodies lost their humanity and became "things."[45] Flesh, once belonging to a particular subject, was transformed into a universal object—a

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[40] Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 185.
[41] Copeland, 10.
[42] Jennings, 188.
[43] Pinn, 41, 42; quoting Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 11-12.
[44] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004 (orig. 1987)), 267.
[45] Pinn, 49.

"fragmented commodity"—now separated from the person it enfolded and available to be used by others as they pleased.[46]

According to Mayra Rivera, "Once race becomes encoded as a set of visible differences, it works tacitly through perception. This means that my seeing is colored by racialization, regardless of whether or not I think there is a biological link between phenotype and behavior or believe in the characteristics attributed to a given 'race.'"[47] M. Shawn Copeland notes that the white horizon of bias inflects the way we view ourselves as normative as well as the way we perceive others as invisible in their difference or othered threats to our particularity. Our perceptions and responses to physical bodies, that is, how we view bodies that are alike and different from our own and the bodies of "our" social group, affect the way we treat those bodies. The social body's assignment of meaning to race at least influences and perhaps determines the existence, suffering, and flourishing of concrete lives.[48] It ambiguously marks the quotidian experiences of us all into a racialized reality in which the color of one's skin can greatly determine how one is seen and treated by others. Rivera suggests that perception works in the same way habits do, without conscious analysis of the logic at work in the performance—like practices. In this way, our perceptions not only project onto other's bodies, but they shape us as well. And they require alternative practices to reconfigure our perception.

Any solution to this problem of objectifying dark flesh or racialized perception—the twisted embodied liturgical practice of white supremacy—does not lie in retreat toward the Docetic temptation to extract, or abstract, a theological account of race and racism away from the body. This only allows for privileged pretensions of colorblindness and further avoidance of the issue altogether. Whites have so disassociated ourselves from our flesh, from acknowledging that we also have a color, a racial history that marks our worldviews, horizons of vision, and axiological claims that we simultaneously become blind to the realities of our own flesh deemed normative while pretending not to see other flesh. The particularity of our whiteness hides itself from us.

3.2 Fleshly Theology
Instead, we must press into the deeply embodied aspects of racism—as this history demonstrates—and, therefore, recognize the way race and racism are never far removed from our fleshly reality. A theology that constructively attends to race and racism is one that affirms with the Paul that *not all flesh is alike but there is one flesh for human beings*. Particularity and universality are held in creative tension. Race is both a socially structured phenomenon and

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[46] Copeland, 50; quoting Barbara Omolade, *The Rising Song of African American Women* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 1994), 7.)
[47] Mayra Rivera, 139.
[48] Copeland, 8.

an objectification of fleshly realities that result in bodily-enacted white domination. There is indeed one race (or flesh)—human being—yet we cannot deny that race as it has been socially constructed according to different flesh tones does indeed matter; it perpetuates real, concrete consequences in this world. This accounts for race as a shifting, complex concept, producing a wicked problem, while also admitting that race is something that we see, that we have been taught to see. Victor Anderson talks about this as "postmodern blackness" which recognizes the permanency of race as a category in identity formation, but allows that these identities are continually being reconstituted in different social spaces and communities of discourse.[49] Today this plays out in a systemic cycle that many in positions of power remain oblivious to. The important thing to remember here is that even when understood as a social construct, the concept of race does not leave skin color behind.[50] That is, while race is not an objective reality—it is, as Copeland and others argue a social construct—the concrete reality of skin tone has very real effects (life and death effects) because of the history of this original, objective concept of race.[51] "Although race cannot be explained as an objective condition, in racist

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[49] Anderson, 11.

[50] The 2015 controversy over Rachel Dolezal is an example of the complexity of race and the problems created when race is severed from the fleshly reality of skin color and history. Dolezal was forced to resign as Spokane, Washington NAACP leader and professor of African Studies at Eastern Washington University when it was revealed that she identified as black, despite being born to two white parents. Dolezal claimed, "If somebody asked me how I identify, I identify as black. Nothing about whiteness describes who I am" (Chris McGreal, "Rachel Dolezal: "I wasn't identifying as black to upset people," *The Guardian*, December 13, 2015, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/dec/13/rachel-dolezal-i-wasnt-identifying-as-black-to-upset-people-i-was-being-me). Yet her insistence on her self-proclaimed racial identity drew a backlash from many African Americans charging her with "exploiting the long history of black suffering to play the victim. The evident change in her appearance from a girl of European heritage to a woman with elaborate braided hair extensions and a distinct tint to her skin was portrayed as part of a long and insulting history of 'blackface.'" To this, Dolezal responds, "I wasn't identifying with being black to upset people. I was being me." As a professor of race, she describes race in this way: "What I believe about race is that race is not real. It's not a biological reality. It's a hierarchical system that was created to leverage power and privilege between different groups of people." One article observes that "Dolezal has made a point of describing herself as black, not African American, a distinction derided by *Vanity Fair*, but one that black Africans in the US would recognise. She describes African American as a particular historical experience. To be black is broader, unbound by dates or borders." Still, her critics suggest that she, unlike African Americans, has made a choice to identify as black without having experienced the same trials and struggles that most African Americans growing up in America have experienced. I bring up this example to note the complexity of the issue and to offer one illustration of the difficulties that a concept of blackness and whiteness partitioned from history, experience, or skin color make produce. While Dolezal identifying as black is not the same scenario Cone describes, and prescribes, it reveals the difficulty with a fluid, "unbounded" to use Dolezal's terminology, concept of racial identity that reduces to self-identification. (For more see also, www.newsweek.com/family-accuses-naacp-leader-rachel-dolezal-falsely-portraying-herself-black).

[51] Remember here that Copeland worries that the concept of race in Cone's project functions ambiguously, often as an objective condition or essential attribute (Copeland, "Race," 508).

culture this idea obtains," Copeland observes. "Each human being is reduced to biological physiognomy: innocuous physical traits—skin color, hair texture, shape of body, head, facial features, blood traits—are identified, ordered, exaggerated, evaluated."[52] Humans are assigned a racial designation that orders her social relations to others of the same or difference races, especially in relation to the race deemed normative. Copeland notes that generally the darker your skin tone the less you earn, the shorter your life span, the poorer your health, the more likely you are to be incarcerated or a refugee. Race has also become a tool to categorize people politically—who is loyal and who is a threat, who is fundamentally "American" and who is a suspicious outsider.[53] Racial difference is naturalized; it penetrates daily life and destiny, profoundly, collectively, completely, and inescapably.[54]

We see evidence of this mounting almost daily it seems, for example, that law enforcement does see skin color and treats people differently based on the color of their skin. Caring for the lives of the oppressed and proclaiming that Black Lives Matter to a country in which it appears that they do not, is a call to whites see our flesh in its particularity for perhaps the first time. We see black flesh riddled with police bullets that lies dying in the street or in the passenger seat of a car, flesh bleeding onto the tile floor of a church basement just minutes after Bible study. It cannot be abstracted into mantras or protest chants, liberal sentiments of empathy, or expressions of loving the abstract "Other." It is a concrete call to love the actual, particular flesh of those whose flesh looks like mine and those whose does not.[55] This is not a claim that a "white gaze" onto the suffering of black bodies will bring about salvation for whites. Seeing, as I've argued, is an important first step because it opens the door for whites to see ourselves as white for the first time, and realize the ways in which whiteness permeates all that we see, believe, and do. But this is just one dimension of an embodied reconciliation. An embodied reconciliation requires the whole body, for it is only in the corporation of the whole of multiple diverse bodies that these bodies can be made into one communal Body. If the whole body were an eye, Paul asked, where would be body be? But by what practices, or way of formation, can we come to understand the necessity of attending to bodily, fleshly

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[52] Copeland, "Race," 504.

[53] Copeland, 67. I write this as my Facebook feed overflows with memes and tweets comparing Donald Trump's explicit verbal insistence that America is not great with Colin Kaepernick—a black quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers—who sat during the national anthem to protest America's unequal treatment of blacks. While both claims insist that America is troubled, Kaepernick has received much criticism for his protest, leading many to suggest racial bias in the public's reaction.

[54] Copeland, "Race," 505.

[55] While generally affirmative of Cone's work, womanist theologian Delores Williams suggests that Cone, especially in his theology of sin, does not adequately take the human body serious enough, or identify the way the African American community sustains systems of sinful oppression against the bodies of black women ("A Womanist Perspective on Sin," in *A Troubling in My Soul: Womanist Perspectives on Evil & Suffering*, ed. Emilie Townes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

reality—practices that will require us to acknowledge the realities of the racially othered and undermine our positions of white privilege? It is here that my argument turns to the church. I will introduce formative practices that involve the whole body in chapter eight—not only eyes for seeing, but ears for hearing, mouths for singing, and legs for kneeling.[56] The remainder of this chapter will argue for why the church is the site, the *Body* best suited to form us into a social body that attends to concrete physical bodies and possesses the resources necessary for treating the wounds we have inflicted on one another's bodies.

4 Why Church Matters

Why is the church central to this project? Why is it key to transcending the wounds of racism? Identifying the church as the most appropriate site of racial reconciliation—when the American church has historically been one of the worst oppressors of African Americans and a stronghold of white supremacy—may seem foolish, or even a case of attempting to use the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.[57] The church not only contributed to racialized thinking as it abetted Europe's colonialist impulses, but in the American context used the gospel to suppress any revolutionary desires among black slaves. Even now the white church continues to deploy the gospel as an instrument of maintaining the social status quo—at best—and often directly contributes to marginalizing and oppressing African Americans.[58] Cone insists, "Whites had turned Jesus into a message about white supremacy, a complete contradiction of the gospel. They transport Jesus, a poor Galilean peasant executed as a criminal by the Roman state, they turned him into an alabaster Christ who served the interests of the powerful rulers in America."[59] He wonders how whites can live with "such a blatant contradiction of the man from Nazareth."[60] With this Cone echoes the famous words of Frederick Douglass from over 150 years ago: "Between the Christianity of this land, and the

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[56] "Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?" (1 Corinthians 12:14, 17).

[57] Audre Lorde, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings By Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983), 94-101.

[58] Raphael Warnock implicates the pietistic strand of the black church in helping to maintain the status quo and impede the black church's historic revolutionary mission in his *The Divided Mind of the Black Church*. On white churches he charges, "the European and American theology that informs the work of white churches, in much of its evangelical, liberal, and neo-orthodox variations, has reinforced the status quo of a racist society, has marginalized black people, and has largely ignored their struggle as a theological problem" (17).

[59] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood,"

[60] *CLT*, 132.

Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference."[61] The work of the church in the oppression of the other challenges the legitimacy of the institution—especially its legitimacy in acting as a source of reconciliation and repair. Yet, James Baldwin—not a defender of the church by any means—helpfully identifies the damage the church has inflicted as a hypocritical violation of mission of Christ. He writes:

> The Christian church has betrayed and dishonored and blasphemed that Saviour in whose name they have slaughtered millions and millions of people. . . . If the Christians do not believe in their Saviour (who has certainly, furthermore, failed to save them) why, then, wonder the unredeemed, should I abandon my gods for yours? For I *know* my gods are real: they have enabled me to withstand you. [62]

The hypocrisy of the church in Baldwin's charge arises pointedly in Howard Thurman's lament: "Why has the church been such a tragic witness to its own Gospel?"[63] Still, Cone and others insist that this places them outside of legitimate Christian identity, but does not indict Christianity itself. [64] Today, the predominantly white church, and many integrated congregations, remain unreflective about the ways their whiteness impacts their self-understanding, their theological positions and practices, and the way they perceive others. It universally projects the particularity of its own standpoint onto the particular bodies of other individuals, churches, and communities. And this blinds white churches to the woundedness of the Body of Christ, the broken and sinful character of the church due to its complicity with racism.

Acknowledging this hypocritical history and present, I will argue that in spite of it, the church is the appropriate and necessary site of reconciliation because the church is in fact the broken and wounded Body of Christ. It is precisely because this history has indeed been hypocritical—inconsistent with the mission and identity that being the Body of Christ calls it to—that in the church's confessing of its sin and movement toward repairing those wounds, the church offers the resources necessary for this difficult work. The church is founded on the wounds of Christ—the broken Jewish flesh of Jesus. Our remembrance of those wounds also reminds us that our own wounds of racism, hatred, and blindness—the wounds that Baldwin identifies—cannot be transcended without being remembered.

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[61] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1835).

[62] Baldwin, *Name*, 49.

[63] Howard Thurman, *A Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life*, eds. Walker Earl Fluker and Catherine Tumber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 254.

[64] *CLT*, 132.

4.1 Church as Body of Christ

This task begins with a proper understanding of the church as the Body of Christ. While scripture describes the church with many images throughout the New Testament, the Pauline image of the church as the Body of Christ has perhaps been the most significant through Christian history. Paul tells the church in Corinth, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it," and likewise to the Romans, "we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another."[65] This image also expresses the nature, constitution, and mission of the church in a way that helps us to understand the possibility, and challenge, of the church as a site of reconciliation.

St. Augustine helps decipher this metaphor more explicitly, claiming boldly that the church is the extension of Christ's incarnation. He specifically highlights the "union of flesh" in Christ and the church: "If two in one flesh, why not two in one voice? Therefore, let Christ speak, because the Church speaks in Christ, and Christ speaks in the Church, both body in the head and head in the body."[66] Yet, while countless theologians like Augustine have reflected on this theme, perhaps the one who most closely and explicitly identifies the corporate body of the church with the physical body of Christ is Dietrich Bonhoeffer.[67] According to Bonhoeffer, the divine revelation of the church maintains a specific form: the body of Christ. Bonhoeffer advances a thoroughly *incarnational* account of God's self-revelation across human time that culminates in an identification of the incarnation of Christ with the present and future event of the church. So it is, then, that "there is no relation to Christ in which relation to the church is not established as well."[68] The revelation of God in Christ established and proleptically anticipates the church as the ongoing temporal reality of that revelation during this "ordinary time" between the times.[69] The church is of course provisional, and morphs into different visible forms; for example, he envisions the church existing exclusively in "prayer and righteous action" after its failure during the Third Reich. Yet, the church-community is always the present reality of Christ's incarnation and manifestation of Christ's ongoing mission in the world. In fact, the church's revelation may be called "Christ existing as

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[65] 1 Corinthians 12:27 and Romans 12:5. This image is also used in Ephesians 4 and 5, and Colossians 1 and 3.

[66] *Enarrationes in psalmos*, on Psalm 30.2 quoted in Michael McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning: Augustine, the Psalms, and the Making of Church," in *Theological Studies* 66 (2005), 23-48, 34; English translation is McCarthy's.

[67] I draw much of the material in this subsection from my chapter, "The Incarnational Church: Bonhoeffer's Political Ecclesiology of Transformation" in *A Spoke in the Wheel.*

[68] Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communion: DBWE* vol. 1, 127.

[69] *DBWE* 1, 130.

church community." [70] That is, underlying this incarnational hermeneutic is a literal understanding of the church *as* the body of Christ, offered most explicitly in his Christological lectures, published as *Christ the Center,* and later in his *Ethics.* Echoing the famous Reformation debate between Luther and Zwingli, Bonhoeffer argues that his claim that the church is the body of Christ is not a declaration that it merely *signifies* Christ, but actually *is* Christ. "It is not a mere image (another translation reads "symbol")," he insists. "The church-community *is* the body of Christ." [71] Bonhoeffer maintains the traditional distinction of the Head and Body of Christ, but posits a more actualized version of Christ's present physicality: the church as the body is, in fact, the continuing activity of Christ on earth. [72]

This image, however, risks overrunning the individual distinctions that mark our own bodies as members of Christ's. Christians must be diligent, then, to not only attend to the particularity of the community in contrast to other communities, but to the particularity of the individual people who constituted it. As the Apostle Paul wrote, and I noted above, the Body of Christ is made up of many differentiated members; and those members, be they eyes, ears, or feet, retain their distinctive marks, gifts, and roles. "The flesh of the church is the flesh of Christ in every age," Shawn Copeland asserts, aligning with Augustine and Bonhoeffer. But she further pushes churches to remember that that this flesh is marked just as Christ's was, she argues, by race, sex, gender, sexuality, and culture. "These marks differentiate and transgress, they unify and bond." [73] Therefore, the Body of Christ takes in all, as they are in their own bodies. This is an "incorporation," not an "erasure, not uniformity." [74] As Christians we are indeed reoriented, remade, and remarked beneath the foot of the cross of Jesus, but being incorporated into his body "preserves the integrity and significance of our body marks" and does not overwhelm them. [75]

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[70] *DBWE* 1, 138. This exact reference comes from material original to Bonhoeffer's dissertation, but edited out of the published version. This sentence is retained in the *DBWE* in a footnote, although the term "Christ existing as church-community" is used throughout the published work.

[71] Bonhoeffer, *DBWE* vol. 12, "Lectures on Christology," 323, italics in original. Alternative translation from *Christ the Center*, trans. E. H. Robertson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 59. Bonhoeffer reiterates the point in *Ethics*, explaining that Christ takes form in the world as the Church (*DBWE* vol. 6, 96).

[72] Again in *Christ the Center*, 59: "Christ is not only the head of the Church, but also the Church itself (see I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians). Christ is head and also every member."

[73] Copeland, 81.

[74] Copeland, 83.

[75] Copeland, 83.

4.2 The Body Wounded

At the same time, recognizing the church as the Body of Christ that bears the marks of Jesus' flesh, forces Christians to reckon with what was done to Jesus' flesh. Christian bodies are haunted by the incarnation and resurrection, but also by the passion and crucifixion. Bonhoeffer's assertion that the church literally is the Body of Christ is not a triumphal claim, as some have taken it, positing a pure and sinless church in contrast to a tainted and sinful world. Bonhoeffer did not intend his claim to be understood that way. Rather, it is a claim that like the physical human body of Jesus of Nazareth, with flesh prodded, torn, and beaten, the church bears those same marks—some given to it by the world, but many perpetrated on itself (a long history of oppression to persons of color reveals these self-inflicted wounds—wounds that scar church members of all races). The church is not the Body triumphant, but the body of the suffering servant who was "wounded for our transgressions"[76] and, certainly, by our transgressions. However, the redemptive gospel narrative that runs quickly from cross to resurrection, Shelly Rambo argues, risks glossing over the experiences of "life in the aftermath of death."[77] It fails to account for the way suffering comes back over and over again, the trauma of an open wound. But as Wendell Berry writes, "As the master, or as a member of the dominant race, [the white person] has felt little compulsion to acknowledge it or speak of it; the more painful it has grown the more deeply he has hidden it within himself. But the wound is there, and it is a profound disorder."[78]

In his commentary on the Psalms, Augustine grants the church, as Christ's body, intimately fleshly actions, needs, and experiences—hunger, thirst, and the acts of eating, chewing, and avoid being eaten.[79] Yet, Augustine notes that the body in the Psalms is a site of pain more than pleasure. Therefore Augustine's exegesis of the Psalms suggests that it is pain that teaches the church how to be the body of Christ.[80] James Cone and Shawn Copeland both direct our attention to the wounded body of Jesus. Cone suggests that the cross speaks to the black church in ways no other aspect of Jesus' life does. He recalls constantly hearing about the cross

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[76] Isaiah 53:5.

[77] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 6-7. "Trauma is the suffering that does not go away," Rambo writes. Yet theology possesses a tendency to "elide a narrative or remaining that speaks to the complexities of ongoing suffering" (15, 17).

[78] Berry continues, "If white people have suffered less obviously from racism than black people, they have nevertheless suffered greatly. . . . If the white man has inflicted the wound of racism upon black men, the cost has been that he would receive the mirror image of that wound into himself," (*The Hidden Wound* (Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 2010), 3-4).

[79] McCarthy, 41-42.

[80] McCarthy, 41.

while growing up at Macedonia A. M. E. Church.[81] For black Christians, if God can be found in the despised, condemned, and crucified, God can be found among them.[82]

Christ's body rises in glory, and the church celebrates this glory, but this is a strange glory that continues to bear the scars of his mortal wounds. He is the Lamb who was slain, marked with blood,[83] and continues to bear the mark of the world's sin even in his eternal "honor and glory and might."[84] In fact it was Jesus' marked flesh in his resurrected body that proved to his disciples' that it was indeed him—"See my hands and my feet. . . . Touch me and see."[85] The disciples did touch him, and in touching his marked flesh, they believed. As Augustine writes, "For this He judged expedient for His disciples, that His scars should be kept, where by the wounds of their hearts might be healed."[86] Christ's healing and redemptive power over creation, according to the apostle Paul, "will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body."[87] But this glorious body continues to bear the scars of his suffering in the resurrection. We can reason, therefore, that when we "also will appear with Him in glory,"[88] as Paul says, so too will our bodies bear the "scars of human contingency"[89]—the wounds of the world. They will be transfigured into eschatological glory, but still persist as remnants of our earthly struggles.[90]

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[81] *CLT*, 21.

[82] *CLT*, 23; and Copeland, 121-124.

[83] Revelation 5:6, 5:12-13, and 13:8.

[84] Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "It is a strange glory, the glory of this God who comes to us as one who is poor, in order to win our hearts. And what Christ asks of us, too, is so strange that we cannot get over our astonishment: 'Be reconciled to God'" (*The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. Isabell Best (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 92-93).

[85] Luke 24:39. We see in Luke 24 and John 20 that there is continuity between Christ's earthly and resurrected body. Not only does Jesus bear the scars of his crucifixion, but when he appears to his disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:39) he tells them to see his hands and feet, "for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have" (NASB). In fact, the resurrected body of Jesus hungers for food—and receives fish—and eats.

[86] Augustine, "Sermon 66 on the New Testament," trans. by R.G. MacMullen. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6. ed. by Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888).

[87] Philippians 3:21 (Revised Standard Version).

[88] Colossians 3:4 (Revised Standard Version).

[89] Elizabeth Stuart, "Disruptive Bodies: Disability, Embodiment, and Sexuality," *The Good News of the Body: Sexual Theology and Feminism*, ed. Lisa Isherwood (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 174.

[90] In his reflection on the resurrection of human bodies in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul upholds this tension between the transformation of the body in its resurrected state and its continuity with the mortal body. As we see continuity between Jesus' earthly and resurrected body in terms of retaining his earthly scars, his flesh and bones, and physical hunger, as well as marks of a transformed body (like the ability to move through walls), Paul here suggests a similar tension between continuity and transformation. Writing to a congregation in Corinth that was skeptical of the resurrection of the body—believing only in the resurrection of the spirit—Paul carefully negotiates a balance between continuity and

To be sure, they are no longer marks of pain, but are healed wounds, (healed by the very wounds of Christ)[91] whose scars have been turned into a reminder of God's gracious redemption and salvation of the world. This is the scandal of Christian redemption: it is "the face of the God who, beyond history, came into history and became ugly, mangled, and ripped apart by deep dereliction and thorns, a face that unbearably whispers: you can only be saved by the beautiful one who has become the ugly one."[92] Our salvation is certainly a healing, but this healing is not, in the words of Sharon Betcher, a "power to rescue or repair according to some presupposed 'original state' or ideal form, but as the energy for 'unleashing multiple forms of corporeal flourishing.'"[93] Rather, these scars, and the memories they illuminate, are sites of redemption and reconciliation.[94] Scars are emblems of beauty, not grotesque markers

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transfiguration. He argues that the primary difference in the two bodies is that the heavenly body is imperishable (v. 42), free from decay and weakness, though significantly he does not say free from our scars. He employs the metaphor of a seed that is sown (natural, earthly body), and then raised in its spiritual body form (vv. 42-44). "What one plants is and is not what grows" (J. Paul Sampley, *First Letter to the Corinthians: New Interpreter's Bible,* vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 987). Employing another analogy that leans more toward the theme of continuity, Paul asserts that the perishable body must "put on" (ἐνδύσασθαι) the imperishable body (v. 53). This image of vesting our wounded and weak bodies with an imperishable nature over top of them, suggests that some remnants of this earthly existence remain—though transformed by our new garment. Throughout the passage, Paul notes commonality while honoring distinctiveness (Sampley, 987). While our eschatological bodies will shed the corruptions and weaknesses of this world and replace them with immortality, Richard Hays points out that Paul "insists that our future life must nonetheless be embodied" (*Interpretation: First Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 271). According to Hays' interpretation of this passage, the juxtaposition between "physical" bodies and "spiritual" bodies, as they are usually translated in vv.44-46, is unfortunate. A better distinction, and translation, is that our earthly bodies (σῶμα ψυχικόν) embody a soul (ψυχὴ), while our resurrected bodies (σῶμα πνευματικόν) embody the divinely given spirit (πνευμα) (Hays, 272). The spiritual body "is entirely outside our present experience (except insofar as we know something about it through the body of the risen Christ)" (Hays, 271). And as Amos Yong adds, when John the Apostle writes, "'when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is' (1 John 3:2b)—we know that this is not incompatible with the resurrected body carrying the marks of our earthly lives, and yet somehow transforming them" (Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 274).

[91] 1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:5.

[92] Jimmy Myers, "Is It True that 'The World Will Be Saved By Beauty'?" *First Things.* https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/07/student-essay-contest-winner-first-place

[93] Sharon Betcher, "Monstrosities, Miracles, and Mission: Religion and the Politics of Disablement," *Postcolonial Theologies: Divinity and Empire*, eds. Catherine Keller, Michael Nauser, and Mayra Rivera (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 82.

[94] Gregory of Nyssa famously believed that his sister Macrina would bear the scars of her healed tumor in her resurrected body, and described this scar as "a memorial of the divine intervention, the result and the occasion of perpetual turning toward God through the action of grace" (Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 86).

of pain; they are witnesses to the promise of God to be with us and draw us closer through our sufferings. This idea is often proclaimed through Christian art as martyrs are portrayed as ones who retain their marks of martyrdom in their resurrected bodies.[95] We see, for example, St. Sebastian commonly depicted holding the arrows that shot him through, or in Michaelangelo's famous fresco, "The Last Judgment," adorning the altar at the Sistene Chapel, Bartholomew grasping his flayed skin. For an even more striking example, the altarpiece at the St. Anthony Monastery in Isenheim, France, painted by Matthias Grunewald in 1516, depicts Christ's crucified body as suffering from ergotism, a skin and nervous system disease that afflicted the people around St. Anthony's. In Grunewald's vision, not only does Christ take on our sins but also our particular sufferings and struggles.[96] The body of Christ is a body that bears the marks of the world with all of its wounds. It takes them on and bears them, as we bear the sins and burdens of one another. The hope is not that these scars will be removed—as Christ's resurrected body reminds us. These scars, the memories of our sins and sufferings will remain with us. But the hope is in their transformation.

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[95] By the postapostolic period, as orthodox Christians attempted to weed out Gnostic heretics, the church grew comfortable in the conviction that the resurrected body would be free from human blemishes. Despite instances of Jesus eating and drinking after his resurrection in the gospel accounts, Tertullian and Augustine after him, contended that these actions are only for pleasure; the resurrected human body has no bodily needs and is aesthetically perfect. (Yong, 262). Augustine, in Book XXII of *The City of God* reasons that if Christ promises that "not a hair of your head will perish" (Luke 21:18), this means that the number of hairs on our head will be fully restored in our resurrected bodies so that any deformity—such as baldness—will be repaired (which should come as good news to one member of this dissertation committee). While maintaining the integrity of our earthly bodies, Augustine believes that God will restore all of our bodily blemishes and deformities to perfection, except for the marks of wounds of the martyrs, for these are not blemishes, but "the beauty of their virtue." (*The City of God*, Book XXII, chapter 19, ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1146-1150). Augustine is concerned that resurrected bodies express the utmost beauty, worthy of our eschatological home. Thus he is concerned that we will maximize our height, regain all of our hairs, maintain perfect fingernail length, and even suggests that our bodies may be immortalized in their form at the age of Jesus death since the early thirties are said to be the prime of life (as one who remembers easily dunking a basketball in my early twenties but now in my early thirties struggles to get out of bed the day after a hard exercise, I may dispute this claim!). However, these concerns that require Augustine to conclude that all bodily blemishes (save martyred wounds) are removed rely on a speculative (and fully earthly) assessment of temporality and a particular (and fully earthly) ideal of beauty. Augustine simply assumes that our resurrected bodies will inhabit the form of our earthly body at one particular moment in time. This would seem to be an odd way for the eschaton's relationship with temporality to work, and at least relies on an utterly earthly conception of temporality. Likewise, his insistence that our bodies must present without blemish or deformity in order to embody true beauty also relies on a very worldly aesthetical sense, tethered to notions of purity, that we would today consider perpetuating a dangerous ideology of beauty. I challenge this conception of beauty above in the text below.

[96] Thanks to John Shelton for this illustration.

Our bodies are healed in the resurrection, but retain their embodied diversity and marks of our earthly experiences. These marks remind us that redemption was not accomplished through a cheap but a costly act of grace, and serve as a symbol of God's work to reconcile us both to God and to one another. To be sure, the Apostle Paul attests that not only in the resurrection, but even after Baptism, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."[97] Yet, this is not an erasure of ethnic identity. We do not arise from the waters of Baptism with renewed generically beiged skin. While ethnicity is no longer a determinant of one's right to be part of God's people after Christ's resurrection, we still retain the empirical marks of our earthly ethnic identities and racial markings. This is a theological claim, and one that Cone affirms, but it does not suggest a process of making this truth an empirical reality within the church. In fact, this is the problem with cheap reconciliation: it seizes the theological truth of the relativization of our ethnic identities under Christ without the difficult process of reconciling that into reality.

To argue that resurrected bodies will not bear the marks of their earthly experiences of suffering and challenge–physical and mental, as in the case of mental disabilities–threatens the continuity between a person's earthly and heavenly identity. The phenomenological and existential experiences of disability and mental or physical sufferings are not inconsequential to a person's identity; indeed, these shape our lives, relationships, personality, and identity in substantive and deep ways.[98] They teach us about life and about ourselves, they form character traits essential to our personhood, they draw us into unique relationships with others and with God. These experiences and resulting characteristics constitute our identity; we would not be who we are if memories of these experiences were eclipsed in the eschaton. Stanley Hauerwas argues for this continuity of identity and worries about our belief that "The disease can be eliminated without eliminating the subject of the disease."[99] To sever bodily experience from personhood in this way is to fall into the problematic body/soul dualism that becomes difficult to reconcile with our Christian understandings of salvation. Salvation does not erase the continuity of our identities between the already and not yet. These identities, and the memories of the earthly experiences and sufferings that have shaped them, will surely be carried with us into the resurrection, and though healed will continue to shape our life as the eschatological community. The reconciliation of the eschatological body politic is an ongoing

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[97] Galatians 3:28. Paul also does not insist that Christian slaves go free and continues to employ sex and gender roles within his vision of the church.

[98] Yong, 269.

[99] *HR*, 557. Elsewhere he explicitly claims, "To eliminate the disability means to eliminate the subject" ("Marginalizing the 'Retarded,'" in *The Deprived, the Disabled, and the Fullness of Life*, ed. Flavian Dougherty (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier Books, 1984), 69).

work of the Holy Spirit among the saints, and it requires these collective and individual memories. And this ought to shape the earthly body politic of the church community.

4.3 The Body Remembered

Eschatology not only shapes our views of the life to come, but also informs our practice as Christians in this life and with one another. Bearing the marks of Christ's Body, therefore, will take place in the present and painful work of remembering and confession. As James Cone hopes, God's promise of a future ought to affirm our humanity and "become present, thereby forcing us to make changes in this world."[100] Therefore, our hope as the church, as the Body of Christ on earth is not that these scars will disappear and become invisible in the eschaton. No, the wounds of racism, of oppression, of white supremacy, of systemic racial bias, will all be healed, but the scars of these sufferings—like those of Christ's resurrected body, like the wounds of the martyrs—will remain.[101] And we will remember. The memories cannot be eliminated without also eliminating the subject. The memory of the wounds of our racist past shape us and remind us that we are people in need of grace, a people in need of healing, and a people who need to do the hard work of repairing these breaches and reconciling.

This task of remembering also requires a community—we cannot accomplish this alone—and a community that constitutes itself by repeated practices of remembrance. These are practices that require us to reckon with our dark history, resist repression of our atrocities, and renounce our selective amnesia. For example, Greg Jones writes of the corporate practice of Eucharist, "By encountering the real presence of the crucified and risen Christ in his forgiving love, we can bear the past truthfully. We can do so in hope."[102] This act recognizes and forms us to understand that reconciliation (with God and one another) requires reckoning with the crucified body of Christ—given for us. This is not to gloss over or become blind to the scars, but to gaze upon them and understand that these scars are signs of our redemption. From the beginning, Christians have maintained that the wounded and bleeding hands and feet of Jesus were indeed "beautiful" hands and feet. Christ's tortured, groaning figure wasting away on the cross is the site of beauty; sites of the grotesque often reveal true beauty. We must see the scars of racism, touch them, weep, and believe. They are the transformation of our wounds—the wounds we have inflicted on one another and the wounds we have inflicted on Christ by inflicting them on one another—into the glory of Christ; power made more perfect in our

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[100] *BTL*, 241.

[101] "It is a sentimental error, therefore," Baldwin notes, "to believe that the past is dead; it means nothing to say that it is all forgotten, that the Negro himself has forgotten it. It is not a question of memory, Oedipus did not remember the things that bound his feet; nevertheless the marks they left testified to that doom toward which his feet were leading him" (*Notes*, 30).

[102] Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Press, 1995), 177.

weakness.[103] Reconciliation requires a reckoning with the sin, the blood, the bare life of the body of the Christ and the Body of Christ. As we recall the beautiful, grotesque body of Jesus, we recall the bare lives that the church has so often refused to see– bodies hanging from a tree, bleeding in the street, walking to the death chamber–refusing to acknowledge our own brokenness, our own wounds.

It is here that Hauerwas and Cone both provide important resources to help us. Cone's insistence that Christ is black illuminates the essential suffering nature of Christ; Christ is the oppressed, the wounded. And Hauerwas's insistence on the church as the community of memory demands that we reckon with that suffering as an integral part of what it means to be church. "The kind of memory which truly shapes and guides a community is the kind that keeps past events in mind in a way which draws guidance from them for the future," he argues.[104] The church witnesses to Christ's redemption precisely through its confession of sins and memory of God's liberation from those sins. Thus, "we must be the kind of people capable of remembering our failures and sins if we are rightly to tell the story we have been charged to keep, for a proper telling requires that we reveal our sin."[105]

This means that the church community, the wounded Body of Christ, is the means for remembering the racial wounds of our past and acknowledging the racial wounds of our present. The church embodies the politics of memory and hope in the work of the Spirit that can make such a project of reconciliation possible. We cannot shy away from the difficult conversation and conversion that this work requires. And this begins by admitting and remembering the times we wounded and were wounded, the times we ignored the marks of the sufferings we inflicted and endured. But in many churches and theological discourses (especially white ones), the cross has been overly-spiritualized and abstracted from the brutal suffering and liberating power it displays–"a symbol of abstract, sentimental piety."[106] And in this truncated version of salvation it fails to oppose the status quo in the way its occupant did.

Thus, even more crucially, for both Cone and Copeland, it is by peering at the lynching tree that we can uncover the true revelation of the cross; the lens of the lynching tree frees us from the other-worldly and quietistic abstractions that usually follow discourse about the cross in white churches. As Cone argues, "the lynching tree can liberate the cross from the false pieties of well-meaning Christians."[107] Remembering the history of the lynching tree, and the

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[103] 2 Corinthians 12:9.
[104] *TT*, 105.
[105] *PK*, 70.
[106] *CLT*, 161.
[107] Cone, "Strange Fruit: The Cross and the Lynching Tree," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* vol. 35 no. 1 (Winter 2007), 53, rephrased in *CLT*, 161. Cone writes, "White theologians in the past century have

church's complicity in this torture, directs us to the tortured body of Christ, the wounds that he bore, and helps us avoid a triumphal estimation of the way we embody that Body. The cross demonstrates the power of redemptive love, Copeland comments, but we must be careful to never reduce it to a cheap solution to evil like racism. Instead, by placing the cross next to the lynching tree, the maimed lynched bodies next to the wounded body of Christ, "reinforces the sacramentality of the body, contests objectification of the body, and honors the body as the self-manifestation and self-expression of the free human subject."[108] Kelley Brown Douglas argues that Jesus' crucifixion and broken body "not only reaffirms God's partiality for the oppressed; it also reifies that this partiality is much more than an impassive identification with those least regarded in society." She asserts, "The crucifixion unquestionably reveals a compassionate solidarity with them."[109] The wounded body of Jesus is Christ's union with the oppressed.

Therefore, due to the churches immense ability to avoid, obfuscate, and forget, regular communal acts of remembrance, confession, and repair are necessary to open our eyes to the wounds—practices that teach us to see other bodies, listen to silenced voices, lament our wrongdoings before others, and celebrate our common hope. (I will turn to specific practices in the next chapter.) The church's task is to engage in practices acknowledging its failure, seeking repair, leading to reconciliation, "drawing [us] toward other peoples, calling [us] to become one and to love concretely."[110] Re-membering requires a body; remembering the wounds that lead to redemption requires a wounded Body. And the church—the Body of Christ—is such a body, and therefore the place in which a robust practice of healing and reconciliation can take place. The church as a community of reconciliation founded on the One who was wounded for our transgressions, is a countersign to the violence of racism and

written thousands of books about Jesus' cross without remarking on the analogy between the crucifixion of Jesus and the lynching of black people. One must suppose that in order to feel comfortable in the Christian faith, whites needed theologians to interpret the gospel in a way that would not require them to acknowledge white supremacy as America's great sin" (*CLT*, 159).

[108] Copeland, 124.

[109] Kelly Brown Douglas, *What's Faith Got to Do with It?: Black Bodies / Christian Souls* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 96. Some womanist scholars, most prominently Delores Williams, has renounced the role of the cross Christ's redemption of humanity (see *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 162-167; for another classic criticism of the narrative of redemptive suffering of the cross from a black perspective see Anthony B. Pinn, *Why Lord?: Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (New York: Continuum Books, 1995). In critique of the notion of redemptive suffering, Williams argues that if Jesus were a surrogate—dying in the place of sinful humanity—then his action encourages black women to accept their own roles of surrogacy. It is clear that Douglas affirms the role of the cross in Jesus' work of atonement and Cone responds to Williams' concerns as well. While agreeing with Williams' rejection of the notion of redemptive suffering, he says that the "story" (to reinforce his narrative focus) of Jesus's solidarity with the oppressed led to the cross and thus snatched victory from death (*CLT*, 150).

[110] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 167.

devaluation of black bodies. Therefore when we begin to understand ourselves, the church, as the wounded Body of Christ and not just the transfigured church body triumphant, we can "as *his body*," according to Copeland, "embrace with love and hope those who, in their bodies, are despised and marginalized."[111]

In the next chapter I will argue why a full understanding of reconciliation is more than adequate for attending to past and present racism, but is in fact a robust theological, social, and practical response to the problems of racism. This is because reconciliation, in its deepest scriptural and theological tones, necessarily entails repentance, reparation, and resistance to injustice. Thus, I argue that we do not need a new paradigm—jettisoning a reconciliation approach—but rather this fuller, practical understanding of reconciliation and its costs; not a cheap reconciliation, but a costly one. As the ecclesial Body of Christ this must occur through ecclesial practices of reconciliation—what I call reconciliation as *conversion*. In the next chapter, I will turn to this argument.

5 Conclusion

In Romans 8, the apostle Paul writes, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies."[112] I type these words as images of a dying black man flash across my television screen. Another black body, shot by white law enforcement, hands held in the air as he walked toward his car. He suffered on the street for over a minute before the handful of officers surrounding him offered any assistance. The groans of Terence Crutcher join the groans of a fallen creation. Sometimes the groans are overwhelming, words fail us, and all that we are left with are sighs that cut too deep for words. When we see a body groaning, a body like ours, different from ours, bleeding helplessly in the street, we want to turn away. Groans do not draw us toward them. Groans repel. Groans illuminate the grotesque, the brutal, the darkness that we want to avoid. But as all of creation groans in the groans of this one black body, his groans beckon us to confront them. To not turn away and avoid them. But to see them. To witness them. To embrace them, however tentatively, with whatever courage we can muster, the blood and sinew and marrow and flesh—to reckon with this suffering, both caused and endured, as we see Terence dying, and Trayvon, and Sandra, Philando, Freddie, Walter, Clementa, Myra. But as we see these sufferings and embrace these bodies and grasp for a hope that seems so elusive, we read as Paul concludes with a metaphor of childbirth, that these groans are the groans of labor pains. This is not a claim that all suffering is redemptive. Sometimes bodies simply die

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[111] Copeland, 127.
[112] Romans 8:22-23.

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in the street, hang from the tree, rot in the cell. But this is a claim that redemption may indeed remain too far away if we fail to acknowledge, address, and remember the suffering that has already occurred. Like the disciples in that upper room, it is only by touching the wounds, that the hard, costly work of reconciliation is possible, even if things will never be the same once we do.

Chapter Seven | *Embodying Reconciliation*

God's reconciliation is God's liberating work.[1]

Introduction: A Review of Chapters 1-6

I began this dissertation (Part One) with the questions: What are white Christians who desire racial reconciliation in their churches and white theologians struggling to adequately address race and white supremacy in their theology—especially their ecclesiology—to do in a time when the wicked problem of racism, often disguised as post-racial colorblindness, persists in intangible and indecipherable ways? As pretensions to colorblindness shield white people from our own color—the ways our own racial formation shapes our thought, perceptions, and actions—how might white people recover the ability to see our own whiteness? How ought white theologians incorporate race into their theoretical frameworks, and churches to incorporate reconciliation into their praxis? I framed these questions (chapter one) within our contemporary ecclesial context, defined by one scholar as the "end of white Christian America" though also a time when white supremacy seems bent on holding on with its last breath to inflict as much damage as it can manage. I also framed the questions within our current academic context, shaped by the two most prominent threads in Christian ethics and political theology, one designated by a series of overlapping categories like post-liberal, New Traditionalist, or neo-Anabaptist, and the other as liberation theologies of various stripes. In fleshing out this question more concretely, I turned to the ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas. One of the most influential and prolific theologians of the past fifty years, as well as a key representative of one the first thread, Hauerwas rarely attends to issues of race or racism in his writings (chapter two).

In my investigation into this noticeably white ecclesiology, I traced the driving features of Hauerwas's ecclesiology, and paired them with the ecclesiology of black liberation theologian James Cone (chapters three and four). While ostensibly offering radical visions of the church and church's mission, I argue that both theologians draw on the same underlying conceptual

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[1] GO, 216.

themes to shape their visions. While they contest different challenges within their respective critical ecclesiologies—Hauerwas contesting the effects of liberalism and Cone the effects of whiteness and white theology—these challenges operate in similar manners in opposition to their visions of Christian community. Both theologians seek to emphasize the importance of the particularity of the community to whom they speak, communities they fear have adopted the malformative influences of liberalism and white theology—both of which lead to abstraction and universalism which prevent the church from properly understanding itself and its mission. Therefore, both Hauerwas and Cone emphasize the role of story in the formation and mission of the church, the particularity with which the church understands its identity and mission (and the particularity of the sources from which it draws its identity), and the concreteness of its attention to reality and practice in the world. I argued that these three sources contain important resources for Hauerwas, and white theologians more broadly, to better attend to the racial realities of our time.

Part Two turned from analysis to criticism and now construction. I attempted to theorize the reasons for Hauerwas's blindness to race and then offer Cone's response to the racial omissions and oppressions of white theology (chapter five). While Hauerwas's story-formed hermeneutic is helpful in the ways I identify above, his reliance on Alasdair MacIntyre's notions of narrative and tradition cause him to view race in terms of incommensurable traditions. He thinks it is impossible for him as a white person to enter into the story/tradition of African Americans and the black church with anything meaningful (and not ultimately harmful) to say—so it is best to just be silent. Cone counters this silence with a plea to speak and write and participate. Cone has been criticized (most famously by J. Kameron Carter and Victor Anderson) for falling into an ontological conception of blackness that is bound to immanence and reactively tethered to whiteness. Their argument is that by identifying blackness with suffering and liberation, Cone unnecessarily couples blackness to the whiteness that created it and submits it as an identity devoid of theological content. I disagree partly with this criticism: I believe Cone's concept of blackness is indeed theologically based, in fact it is a Christological concept for him, filtered through his notion of the "Black Christ." And herein lies my concern. Cone argues that by participating in Christ—the Christ who is black, by which he means identifies with the marginalized of the world—anyone can "become black" themselves. Blackness, therefore, is not primarily an ontological concept. And while it is grounded in his Christology, blackness takes on an exclusively moral character: one is black by being on the right side, joining in solidarity with the oppressed, and fully identifying with blacks. I worry that this allows "colorblind" whites eager for reconciliation to identify in solidarity with their black brothers and sisters too easily and simply, and does not take as seriously the concrete realities of skin color—the fleshly realities that determine how one is treated as he or she walks through this world. An ecclesiology that takes race and racism seriously and offers any adequate (and hence, costly) practice of reconciliation must be an

embodied ecclesiology that understands itself as the wounded Body of Christ, whose flesh bears the marks of a long history of racial violence (chapter six). Reconciliation within this wounded Body of Christ must recognize that like Christ's crucifixion wounds, these scars do not go away but remain as the very material that must be attended to and lifted up for redemption and transformation. I will argue in this chapter that only an understanding of reconciliation as a kind of conversion can address these fleshly realities and promote healthy practices of reconciliation, while still maintaining an appropriately tempered outlook on what reconciliation is possible in the wounded Body on this side of the eschaton. Hauerwas and Cone's relentless attention to concrete reality (when they are at their best) and the particular narrative formation of community, identity, and mission provide the resources necessary to sustain a robust vision and practice of ecclesial racial reconciliation.

But before proceeding to outline the elements and practices of this vision of reconciliation (chapter eight), I want to return to the previous points above about Hauerwas's inattention to race. Having moved from the abstract to the concreteness of the wounded Body and the unavoidability of color, we are still left with the practical question of how white theologians and Christians ought to proceed. We have witnessed how even theologians most attentive to concreteness and particularity are still prone to drift into unhelpful or even harmful abstractions—and as Cone claims, this a major obstacle for any white Christian or theologian because it is an inherent aspect of white theology. Proceeding with care toward any hope for the church to be a community of reconciliation, therefore, requires once again grappling with the tendency of white theology to turn a blind eye to issues of race and white supremacy and white churches to neglect resistance to racism as a constitutive practice. I do not wish to validate Hauerwas's inattention, but I do believe that Hauerwas perceives a real dilemma that opens up to the core of my opening questions. Entering into the story of the black church or black experience as a white person (that is, telling cross-cultural stories of harm and hope) risks colluding in the oppression of others. Yet, avoiding these difficult and potentially harmful issues and not telling these stories, risks colluding in the idea of an isolated, neutral observer that can also lead to oppression. It seems that whites may be stuck between the options of colonization or silence. Hauerwas has opted for the latter. Yet we must understand that silence is never really silence. Silence speaks and fails to recognize the inextricable connections of our histories and the pained, stretched, and sprained sinews that connect us as one Christian Body. We must understand that my story always interacts with your story. Here Cone is also correct. But Cone's solution to this dilemma, "becoming black" through moral action and solidarity, may still allow for a too-easy and cheap concept of and attempts at reconciliation. In the hands of white Christians who earnestly long for reconciliation, this may only perpetuate their tendencies to colorblindness.

So what do we who are white theologians and Christians do about this? We do not wish to devolve into the despair of avoidance and silence, to rush into an over-identification with blacks, nor to maintain a measured and abstract perspective of colorblindness that continues to permit and drive racist structural theologies and policies. I will now turn back to the church in this final chapter, and examine the church as a site of formation and practice, of formation into a site of costly reconciliation, one that begins with and understands itself as a process of continuing, difficult, and incomplete formation.

1 Why Reconciliation Matters
1.1 The Failure of the Reconciliation Paradigm

In chapter one I identified criticisms of the concept and work of reconciliation. There is no need to explain these criticisms in detail again, though a short review of the most pressing points may be helpful before offering an alternative vision of reconciliation. The problem with reconciliation as most white Christians approach it is that it identifies segregation as the most pressing problem with race relations. This, however, leads to an emphasis on sameness across racial differences, meaning that the "reconciliation paradigm" as Jennifer Harvey puts it, rests on a universalist ethic. This universalist preoccupation with sameness is a product of white privilege that suggests that we all equally must bear the burden of reconciliation, offers the same call for action, promotes the same duty to one another, and entails the same urgency for unity. Bound to this universalist vision, the reconciliation paradigm fails, Harvey says, because it 1) does not identify the different work required of whites and blacks, 2) it does not attend to the deeper history and structures that caused racial separateness, 3) it reinforces a white perspective that privileges the work of forgiveness at the expense of repentance and repair, and 4) it prioritizes relationships over action.[2] This is especially true, she suggests, in justice-oriented Evangelical communities who champion personal interracial relationships as triggers for reconciliation. Her problem with an emphasis on relationship building is that it also places undue expectation on people of color to listen to white stories or tell their own, that it is their job to educate us, in a context of white defensiveness and fragility.[3] Reconciliation in this way becomes a more costly endeavor for blacks than it is for whites. It is emblematic of Cone's observation that whites want "God without blackness, Christ without obedience, love without death."[4] In short, it is a project of reconciliation severed from liberation. As Harvey and Cone

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[2] Harvey, 78. I agree with her point here, but in the next chapter will also argue for "friendship" as an essential part of reconciliation as something that both Cone and Hauerwas express.

[3] Harvey, 79.

[4] *BTBP*, 150. This recalls H. Richard Niebuhr's indicting description of liberal theology, as wanting "A *God without wrath* brought men *without* sin into a kingdom *without* judgment through the ministrations of a Christ *without* a cross" (*The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, CT: Weslyan University Press, 1988, orig. 1937), 193). Niebuhr observes an affinity between liberalism and Evangelicalism and

and others remind us, reconciliation must entail commitments on the part of white people to repent and bear the burden of this difficult work.

1.2 Retrieving a Costly Reconciliation

While I understand Harvey's concerns about reconciliation, and even agree with her dismissal of the "reconciliation paradigm" as she understands the cheap, quick, and shallow content of this *paradigm*, I conclude this project with a call for the retrieval of reconciliation. I argue that reconciliation, in its deepest scriptural and theological tones, necessarily entails repentance, reparation, and resistance to injustice. In this proposal, I follow Willie Jennings' word of caution and word of hope that:

> The concept of reconciliation is not irretrievable, but I am convinced that before we theologians can interpret the depths of the divine action of reconciliation we must first articulate the profound deformities of Christian intimacy and identity in modernity. Until we do, all theological discussions of reconciliation will be exactly what they tend to be: (a) ideological tools for facilitating the negotiations of power; or (b) socially exhausted idealist claims masquerading as serious theological accounts. In truth, it is not at all clear that most Christians are ready to imagine reconciliation.[5]

If this is the case, we do not need a new paradigm—dismissing the important theological aspects of reconciliation—but rather a fuller, practical understanding of reconciliation and its costs; not a cheap reconciliation, but a weighty reconciliation, a costly one. This is a form of reconciliation that recognizes the complexity of the issue of race: understanding race for what it is, and the complex resistance inherent to whiteness, that it is not an easy thing to "become black." This is also a reconciliation that commits to addressing these issues in their complexity, to not give in to the fragility that seeks to defend or be silent in the face of this wicked problem. But the complexity of this "wicked problem" does not render reconciliation naïve or deficient. Reconciliation is central to the gospel, though we are far too aware of the ways in which it can be corrupted when not coordinated with justice. A reconciliation predicated on justice is not the cheap "reconciliation paradigm" criticized by Harvey, but a weighty, costly form of reconciliation that places the burden on the privileged group, dispossessing white people of power and privilege. In other words, reconciliation cannot

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condemns them both for seeking promise without judgment: "the romantic conception of the kingdom of God involved no discontinuities, no tragedies or sacrifices, no loss of all things, no cross and resurrection" (191). It appears the Cone is drawing on Niebuhr's insights here and applying them to white theology's impotent gospel. Even if Cone is not, these criticisms ought to still challenge white Evangelicals and liberals today, especially those seeking a cheap form of racial reconciliation or those too quick to identify on the side of the oppressed while retaining the vestiges of their privilege—solidarity without sacrifice, discipleship without carrying a cross (Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23).

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

proceed unless the conditions for justice are secured both prior to and throughout its process. This must be a proposal for a costly reconciliation that includes the liberatory requirements for reconciliation upon which Cone insists.

Reconciliation does not just require justice, but it also requires fidelity to the mission of Jesus, who came as the great Reconciler; in fact, fidelity may be the prior condition for reconciliation. And so further, I argue that this must be done ecclesiologically. As the wounded Body of Christ the remembering, transformation, and redemption of and through these wounds must occur through ecclesial practices of reconciliation. I propose a new paradigmatic understanding of reconciliation. Not the shallow, integrationist-oriented view of reconciliation that Harvey and others criticize, but a reconciliation that begins with concrete attention to bodies, to the effects of skin tone on the we are perceived and treated publicly and systemically, and that calls for the hard work of remembering and confessing the wounds we have perpetuated and permitted, and in which we have remained complicit. This vision of reconciliation moves from memory and confession to the hard reparative work of transformation through an embodied form of solidarity that acknowledges the difficulty of entering one another's stories, while still advancing toward a mutual vision of community that works to right the wrongs of injustice, displace and replace leadership, and undercut the privilege that has sustained white supremacy in an age of colorblindness. This paradigm is reconciliation as conversion.

The resources for such a weighty view of reconciliation are found in the work of both Hauerwas and Cone. These resources help to stake out a middle position between Hauerwas's avoidance of race behind his white privilege and Cone's insistence that white Christians must (and can) "become black." In a more general, and perhaps more helpful way, they help us stake out—and one of the key purposes of this project is to argue for—a middle position between the two dominant responses to the problem of racism and white supremacy. I hope a costly reconciliation as an act of conversion will forge a path between a pretension to "colorblindness" on one end, and a rejection of the project of "reconciliation" on the other.

2 Cone on Reconciliation

It is important to note that this insistence on maintaining reconciliation as a crucial category is not solely my own; it is vivid in the work of James Cone. In his writings, and especially in my conversations with him for this project, he upholds the importance of reconciliation as the way of overcoming racial oppression in the U.S. Cone grounds his emphasis on reconciliation theologically, while still acknowledging the difficulties and temptations of cheap reconciliation. Cone understands liberation and reconciliation not as two competing interests that must be balanced, but as "a single soteriological event." As he puts it, "God's

reconciliation is God's liberating work."[6] This means that liberation is a precondition for reconciliation, but also that liberation is only possible as a form of reconciliation. According to Andrew Prevot, Cone's notion of liberation is "a struggle in which the ultimate goal must not be mere negation but rather conversion and communion."[7]

Cone does prescribe content for this vision of reconciliation. Most importantly, reconciliation must be sought on the terms set by those who are oppressed. The fact that white people want to move so quickly to "reconciliation" is a symptom of white people having short memories, Cone wrote back in 1969.[8] Thus, black people cannot consult Euro-American theologians for their definitions of reconciliation; only the oppressed themselves can say what reconciliation means and requires.[9] White people cannot be trusted to define the terms of reconciliation because we have been "enslaved by [our] own racism." The terms of reconciliation must be defined by the oppressed, not the oppressors, and must entail that "people of color [are able to] affirm the authenticity of their political freedom."[10] Like Harvey, Cone is worried that a focus on the narrow goal of integration will mean accepting or assimilating to white values, style, or religion. Reconciliation can only mean meeting one another on equal footing; only then is meaningful dialogue possible.[11] In addition, reconciliation requires attending to color: one cannot act like color does not exist (i.e. color-blindness is not the answer) because avoiding color erases the particular history of blacks. Full liberation must be a necessary ingredient to any hope of reconciliation, and the point of departure for any conversation of reconciliation. For Cone, this is not a matter of whether reconciliation is a good end, but "on whose terms we are to be reconciled."[12]

More importantly, on this matter, Cone observes, "Reconciliation happens on God's terms." Not only does Cone insist that any efforts toward reconciliation must begin on the terms and conditions set by those who are oppressed, he also maintains that it must be divinely animated and guided. Reconciliation is a theological matter, not simply a social or political matter. "I'm for reconciliation," he repeated to me during our interview. "Reconciliation happened on the cross. But that's the problem with white theology—it has a corrupt view of reconciliation. And that's the problem with [those theologians that disavow reconciliation]. They have allowed

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[6] GO, 216-217.
[7] Prevot, 311.
[8] *BTBP*, 144.
[9] "If white people insist on laying the ground rules for reconciliation, which can only mean black people denying the beauty of their blackness, then black people must do everything within their power to destroy the white thing. Black people can only speak of reconciliation when the black community is permitted to do *its* thing" (*BTBP*, 144).
[10] *BTBP*, 145; GO, 216.
[11] *BTBP*, 17.
[12] *BTBP*, 145.

white theology to define the term for them."[13] For Cone, reconciliation must happen at the foot of the cross, and that means in our current context, by looking up at the lynching tree—reckoning with our sins, confronting the specific ways in which we have oppressed the other and suffered at the hands of one another. "If white people and black people are going to be reconciled, they have to do that looking at those lynched bodies," Cone continues. "You can't have reconciliation without looking at the lynched bodies, the enslaved bodies, the Trayvon Martins. You've got to look them in the eye, their mothers, their fathers, and then talk to me about reconciliation. Don't talk to me about it in some abstract way."[14] And white theology, he presses, by writing a "corrupt, heretical theology" that reflects on race, racism, and oppression in abstraction, is implicated in the wounds of those bodies. Thus, Cone's word to white people and white theologians—those still longing for racial reconciliation—is this: "Reconciliation means you shut up and listen and get down on your knees and pray that all those people you killed will forgive you without you assuming that is going to happen."[15]

Despite these conditions and qualifications, reconciliation is always the goal because it is a theological imperative: "The Christian faith requires it, and human decency demands it."[16] God is the primary agent of reconciliation, and the work of reconciliation begins with what Cone calls the "objective stage" of reconciliation: grounding the temporal work of reconciliation in an acknowledgment of the truth that God has already reconciled sinful, disobedient humanity to God's self.[17] God's active work of liberation and reconciliation to God's self has already been secured "through the cross and resurrection of Jesus," and this forms the basis of God's continuing work of temporal reconciliation between oppressed and oppressor, black and white, through actual, physical liberation.[18] Cone cites God's deliverance

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[13] Cone interview.

[14] Cone interview.

[15] Cone interview.

[16] *FMP*, 203. While Cone and J. Deotis Roberts disagree on much—though this disagreement often appears to be more of a difference in emphasis—Cone here sounds much like Roberts: "The liberating Christ is also the reconciling Christ. The one who liberates reconciles and the one who reconciles liberates" (*Liberation and Reconciliation*, 48).

[17] Paul writes to the Corinthians, "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). It seems for Paul, reconciliation is a cooperative effort between God and humans: it begins with God's salvific work in Christ, to be sure, but Paul also implores the church to "be reconciled with God." As Paul express in Ephesians 2, God's radical work of reconciling all humanity to God's self opens the path for reconciliation within a humanity divided by ethnic and racial difference. He writes that Christ's work will overcome those divisions and make us "one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it" (Ephesians 2:16). But this requires work on the part of humanity, now commissioned as "ambassadors for Christ," to overcome the enmity that separates us as God's good creature (2 Corinthians 5:20).

[18] GO, 214.

of Israel from bondage and into covenant with God, and Jesus as the continuation of that work of reconciliation through liberation: he is "Reconciler because he is first the Liberator."[19] Next to this "objective reality" of reconciliation is the subjective reality that requires the work of the oppressed to be obedient to God and affirm their own freedom.[20] Reconciliation, already accomplished by God through Christ, means that humans are free to be what God created them to be. He connects these actions to the themes of justification and sanctification—God's work and our subsequent obedient response to working alongside God. Cone goes so far as to reassert Paul's claim that reconciliation *is* the Gospel insofar as the wall of hostility has already been broken down through Christ.

Also, importantly, for Cone, this "subjective reality" of reconciliation is a distinctively ecclesiological endeavor. The church as the community that proclaims the truth of this Gospel must embody within its own community what it preaches and what it wants to accomplish in the world.[21] And this means, in part and perhaps primarily, that the church is itself to be a reconciled community, before it could ever hope to be a community capable of liberation.[22] It has a distinctive witness and must shape itself into a community of reconciliation before it can recreate society.

But, unfortunately, the essential connection between the objective and subjective realities of reconciliation—between reconciliation and liberation—has been lost among most white theologians and churches, Cone laments. This has led to a distortion of the Gospel into a theologically pernicious and politically inept doctrine. More specifically, it has led to a cheap understanding of reconciliation. (Interestingly, like Hauerwas, Cone places the blame for this on Constantinianism!) Like Jennifer Harvey and others, because this distorted view of reconciliation persists, Cone insists that reconciliation must begin with the work of whites, and is not a further burden to be born by blacks. In beginning their initial work of seeing and remembering, whites are able to liberate themselves as well: "My hope is that whites will be redeemed from their blindness and open their eyes to the terror of their deeds so they will know we are all of one blood and what we do to others we do to ourselves."[23] This echoes the words of James Baldwin, that "The truth which frees black people will also free white people,

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[19] GO, 210-211.
[20] GO, 213.
[21] *BTBP*, 70. He later writes, "The real scandal of the gospel is this: humanity's salvation is revealed in the cross of the condemned criminal Jesus, and humanity's salvation is available only through our solidarity with the crucified people in our midst" (*CLT*, 160).
[22] GO, 125. Similarly, Hauerwas claims that reconciliation is becoming "a community capable of witnessing to others the kind of life made possible when trust rather than fear rules our relation with one another" (CC, 70).
[23] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood."

but this is a truth which white people find very difficult to swallow."[24] Similarly, Cone claims, "Freedom will come only through the building of a society that respects the humanity of all, including whites." [25] Reconciliation is necessary, ultimately, because liberation and sanctification are at stake for both blacks and whites. The atrocities perpetuated on blacks by whites were also perpetuated on themselves: "When whites lynched blacks they were literally and symbolically lynching themselves." He goes on to say, "Whites may be bad brothers and sisters, murderers of their own black kin, but they are *still* our sisters and brothers. We are bound together in America by faith and tragedy. All the hatred we have expressed toward one another cannot destroy the profound mutual love and solidarity that flow deeply between us."[26]

Cone then identifies the tasks specific to each group. For black people, affirming their freedom means first being reconciled to their blackness, that this is who God created them to be. Blackness is a created good. This means that reconciliation involves insisting to be treated as an *I* and not an *It*.[27] Second, this means joining God in actively struggling against the "principalities and powers" by "changing the political, economic, and social structures so that the distinctions between rich and poor, oppressed and oppressor, no longer constitute the social reality. To be reconciled with white people means fighting against their power to enslave and reducing masters to the human level, thereby making them accountable to black liberation set on the terms of black people, as discussed above.[28] For white people, this means recognizing that God is black—that is, on the side of the oppressed—and therefore whites can only enter in relationship with God "by means of their black brothers."[29] For whites, this also means accepting "God's wrathful destruction of white values" because "everything that white oppressors hold dear is now placed under the judgment of Jesus' cross."[30] Whites must recognize that reconciliation will be a costly experience. He writes that whites want a "God without blackness, Christ without obedience, love without death."[31] But reconciliation is not simply a matter of integration or proximity—as Harvey rightly claims—though these elements may be ingredient to the deeper realities of true weighty reconciliation. Rather, reconciliation requires obedience, and Cone frames obedience for white people in the following way,

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[24] Baldwin, *Name*, 129.
[25] *FMP*, 203. Again, echoing Baldwin's claim: "We, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation." (*Fire*, 97).
[26] *CLT*, 165. Brian Bantum claims that Cone collapses reconciliation into an "assertion of black identity and community" (Bantam, 5). But I hope to have shown that Cone's account of reconciliation is theologically richer than Bantam suggests.
[27] *BTBP*, 150.
[28] *GO*, 218.
[29] *BTBP*, 150.
[30] *GO*, 217.
[31] *BTBP*, 150.

reminiscent of an act of conversion: "Reconciliation to God means that white people are prepared to deny themselves (whiteness), take up the cross (blackness), and follow Christ (black ghetto)."[32] According to Prevot's analysis, Cone argues for self-emptying and self-giving as twin components of reconciliation, obligating both whites and blacks in its work: whites must empty themselves in order to receive the gift of blackness, and blacks are called to give themselves as critical witnesses by confronting whites with their racist history and offering the gift of a more faithful account of the gospel—even at risk to themselves. This requires measured conflicts and costly conversation—practices that I will examine in this chapter. Reconciliation, in this model, is an "uncompromisingly apocalyptic reality breaking into world history." Reconciliation means that whites are ultimately able to "share deeply in the passions, sorrows, and resilient hopes of their black brothers and sisters."[33] But to do this requires a process of conversion, that begins with the willingness of whites to empty themselves through practices of remembering and confessing.

Thus, we see that Cone's vision of reconciliation is much different than the shallow forms of the "reconciliation paradigm" that Harvey identifies. It requires more sacrifice on the part of the privileged, places the burden on their efforts, and positions them in a relationship of accountability to blacks. But from start to end, Cone insists on the importance of calling this work *reconciliation*. Reconciliation is at the heart of Black Theology,[34] and thus relies on attention to the particular against the tendencies to abstract into universal conceptions of the good. Costly reconciliation retains the particular beauty and values of both blackness and whiteness, he says, but primarily means that black culture and values are not subsumed into white culture.

Importantly, Cone insists that "Reconciliation does not transcend color, thus making us all white," though he suggests that the goal of reconciliation is indeed to make us all black. Cone concludes his first book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, with this reflection on reconciliation: "God's Word of reconciliation means that we can only become justified by becoming black. Reconciliation makes us all black."[35] Fifty years later, he recalls these original words and expands on them: "No gulf between blacks and whites is too great to overcome, for our beauty is more enduring than our brutality. What God has joined together, no one can tear apart."[36] During our interviews, when I mentioned that he seemed to strike a more conciliatory tone in these final pages of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, he assured me that he has always been consistent, that reconciliation between blacks and whites has always been his goal, and then

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[32] *BTBP*, 150.
[33] Prevot, 323.
[34] *BTBP*, 148.
[35] *BTBP*, 151.
[36] *CLT*, 166.

quoted me this passage from his first work. "I have always had a Christian identity at the heart of all I say," he insisted. "And when you know that you know that all people are brothers and sisters. White people just don't want to act like it."

3 Excursus: On Reconciliation, Violence, & Nonviolence

Before moving on to chart an approach to reconciliation consistent with Cone's proposals, and one that avoids the universalizing tendencies often associated with these efforts, I must first deal with one of the core distinctions between Cone and Hauerwas when it comes to reconciliation: that is, their understandings of the legitimate use of violence to secure liberation. This issue is important for this project because it raises the question: can violence be consistent with reconciliation? Cone insists that the project of reconciliation may need to employ violence in order to achieve its liberatory aims. Hauerwas's theological project denies the faithfulness of any violence on the part of Christians.

Hauerwas, a famous pacifist, rejects the use of violent actions by Christians in any circumstance—whether they are in positions of privilege or oppression. The church is a peaceable community formed by the peaceful witness of Christ as he faced a violent death, and therefore to employ violent action would always be a violation of a faithful Christian witness. Reconciliation, therefore, for Hauerwas can only be accomplished in a posture of peaceableness, wherein wrongs are repaired by peaceful means of dialogue, or where Christians choose to suffer at the hands of the violent rather than fight back. The oppressed must endure suffering for the sake of the possibility of reconciliation rather than use violence to force the oppressor to reckon with their own injustices. For Cone, God's love grants humans the power to reflect God's power in seeking their own liberation. Many of us may recall the shock we felt when, as infants in the complexities of theology and race, we read Cone write about throwing Molotov cocktails through the windows of white-owned buildings. "We know, of course, that getting rid of evil take something more than burning down buildings," he quipped, "but one must start somewhere."[37] In less provocative terms, Cone asserts that to love the white man is then to confront him with God's power of liberation; he warns, "The black man must, if he is not to lose sight of his new-found identity in Christ, be prepared for conflict, for a radical confrontation."[38] Following Tillich, Cone asserts that one cannot speak of love without speaking also of justice and power.[39] Then in an odd internalist move (a la Luther), Cone insists that love is not fully embodied in one's outer action but in

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[37] *BTL*, 20th ed., 26.

[38] *BTBP*, 53.

[39] *BTBP*, 54. He quotes Paul Tillich: "It is the strange work of love to destroy that which is against love" (*Love, Power, and Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, 49)).

her inner motive for this action.[40] The moral force lies in the motive, intention, and attitude. This renders the attempt to measure love—or morality—by specific actions, like suffering violence without retaliation, theologically incorrect.[41]

Further for Cone, white theologians' insistence on nonviolence is a condition of their privileged position, and more specifically, their blindness to the ways in which violence is already embedded in their actions. None of us are free of committing acts of violence—even when we are blinded from recognizing the violence we inflict on others by our privilege. We do not have to be a white law enforcement officer shooting an unarmed black man, or even a landlord discriminating against tenants on the basis of race; simply by living within and participating in systems of power in which these things—and more—happen on a regular basis, without doing everything in our power to radically disrupt these systems, we are already implicated in violence inflicted on people of color. In short, violence already exists in every situation in which a people are oppressed—"no one can be nonviolent in an unjust society."[42] Cone might say, that for pacifist white theologians like Hauerwas, attention to violence has been limited to what Anna Floerke Scheid has called "assault" violence. Scheid helpfully distinguishes between three types of violence: degrading violence, structural violence, and assault violence.[43] It is these first two types—verbal and system attacks—that often go unnoticed, or un-theorized—by white pacifist theologians. Cone would contend that degrading violence and structural violence are just as harmful as physical violence and should be incorporated into any account of violence and nonviolent resistance. We recall that in chapter two, Woodard-Lehman argued that Hauerwas's pacifism defines violence too narrowly—only the direct physical actions of war and torture. This avoids the Foucaldian concept of dominative power: an awareness of the ways violence persists beyond physical force to more subtle and passive forms of violence. This involves "racially correlated lived inequalities" that constitute actual violence according to Woodard-Lehman, such as voter ID restrictions or verbal micro-aggressions fueled by white fragility.[44] This more comprehensive view of violence, thus, means that it is nearly impossible to avoid participating in violence, understood on a structural level in which it becomes more difficult to lay direct blame or identify individual guilt.

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[40] See Martin Luther's moral dichotomy between the "outer man" and "inner man" in his famous work, *The Freedom of a Christian* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

[41] *BTBP*, 55.

[42] GO, 201.

[43] See Scheid, *Just Revolution: A Christian Ethic of Political Resistance and Social Transformation* (New York: Lexington Books, 2015).

[44] Woodard-Lehman, 312.

Therefore, the question of whether to participate in violence or nonviolence is moot, according to Cone. Violence versus nonviolence is not the issue. The true question is: Whose violence is on the right side?[45] To claim to be nonviolent is simply to accept the oppressors' values, and participate in his violence. If the system one finds herself in is evil then revolutionary violence is justified and necessary.[46] Violence and reconciliation, therefore, are not incommensurable, just as the use of violence and Christian morality are not incommensurable more broadly, since violence is fundamentally an unavoidable part of human temporal existence.

Cone justifies these claims (which of course distinguish him from Hauerwas's views of how to faithfully achieve reconciliation) with a particular view of how the historical Jesus functions in ethical thought. We cannot glean absolute ethical guidance from Jesus, he claims rather boldly; that is, one cannot solve the ethical questions of the 20th century by looking at what Jesus did in the first century.[47] Again, this move is consistent with the priority Cone grants to particularity, context, and experience. He writes:

> If violence versus nonviolence is not the issue, but rather, the creation of a new humanity, then the critical question for Christians is not whether Jesus committed violence or whether violence is theoretically consistent with love and reconciliation. We repeat: the question is not what Jesus *did*, as if his behavior in first-century Palestine were the infallible ethical guide for our actions today. We must not ask what he did, but what is he *doing*—and what he did becomes important only insofar as it points to his activity today. To use the Jesus of history as an absolute ethical guide for people today is to become enslaved to the past, foreclosing God's eschatological future and its judgment on the present.[48]

Later in *Speaking the Truth*, Cone qualifies and clarifies the claims, rejecting a vengeful motivation for the use of violence: "Returning violence for violence must be completely rejected as an inappropriate strategy for black liberation in the United States."[49] He says that he rejects any use of violence for vengeance "not only because I am a Christian, and thus believe that vengeance belongs to God alone; I must repudiate it because persons who hate are themselves destroyed by the hate and rendered unfit as creative bearers of the new social order."[50] And in his 1993 publication of *Martin and Malcolm and America*, he concludes, "Unless humankind finds a way to put an end to violence, then violence will most certainly

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[45] *BTBP*, 143.
[46] GO, 201; *BTBP*, 143.
[47] *BTBP*, 139.
[48] GO, 204.
[49] *ST*, 65.
[50] *ST*, 69.

put an end to humankind."[51] Still, for Cone, this softening stance toward nonviolence does not disqualify self-defense. Michael Duffy observes that Cone adopts a form of just war theory in adjudicating when violence is necessary and appropriate,[52] though not in any formal way. Cone's principle point remains that since we are all already implicated in violence, there will be particular situations in which taking direct violent action (as in self-defense) is justified. Thus, it is important to recognize that for Cone, no reconciliation is possible until the status of "master" no longer exists–and that may faithfully be accomplished through violent action on the part of the oppressed if necessary. His charge to white theologians like Hauerwas, and me, who subscribe to a pacifist ethic is that their privilege blinds them to the ways they are already implicated in violence. Pacifism is an illusion for the colorblind.

Cone's insistence on this point presses for a response from any white person who suggests that violence is incompatible with Christianity. This is an acute and poignant time to be writing about the role of violence in racial liberation and the question of violence's commensurability with a process of reconciliation. Just in the time I have been working on this chapter, two more African American men have been shot by police officers; witnesses to both shootings claim they were unarmed. At recent protests over police brutality one magazine captured an image of a protester holding a sign that read, "#jamesconewasright." This comes at a time when black people are not only experiencing violence more subtly in the workplace, marketplace, or through aggressive incarceration tactics, but are literally dying in the street at the bloody hands of a system that still seems intent on their annihilation. As a white pacifist theologian who, to show my hand, holds deep sympathies with Hauerwas's perspective, it is difficult to call on those who have never experienced the privilege sitting at a bourgeois coffee shop to write words on an expensive laptop to "turn the other cheek." I have the privilege of being part of a community that has the time and leisure to develop a posture–perhaps it is a "virtue"–of nonviolence and to "opt into" a position of sacrifice if the situation ever arose. My life is not threatened daily, and I am not continually resisting those who constantly want to sacrifice my body. I can maintain a convenient posture toward violence, while many have no choice to opt into or out of a life that reckons with the relentless reality of violence. Those who are hard pressed from every side to simply survive not only are not afforded the time to think on these things and develop strategies for nonviolence–or cultivate habits that may generate a nonviolent response in the moment–but should they also to bear the extra burden of me dictating to them on my contextual terms what they ought to do?

I think Cone is correct, that as the enemy, I cannot dictate the terms of reconciliation. Yet, if I remain convinced that nonviolence is an integral, fundamental, and yes, even universal,

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[51] MMA, 270.
[52] Duffy, 194.

Christian virtue[53]—in some ways the best expression of God's graceful redemption of a sinful and revolting humanity—and not a matter of a double morality incumbent on some and not others (a la Aquinas), then my first task is to see that the material conditions of those who daily face the threat of violence are changed. Part of the pacifism of white Christians must be to work to undermine the material conditions that inflict violence on others—poverty, a corrupt criminal justice system, a prejudiced law enforcement, and the oppression of white supremacy. We must deal with and reduce our own violence first, a violence that creates an environment for others in which nonviolence actually requires a commitment and sacrifice that I will never have to make.

This means, and a costly reconciliation requires, us to first recognize that James Cone was, indeed, right. All are implicated in violence already. *There is no one who does good, no, not one.*[54] Therefore, we must approach the question with grace—in the humble acknowledgement that I have been formed to be pacifist in a context where my life is not in danger and I will likely never face a situation in which I must sacrifice my life, or the lives of those I love. And second, we must recognize that Cone is right again—we must choose sides. God chooses the side of the oppressed; I must also. But I do not believe choosing sides means that Christians are free to advance direct violence on behalf of our side. I do not believe this for two reasons.

The first reason identifies two internal inconsistencies in Cone's position that the historical Jesus is not a morally formative fact for Christians. This appears to be inconsistent with Cone's overall ethics and Christology for two further reasons. First, Cone links his Christology of the Black Christ to the historical Jesus. As I described in chapter five, Cone's Christology is founded in the historical Jesus, in "the early Christian community's historical knowledge of Jesus as a man who defined the meaning of his existence as being one with the poor and outcasts."[55] Christ's blackness, his identification with the oppressed of the world, is based in Jesus' Jewishness, his embodiment as a member of an oppressed community in first century Palestine. Therefore, to exclude Jesus' way of life as recorded in this history, and specifically his nonviolence, from his person seems to be an inconsistency on the part of Cone. The historicity of Christ's blackness and his nonviolence must be taken together or not at all. The historical Jesus cannot serve as a marker for our Christology but not for our ethics. And second, Cone's demarcation of motivation and action in the ethical life of an agent—love

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[53] Cone himself recognizes some universal aspects of Christian morality, binding on all Christians, even those who are oppressed, and even if it places a double burden on those who are oppressed. According to Andrew Prevot's interpretation, for example, the Christian commitment to the poor exceeds the affirmation of blackness in Cone's writing. That is, Cone makes the preferential option for the poor binding on black populations as well. He asks for even disenfranchised and disinherited African Americans to care for those who are poorer than they are (Prevot, 317).
[54] Psalms 14:3, 53:3.
[55] *BTL*, 204.

only need be embodied in one's motivation—risks an internalization of ethics; ethics encompassed by intention alone. Cone's ethics in general, however, is not exclusively intentionalist but certainly takes the concrete consequences of an agent's actions into account. So to exclude consideration of consequences when it comes to questions of violence, again, appears to be an inconsistent move on his part. As trite as it has become, I remain convinced, *pace* Luther and Augustine, that it is difficult to love one's enemy while killing him.

The second general reason has to do with his claim that we are bound to systems of violence. Judith Butler is helpful here by imposing a cleavage between formation and conduct. Granting the point that Cone makes—that we all have been formed as subjects through violence—Butler argues that "it should still be possible to claim that a certain crucial breakage can take place between the violence by which we are formed and the violence with which, once formed, we conduct ourselves." She continues, "Indeed, it may that precisely because one is formed through violence, the responsibility not to repeat the violence of one's formation is all the more pressing and important."[56] Even granting that a human subject's formation through violence is unending as we continue to participate in and be shaped by regimes of violence and power, "and that formative action continues throughout one's life," one is forced to decide "how to live the violence of one's formative history, how to effect shifts and reversals in its iteration."[57] The fact that violence produces the subject is not determinative of all of that subject's actions: I cannot "dispense with the history of my formation," she concedes, but must struggle against repeating its effects. "The point is not to eradicate the condition's of one's own production, but only to assume responsibility for living a life that contests the determining power of that production."[58] Being mired in the condition violence is precisely the opening of the possibility for living non-violently, not its closure, as we seek actively and aggressively to limit the effects and injuries of violence. Important for Butler, and I believe an important hinge to link Cone's account of reconciliation with the Christian call to nonviolence, is the claim that nonviolence is not the opposite of rage and aggression. Rather rage and aggression are constitutive of nonviolence when nonviolent action is directed toward political struggle and the work of liberation.[59]

And here my other ally in these claims, of course, is Martin Luther King, Jr. But to even invoke him as an ally risks falling into the infamous history of white people abstracting King from his agitator role and employing him in a quietist manner. James Cone offers an ambivalent perspective on King himself. As a proponent of nonviolence (of which Cone observes that whites in the 1950s and 60s were all too happy to accept), Cone calls King the

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[56] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (New York: Seagull Books, 2009), 167.
[57] Butler, 170.
[58] Butler, 170.
[59] Butler, 182.

"darling of the white liberal establishment."[60] He praises Malcolm X's call for blacks to take freedom by any means necessary, insisting, "What right did white people have to tell black people the methods that they should use to fight against white racism?" But he also says that King's commitment to love and nonviolence ultimately proved to be right. "With love and nonviolence, blacks developed a way of living with dignity in a world that did not recognize them as human beings. In a situation of sociopolitical powerlessness, 'passivity' was perhaps the only means of black survival."[61] He believes that nonviolent direct action was the only way that the African American minority of ten percent of the population could fight for freedom and also avoid total slaughter.[62]

Still, those critical of appropriations of King by whites calling for peace and order are quite right and have legitimate merit. Our current state of police violence and racism do suggest the failure of the nonviolent civil rights movement to effect real substantive change. Beloved community is still a far off dream. The nonviolent methods of civil rights leaders like King were sufficient strategies to achieve legal rights like voting, but were not enough to bring about the material and systemic change necessary to alleviate the conditions that abetted and perpetuated this racial oppression in the first place. Still, we must remember that for King, agitation and nonviolence were not incommensurable. King was not a proponent of gradualism nor a preacher of quietism. Cone describes a revolutionary turn in the late thought of King; recognizing the plight of the poor in northern slums he shifted his emphasis from integration to a reconstruction of the entire society.[63] This included a movement toward the black separatism called for by Malcolm X, or at least the need for "temporary segregation," Cone argues.[64] Most importantly, King displayed a new affirmation of "black self-esteem and self-determination," affirming the concept of "blackness" in ways that he had not before.[65] King even proclaimed that the race riots of the mid-60s were "caused by nice, gentle, timid white moderates who are more concerned about order than justice."[66] In a speech at Stanford University in April of 1967, entitled "The Other America," King gave depth to his vision of nonviolence:

> Let me say as I've always said, that riots are socially destructive and self-defeating. I'm still convinced that non-violence is the most potent weapon

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[60] MMA, 245.

[61] MMA, 269.

[62] MMA, 303.

[63] MMA, 223, 257.

[64] MMA, 234.

[65] MMA, 226.

[66] King, "Transforming a Neighborhood into a Brotherhood," Address for the National Association of Real Estate Brokers, San Francisco, August 10 (Atlanta: King Center Archives, 1967); quoted in James Cone, "Martin Luther King and the Third World," *World Order and Religion* ed. Wade Clark Roof (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1991).

available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and justice . . . But at the same time, it is as necessary for me to be as vigorous in condemning the conditions which cause people to feel they must engage in riotous activities as it is for me to condemn riots. . . . I think America must see that riots do not develop out of thin air. Certain conditions continue to exist in our society, which must be condemned as vigorously as we condemn riots. But in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it that America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the black poor has worsened over the last few years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquility and the status quo than about justice, equality, and humanity. And so in a real sense, our nation's summers of riots are caused by our nation's winters of delay. And as long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the [only] absolute guarantors of riot prevention.[67]

For King, nonviolence actions create opportunities for the violence that the oppressors are already inflicting to become more visible and explicit. King's strategy created pressure situations that forced oppressors to reckon with their own actions and attitudes. Nonviolence was a "method" for King to bring about better racial conditions, "a means to awaken a sense of moral shame in the opponent,"[68] a pragmatic tactic to elicit certain changes in the political system in the struggle for freedom and equality for the oppressed. For him it was a "potent weapon," in the persuasion of the oppressors and powerful to "see the error of their approach and come to respect us."[69]

And here King links nonviolence with a vision of reconciliation as a form of conversion. The end of nonviolence, urged King, is redemption and reconciliation, to "transform oppressors into friends."[70] His was an effort to "prick their consciences" as Cone puts it.[71] Importantly, this conversion, King expressed, is the precondition for reconciliation—"it reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality."[72] Conversion is the result of Christ's command to love neighbor and enemy, and as the nonviolent resistors

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[67] Martin Luther King, Jr. "The Other America," speech delivered at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, on April 14, 1967, www.crmvet.org/docs/otheram. Thanks to a recent and wonderful sermon by my friend Ben Boswell, delivered to his congregation in Charlotte, NC the week after the Charlottes riots, for bringing this speech to my attention.

[68] Martin Luther King, Jr., A *Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperOne, 1986), 8 (hereafter King).

[69] King, 447, 485, 81. I argue these points more fully in my article, "'No Midnight Long Remains': The Evangelical King and the End of Nonviolence," *Christian Ethics Today* vol. 20 no. 3 (2012).

[70] King, 8, 141.

[71] MMA, 69.

[72] King, 487.

witness to Christ's "love ethic" they will win their oppressors over to their side. And that is the beginning of reconciliation, the inauguration of Christ's beloved community.[73] Reconciliation is the burden of the oppressor, not the oppressed. But advancing the violence already engulfing our social, economic, and political systems, even by the oppressed, only thwarts these efforts.[74] Ultimately, we see through King that reconciliation requires conversion, because reconciliation requires conformation to the character of God, being caught up in the work of God. And I will argue in the remainder of this chapter that reconciliation understood as a process of conversion is a weighty and costly vision of reconciliation. It avoids the abstract and shallow elements identified by the critics of reconciliation, because it places the burden on the oppressors (conversion), and includes the essential elements of repentance and reparation.

4 Reconciliation: A Conversion Paradigm

I imagine at this point that my insistence on reconciliation, and further, my contention for a "conversion paradigm" of reconciliation has raised many ears. The very idea of conversion confronts our postmodern sensibilities with the idea of an inauthentic and coercive façade. More nefariously, conversion is encased in a history that has funded, or at least ignored, many of the religious atrocities of the modern era. The practice of conversion is often criticized for being a-political and avoiding many of the systemic social issues facing contemporary society. One thinks of Billy Graham, integrating his Crusades for the sake of maximizing conversions, but refusing to publicly endorse civil rights protesters. An other-worldly focus on conversion is implicated in the American church's historical avoidance of decrying slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation. Even more damning, conversion has been revealed to be a trigger in the development of race-based slavery and European imperialism.[75] The abduction of Africans for the purpose of slavery, and then the brutal enforcement of the slave system, were repeatedly

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[73] As Karen Guth notes, nonviolent love is a 'creative practice' for King—creating a new type of community and re-creating a redeemed world (*Christian Ethics at the Boundary: Feminism and Theologies of Public Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 175-182. In this way, the tactical purposes of nonviolent resistance are caught up in the redemptive purposes of God and made into "one marvelous unity of purpose" to redeem and reconcile oppressors and oppressed in the unified community of Christ. Through their participation, nonviolent resisters become "instruments of God" and allow "God's energy" to enter and direct their actions and their souls (King, *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 135).

[74] Howard Thurman's *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976; orig. 1949), offers a strong argument for the importance of nonviolence for liberation.

[75] For an account of the abuse of "conversion" during colonization, see Luis Rivera, *A Violent Evangelism*.

justified for the sake of the conversion of the "heathen."[76] With this dark history brooding, I admit that conversion is not an obvious model for a politics of racial reconciliation.

But I remain convinced that the misuse of a concept or practice, especially one so thoroughly ingrained in the scriptural vision for the life of discipleship, is not sufficient reason to jettison it altogether. In many ways, conversion, in the form of witness, or proclaiming the Good News, is at the heart of the Christian story and is the core practice of the Christian community. This Good News of salvation, redemption, and liberation drives points to the work of God and drives the work of God's people in such an encompassing way that any attempt at earthly liberation and reconciliation already participate in the spreading of that Good News. If conversion is nothing but a reconciliation to God, then any earthly forms of reconciliation between God's creatures necessarily involves conversion. Both themes, reconciliation and conversion, are at the heart of Christian understandings of the self, world, and society.

4.1 A Deeper Conversion

In many ways, conversion is central to the praxis of Christian communities—whether this conversion happens through direct proselytizing, or through more holistic measures of social transformation like handing out bus vouchers to the poor or petitioning the city counsel to expand its public transportation system. This is all part of the work of conversion. Shawn Copeland writes, "Embodying Christ is discipleship, and discipleship is embodied praxis. This praxis is the embodied realization of religious, cognitive, and moral conversion."[77] Discipleship is the life work of conforming our attitudes, loves, desires, and actions to God's. It is a process of formation, even conformation to the character of God, and as Luke Bretherton argues, this conformation to the character of God goes by the name of conversion.[78] Conversion is precisely what is needed for reconciliation to become a reality, understood as a transformation of our worldview, relationships, and praxis.

Arthur Darby Nock, who gave shape to the way we conventionally think about conversion with his seminal 1933 work titled *Conversion*, defined it as, "the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to

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[76] See, for example, fifteenth century Portuguese colonizer Gomes Eannes de Azurara's use of conversion as justification for slavery: "for though their bodies were now brought into some subjection, that was a small matter in comparison of their souls, which would now possess true freedom for everyone" (Quoted in Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible" Institution in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 96).

[77] Copeland, 127.

[78] Luke Bretherton, "On Conversion," lecture to the Department of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, delivered at Duke University, February 26, 2015. All Bretherton quotes in this subsection come from this unpublished lecture. I thank Luke Bretherton for permission to use this source.

another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right."[79] Conversion involves a complete embodying of this change, belonging to it, he says, "body and soul."[80] Nock helpfully grasps the totality of this transformation. Conversion involves a seismic shift, a complete turning from the old to the new. The understanding of conversion that I appeal to in this discussion aligns well in this way with Nock's description. However, I want to press more firmly than Nock on the social and political dimensions of conversion. It is indeed about the soul of an individual, but as I will demonstrate in this section, conversion involves important socio-political elements as well. It is a radical reorientation, not just of an individual's soul, but of her entire being, body, and life. It reorders a person's relationships to others, including the principalities and powers, and thus involves a long and difficult process of allowing one's whole self to be drawn to another. It is this deep model of conversion that sets the terms for a practice of conversion.

Cone himself frames reconciliation as a type of conversion, more specifically, as beginning with a conversion from whiteness. He invokes the stronger image of white people destroying their own whiteness, but even this is consistent with the Pauline language of putting to death the old self so that a new self can live.[81] I have argued that the total destruction of one's whiteness is not easy and in fact may be impossible—minimally in the way whites will still be treated and responded to as people with white skin even of they have renounced the benefits of whiteness. But this notion of turning away or dying to one's self, that is, of conversion, must be integral to reconciliation, even if a complete shedding of whiteness is impossible.

The costliness of deep reconciliation cannot be accepted, achieved, and borne without including a process of moral (and yes, spiritual) conversion. According to Bretherton:

> Any commitment to justice, democracy or liberation entails a commitment to conversion, for conversion is simply a way of talking about change. And different conceptualities of change shape our understandings of morality and democracy. For at heart both ethics and democratic politics are about action in time directed toward change for the better. Such action presumes there is a point of disjuncture between the world as it is and the world as it should be.[82]

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[79] A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998; orig. Oxford University Press, 1933), 7.

[80] Nock, 14. Nock appeals to William James to argue that in conversion this impulse to reject the wrong exceeds the desire for the positive. James writes, "In a majority of cases, indeed, the sin almost exclusively engrosses the attention, so that conversion is 'a process of struggling away from sin rather than of striving towards righteousness'" (8). Reconciliation indeed is a struggling away from the wrong (conversion as process, as struggle where we will fail over and over), but reconciliation cannot be merely a turning away. It must always be oriented toward the right, toward the eschatological beloved community breaking in to this world.

[81] Ephesians 4:22-24; Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:6-7 and 8:12-13.

[82] Bretherton, "On Conversion."

I draw on Luke Bretherton's work to inform my discussion of conversion because, as an ethicist, he highlights the important social and political dimensions of conversion that are overlooked in most theological treatments. To support this account I will point to the paradigmatic example he gives of conversion, the conversion of Saul in Acts 9:1-19. This account of the story identifies the fullness of political and moral dimensions of conversion, so I will quote it at length.

> On the road to Damascus he is knocked down. In Caravaggio's portrayal of the conversion Paul is thrown off a horse, Caravaggio thereby captures the figural elements of Paul's descent. The horse symbolizes well Saul's reliance on state power and the markers of elite status to gain standing and prestige. As Brittany Wilson contends, Paul is unmanned through his conversion and goes through a process of dis-identification with the hegemonic social, economic and political structures and signifiers of power. He is blinded. Such disablement is a sign of stigma. He must be led by Ananias and so lacks self-mastery which is a source of shame. He loses command of the soldiers and fails in his mission so lacks military honor. He must receive from and be cared for by others and so is a client rather than a patron which is to be without political power in the Greco-Roman world. Subsequent to his conversion we learn that he cannot rely on rhetoric to win followers. And finally, he is not a father and is celibate, so lacks virility and has no human future as he has no children to carry on his name. Thus his conversion not only transforms him but also his relationship to the principalities and powers of this age. He cannot rely on worldly ways and means to achieve what needs to be done or to gain recognition and status. Quite the reverse, the means of earthly power become instruments of his own persecution. So his conversion is as much a theopolitical event as it is an existential and spiritual one.[83]

New Testament scholar Brittany Wilson goes on to claim that Paul's conversion to the Way now makes this formally self-sufficient man dependent on others—even those he formally persecuted. His conversion has opened him to vulnerability and compelled him to give up self-control over his own life.[84] Yet also, significantly, after the visit from Ananias three days later, Paul's vision was restored; "something like scales fell from his eyes" and he was immediately baptized.[85] Yes, Paul's blindness displaced him and set him on a new way after his first moment of conversion with Jesus, a way of submission, dependence, and vulnerability. But Paul's regaining sight, a kind of seeing that compelled him to immediately go and get baptized, signals a new way of seeing the world. This aligns with one of the most famous accounts of conversion in literature, that of Saint Augustine. While Augustine's conversion was also a momentary revelation as he read from Romans 13 and his "heart was filled with a

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[83] Here Bretherton draws on Brittany E. Wilson's exegesis of Saul's conversion through a masculinity lens in *Unmanly Men: Refigurations of Masculinity in Luke-Acts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 153-170.

[84] Wilson, 189.

[85] Acts 9:18.

light of confidence," he recounts the ways it continued shaping and changing him as a catechumen. Like Paul cemented his conversion in baptism after he regained his sight, Augustine's new sight led him to a vocational change, dedicating his speech and writing to God.[86]

Each of these points connote a broader, and deeper, concept of conversion than one typically imagines; this deeper, and more costly, concept of conversion serves as a helpful model for understanding reconciliation. And each of these point to a necessary condition specifically for the type of conversion that is racial reconciliation. Paul's dependence and new sight converge to turn his world upside down. As chapter six highlighted, reconciliation must begin with a new way of seeing the world and seeing other bodies. As the scales fall from our eyes and we first begin to see the wounds that mark the bodies of others—wounds we have inflicted or contributed to—we begin to see the social realities of our own color. Only then are we able to reflect on the ways that our whiteness has influenced the way we see and treat others and the ways we have hence been blinded to that reality. Whiteness becomes visible to itself. And the newfound vulnerability that comes with conversion grants us the virtue of humility to announce ourselves as those who wounded the body and those who must repent and seek forgiveness.[87]

4.2 Is Conversion a Better Framework for Racial Reconciliation?

I believe, therefore, that conversion is an appropriate and indeed helpful framework with which to understand the work of racial reconciliation. (This notion of racial reconciliation beginning with a type of conversion is expressed in the recent colloquialism that describes one who has achieved a racial awareness as being "Woke." I only want to argue that one is not "woke" instantaneously, but is in a continual process of waking—and also happens to occasionally hit the metaphorical snooze button.)

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[86] Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 172-176; the quote is from 174.

[87] It is important to note that this model of conversion as a process of transformation does not conform to the Social Gospel emphasis on transforming the social order, H. Richard Niebuhr's model of "Christ transforming culture" in *Christ and Culture*, or modern attempts to "win the culture for Christ" though all of these trade on the theme of conversion. This model does not do so because its aims are much narrower and more modest. As the reader will see in my final chapter I believe the prospects for this work are challenging, and incremental and individual transformations ought to be celebrated. Also, in good Hauerwasian fashion, this model of conversion is aimed at the church. It holds no pretensions to win the culture at large, though a Christian will always hope that the witness of a church radically transformed by racial reconciliation will influence the larger publics and model ways in which these other publics can do the same. This is a conversion that takes place first and foremost within the Body of Christ, attending to and transforming its own complicity and its own wounds of whiteness. That work will be difficult enough.

On a deeper level, I argue this is true for four reasons. First, if the reason a reconciliation paradigm insufficient to address racism and racial inequality is due to its lack of repentance and reparation, then the concept of conversion infuses reconciliation with just those elements. One may recall the conversion of the tax collector Zaccheus that was evidenced by his attempts at reparation. After a life of stealing money from the poor, upon encountering Jesus he commits to giving half of his possessions to the poor, and "if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much."[88] Conversion is not a momentary event, but a challenging process of change over time. It begins with repentance—a recognition and confession of one's sins and history of moral and spiritual failings, our continual fallenness—and commitment to change, to become a new creation (born again, etc). And while this process may begin at one point, one precise moment that one can later identify, it is not just a momentary event, but a continual process of moral formation. According to Bretherton, "Conversion entails a *kairos* moment of definitive change that we symbolize in baptism and, at the same time, a chronological process we name as a journey or pilgrimage." It is a process of reconfiguring our desires in conformation to the character of God. If reconciliation to God requires an effort to repair that broken relationship with God, with God's help, then racial reconciliation, understood in a conversion paradigm, requires continual efforts to repair the damage done by white power and supremacy, and continual efforts to be morally formed by and along with our black brothers and sisters—reparations.

In fact, I contend that nothing short of reconciliation as conversion has the hope of overcoming and reordering our misdirected desires, fears, and prejudices. The benefits of privilege are so deeply woven into the fabric of our quotidian realities that it requires a concrete change in perspective—a conversion, in fact—to recognize the problems this privilege also creates for others. A proper understanding of conversion recognizes both the personal spiritual dimension and the social, public and political dimension of this work—that conversion involves changing hearts and changing systems, and any movement toward radical change requires both. It is not a matter of either/or, but both/and. Bretherton calls conversion *incarnational*: "It involves a fundamental recalibration of how we touch, taste, see, smell and hear the world."[89] The importance of the incarnationality of conversion will become central to my analysis of the embodied nature of practices of reconciliation in chapter eight—especially the ways in which these practices engage the senses and multiple parts of the body.

Second, as Bretherton claims, conversion involves both *epistrophe* and *metanoia*—simultaneously a looking back and proleptic openness to the future. ἐπιστροφὴ is the New Testament term typically translated as "conversion." Bretherton defines *epistrophe* as "the

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[88] Luke 19:1-10. Thanks to Sam Speers for pointing me to this example.
[89] Bretherton, "On Conversion."

turning back to, discovery or recollection of one's true self that has been lost or marred because of poor formation, sin or living in a bad society."[90] This is connoted in the way Christians talk about conversion as "regeneration." But in the case of racial reconciliation, this turning back is not to rediscover an earlier purer moment, but to recall the times of our past when we have failed, or discover the ways in which our lives have been continually corrupted by wickedness. Conversion—including conversion from racism, privilege, or colorblindness—begins with a call to remember, to truthfully tell the story of our lives and refigure that story in light of the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. And this refiguring is also a transfiguring that points to the second aspect of conversion. The word used in the New Testament to describe transformation is *metanoia*, as in Paul's calling to the Romans to "be transformed [μεταμορφοῦσθε] by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."[91]

Third, personal metanoia necessarily leads to social, political, and structural change. We see that conversion begins with a conversion of thought—of the mind—but results in a moral transformation, an opening of the ability to see that which is good. It is turning away from the old things to a new beginning—or perhaps allowing our new recognition of the fallenness of our old ways to trigger a new vision, an ability to see our world, relationships, and systems anew. This is why Bretherton claims that "the structural analogue of personal *metanoia* is revolution: the re-founding of society, a radical rupture with the past, and a movement into a new and better form of a political order, institution or practice. The temporal shift envisaged is forward (e.g. to become modern rather than medieval), while the spatial shift is to a different place." It draws on our hope for an eschatological redemption, but as Cone says, that eschatological hope informs and shapes our current ontological reality. It is not yet in full, but breaking in through our hope of and participation in God's greater work of the redemption of the cosmos.

Fourth, conversion calls on one to submit to another's authority. This account of conversion, as a process that subverts one's own sight and one's own power, attends to the costly dimensions of reconciliation as conversion. It is a reorienting of the self and the self's relation to the world around it. In the case of Saul, "how he remembers, imagines, desires and relates to the world around him is transformed so that he is embedded within it more fully." His conversion is a taking on of vulnerability to the risks, joys, tragedies, hopes, injustices, and redemption of the least of these in the world. This is not a cheap grace nor an easy reconciliation—with God nor with the world around him. Rather, it entails multiple levels of change over time, of giving up power, of re-envisioning others, of placing oneself in a

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[90] Bretherton, "On Conversion."
[91] Romans 12:2.

vulnerable position to others. Conversion, rightly understood, effectively balances the personal and political; it doesn't err on the side of the personal and inter-personal, as many of the reconciliation critics detest, but it also includes the personal and interpersonal as integral to politics. The personal is political.

5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued for a costly process of racial reconciliation based on the model of conversion. This is not conversion understood as a momentary event, but as a long and difficult process of formation that requires a holistic transformation. In the end, a conversion model of reconciliation attends to the tension I have identified between the responses and proposals of Hauerwas and Cone to the problem of racism without overcoming the instructive aspects of this tension. If Hauerwas's concern that he cannot fully identify with the story of African Americans, and that any attempt to identify will only lead to colonialism, and Cone's proposal that white Christians become black (a proposal with which I have noted reservations) leave white theologians and Christians at an impasse, I believe that the concept of conversion suggests a path forward.

First, conversion rightfully places the burden for action on white people. Whites are the one in need of conversion—a changed heart and renewed mind. Whites, like the apostle Paul, must have our eyes opened to be able to see rightly—to see the differences in skin that we once deemed subhuman and now gloss over in the name of "colorblindness." Reconciliation as conversion begins with a decision to turn from one's whiteness. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Cone does not provide an outline of this process—what steps are involved in dying to one's whiteness. That, I'm sure he would argue, is the job of white people. In the next chapter I will offer a series of practices that press in that direction. Second, conversion not only identifies a momentary revelation, but an ongoing process of formation. It is a process of continual conformation to the character of God, of sanctification. Likewise, entering another's story is not an easy thing, as Hauerwas rightly suggests. One must tread lightly, with fear and trembling, and in subordination to the other whose story is told. In terms of a process of racial reconciliation, this requires a subversion of whatever power one brings into the process of conversion—a necessary check on the tendency of whites to "take over," as Hauerwas says. We must understand this process, recognize the misunderstandings and acknowledge the difficulties—issues I will address in the final chapter.

Third, conversion requires a community to make sense of what one is being converted into. While conversion happens to an individual, the process of formation and conformation occurs within a community whose narrative pulls one in deeper. Both Cone and Hauerwas signal the need for a community of formation to help one actualize the transformation that

God has begun in them. And fourth, conversion as a process that remains incomplete until we are gathered into the heavenly community of God reminds us that any movement toward earthly reconciliation will always be incomplete this side of the eschaton. Whites will not be able to completely "become black" or fully identify with African Americans. Whites and blacks will not fully be able to overcome the cultural differences and misunderstandings that prevent even well-meaning reconcilers from full community. Conversion provides a necessary chastening measure to our ideas of reconciliation, consistent with the problems and the helpful proposals I have identified in the work of Hauerwas and Cone. In sum, reconciliation as conversion involves a process of formation to recognize and become a part of the wounded Body of Christ. Therefore, reconciliation requires a community as well as formative practices. It is to these that I now turn in the final chapter.

Chapter 8 | *Practicing Reconciliation*

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you.[1]

Introduction

In the previous section I described reconciliation, understood within a paradigm of conversion, as a process of formation. In the case of racial reconciliation, this is a process that begins with white people (racism is a white problem, not a black problem), and requires a process of intentional actions cultivated to reform our perceptions, desires, habits, and praxis—actions typically called *practices*. As I argued in the previous chapter, conversion is best understood as a process of conformation to the character of God—that is, a process of formation wherein human and divine agency cooperate to shape the behavior and desires of the Christian. James Cone also understands reconciliation as a type of conversion. However, Cone does not offer an outline of what this process would look like; that is, no account of the virtues necessary for his vision of reconciliation and liberation or suggestion of what practices such work might entail.[2] What steps must one take to become black? How does one undergo this process of conversion? What steps are entailed in a costly reconciliation? These are not questions he feels the need to answer. As I said at the outset of this dissertation, the problem of racial reconciliation is a white problem, and Cone has justifiably left white Christians to figure this out for ourselves.

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[1] Philippians 2:12b-13a.

[2] This is primarily because he is more concerned with encouraging black Christians to work for their liberation and presumably feels no compulsion to help white Christians think through how to be better and more costly reconcilers. This is also, presumably, because Cone is a Methodist and a Barthian and therefore a sanctificationist who is skeptical of humans—especially those on the side of oppression—who think they can use their own agency to generate moral ends. Still, as I've said at several points in this dissertation, he wants white people to write about race, especially to other white people, so I will undertake the task of beginning to think how white Christians might participate in the divine work of reconciliation through particular practices.

With that in mind, this final chapter is my attempt to begin to imagine what a process of costly reconciliation as a type of conversion looks like. What practices might it entail? And as I have said already, I will locate this process within the community of the church, the wounded Body of Christ. We recall from chapter one, that as Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, the worshipping community is the site of ethnic reconciliation—where all will come bringing their own particularities and own wounds to worship in spirit and in truth. To undertake this task I will turn a the local church, an actual multi-racial congregation, and examine three core practices of this church dedicated to examining and improving racial relations. The chapter will then proceed as follows. This first section will provide a deeper examination of this process of conversion as formation, specifically the role of embodied practices in the formation of moral agents and communities. After theologically fleshing out the way practices form agents, the second section of this chapter will outline specific church practices that I believe will help engender this process of reconciliation as conversion.

1 The Turn to Church Practices

Before proceeding to identify and analyze these three practices I must attend to two preliminary tasks to make a better case for the fitness of practices for the work of reconciliation. First, I need to make a brief case for my employment of the concept of practices—since invoking this concept certainly appeals more to Hauerwas than Cone. I believe practices are consistent with Cone's vision, even if he leaves the work of determining these practices up to white Christians, because of his insistence on attending to the concrete. Second, I must explain specifically what I mean by practice and how I will use the term in this chapter.

1.1 Why Practices Matter

1.1.1 Why Bonhoeffer?

To make this case—that is, to better link Hauerwas and Cone on this point, and also make clear why practices are well suited for an ethics of reconciliation—I will now turn to one of the most prominent proponents of the formative character of discipleship: Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer has functioned as an orienting thinker for me for many reasons, but most significantly, because he is the theologian that Cone and Hauerwas share in common. That is, he is the only figure to whom both scholars consistently appeal for their own thought. One might object that Barth surely fills this role. Hauerwas claims himself as a Barthian and Barth emerges as the hero in Hauerwas's Gifford Lectures (published as *With the Grain of the Universe*), and Cone set out as a Barth scholar. However, around the time of Cone's shift from European and white theological sources to an explicit and near exclusive reliance on black sources with *The Spirituals and the Blues* and *God of the Oppressed*, Barth drops out of Cone's repertoire, at least as a positive figure, almost entirely. Bonhoeffer, on the other hand, remains

a consistent constructive interlocutor for Cone all the way through *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*—the only European or white theologian to remain a positive and constructive part of Cone's source material. Reinhold Niebuhr does also feature in Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, and some may argue that he is the white thinker of most significance for Cone. However, on my reading, Cone addresses Niebuhr primarily as a foil—one who did not do as much for race relations as he ought—whereas Bonhoeffer almost always is presented by Cone as a positive figure. In our conversations, Cone acknowledged his reliance on Bonhoeffer as the only white theologian he uses constructively, citing his participation in the black church during his time in New York (dealt with extensively in Reggie Williams' *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*) and his martyrdom on behalf of the oppressed as reasons for this appreciation of Bonhoeffer.

More specifically, Bonhoeffer serves an important role in this project and my account of church practices because he offers an account of ecclesial formation and practice that serves as a hinge between the work of Hauerwas and Cone. I have noted a few times how Cone suggests reconciliation must begin with conversion but stops short of outlining a process of this turning from one's whiteness. He gives no account of formation into "blackness" or examples of practices that lead to solidarity. In some ways this may be because he is a Barthian and a Methodist (who's commitment to the Spirit's work of sanctification that it mitigates attention to the work of the human agent), and in some ways because he has no desire to do so. This is the work of white people. Yet, because Bonhoeffer is the theological link between Hauerwas and Cone, and does in fact offer such an account grounded in the concrete reality of the church community, I contend that Bonhoeffer's theory of formation is the closest we have to one in which Cone and Hauerwas might mutually endorse. Bonhoeffer's concept of ethics as formation anticipates the turn toward virtues and practice we find in Hauerwas and others, as well as the attention to concrete reality in liberation theologies. This concept also anticipates the focus on particularity and contextuality that I have identified in Cone. It avoids abstraction and subsists in the concrete and bodily behavior of human beings, and therefore offers an important link between the thought of these two figures, and suggests the importance of communal practices of formation for any hope of ecclesial racial reconciliation. Therefore I draw on him extensively in this section to provide such an account.

1.1.2 Bonhoeffer on Formation

Bonhoeffer, Hauerwas, and Cone view the world as deeply contingent, and that means that no moral category can be perceived independently from historical reality. All three theologians reject the abstractions of foundationalism, Bonhoeffer by emphasizing the concrete, Cone by focusing on the particular history and context of the community making decisions, and Hauerwas by championing a narrative description of the world. There can be, therefore, no abstraction into ethical principles or criteria that float above the concrete phenomena of this

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world. Rather the world and God have been unified through Christ, and the renewal of the world has begun; it is only in this way that we can perceive reality. In his comparison of Hauerwas and Bonhoeffer, Guido de Graaf writes that for both, "Reality in its full historical, worldly concreteness is precisely reality as *already* reconciled with God."[3] For both theologians, this means that we must be conformed to the authoritative form of reality, that is, Christ. As Bonhoeffer writes, "We can and should speak not about what the good is, can be, or should be for each and every time, but about how Christ may take form among us today and here."[4] De Graaf notes the common link between Bonhoeffer and Hauerwas as this: "the unity between God and the world takes place in the middle of concrete, contingent historical reality," and I would include Cone in that thought as well.[5] I will outline the specific elements in Bonhoeffer's account of formation as essential elements in the moral life for Hauerwas and Cone as well since they do not offer such a specific outline.

Bonhoeffer's account of formation stands on three legs: Christology, ecclesiology, and contextuality. These three themes have structured much of the argument of this dissertation, and here converge to lay the groundwork for specific practices of reconciliation. Bonhoeffer begins by turning to the person and work of Christ. Rather than principles or programs, Bonhoeffer turns our attention to the crucified Christ as the site of reconciliation.[6] It is from Jesus Christ, the Reconciler who steps in between the sin of the world and God, that "proceeds all the formation of a world reconciled with God."[7] That is, "Formation occurs only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ, by being conformed to the unique form of the one who became human, was crucified, and is risen." This happens as the form of Jesus Christ molds the community and conforms our form to Christ's own.[8] As Lisa Dahill notes, "to the extent that Christians participate in his form, being conformed to him, they too take on the role of *Stellverter* [vicarious representative] of others and of Christ in the world."[9]

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[3] Guido de Graaf, "Overcoming Ethical Abstraction: Peaceableness, Responsibility, and the Rejection of Foundationalism in Bonhoeffer and Hauerwas," in *Engaging Bonhoeffer: The Impact and Influence of Bonhoeffer's Life and Thought*, ed. Matthew D. Kirkpatrick (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 125.

[4] *DBWE* vol. 6, 99.

[5] De Graaf, 126.

[6] "Reality is not built on principles, but rests on the living, creating God," Bonhoeffer writes (*DBWE* vol. 6, 81). Much of this material comes from a section of *Ethics* titled "Ethics as Formation." Accounting for the fragmentary state in which *Ethics* was written, the language at the end of this section suggests that this was intended to serve as an introduction to his book, and thus frames and sets the agenda for Bonhoeffer's thinking about the practical nature of his ethical thought, thus giving cohesion to his fragmentary *Ethics*.

[7] *DBWE* vol. 6, 92.

[8] *DBWE* vol. 6, 93. Here Bonhoeffer cites Galatians 4:9.

[9] Lisa E. Dahill, *Reading from the Underside of Selfhood: Bonhoeffer and Spiritual Formation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 188.

Second, Bonhoeffer not only offers the content for formation, but also its methodology. Formation occurs through the practices of the church. "'Formation' means therefore in the first place Jesus Christ taking form in Christ's church," he writes.[10] In *Sanctorum Communio*, Bonhoeffer spoke of the church as breaking in to the world and disrupting the ordinary rhythm of life, as the form of Christ in the world.[11] And later in *Ethics*, the church breaks into the world specifically as the cruciform Body of Christ—bearing the guilt of the sin of the world, for the sake of the world. As he famously claims later in *Ethics*, the Christian is called to the responsible life: 1) vicarious representative action and 2) acting in accordance with reality. This is Christological action, and thus ecclesiological action: to stand with and for the other, in the place where the other lives, becoming vulnerable to what they are vulnerable to, risking what they risk, whatever challenges or pains they confront. This means, for Bonhoeffer, all ethics and all theology necessarily begins in ecclesiology.

Finally, Bonhoeffer concludes that this form of Christ, though it remains one and the same, takes form in *real, concrete* human beings, "and thus in quite different ways" in their contexts.[12] Universal ethical programs lead only to abstraction and remove us from the concrete embodiment of the ethical action Christ calls us to in the concrete reality in which we exist. The concrete Christian ethic, on the other hand, means that "we can and should speak not about what the good is, can be, or should be for each and every time, but about *how Christ may take form among us today and here*."[13] The question of how Christ takes form among us today and here, and how we can be conformed to him is impossible to determine for all times and places. We must, as Bonhoeffer later says, attend to the "particular context of experience, responsibility, and decision, from which we cannot withdraw without ending up in abstraction."[14] Christ forms us in a concrete manner to act in accordance with the reality in which we find ourselves. In fact, in a world in which we live in constant conflict with one another, seeking principled or universally rational solutions to problems can only devolve into manipulation of the other in our fallen desire to maintain control of the situation, and of

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[10] *DBWE* vol. 6, 96.

[11] I discuss this in more detail in "The Incarnational Church: Bonhoeffer's Political Ecclesiology of Transformation" in *A Spoke in the Wheel*.

[12] *DBWE* vol. 6, 99.

[13] *DBWE* vol. 6, 99.

[14] *DBWE* vol. 6, 101. While I agree with Bonhoeffer on this point, this does not mean that ethical principles or programs are always obsolete or harmful. I think of the way that just war principles, in the form of criteria necessary for engaging in armed conflict, as a helpful model of principle approaches to ethics, still obviously subject to contextualization. However, with contemporary changes in the nature of conflict toward a greater degree of intra-state conflict and non-state actors, like terrorist cells, some of these criteria are already losing relevance and usefulness. As these shifts continue to grow and just war theory itself comes under more scrutiny by pacifist-leaning groups, at least in Roman Catholic circles, it will be interesting to observe if this principle model breaks down in favor of more contextualized, consequentialist, virtue, or command models.

each other.[15] This is the same desire to stay in charge of others, to evaluate, dominate, and oppress that fueled white supremacy in the first place. In sum, Christ forms us, in our particular and contingent contexts, times, and locations into the Body of Christ. That is, through the embodied practices of the community, God forms us as moral agents into the Body of Christ.

1.2 What Practices Mean

In this chapter I am most interested in the content of these practices rather than their form or the theory that lies behind them. My claim that reconciliation requires some kind of practice of memory, confession, and hospitality is most significant and I will devote most of this chapter to examining the content—theological and practical—of these three practices. However, I will begin with a cursory account of the development of the concept of practice in theology, with specific attention to the elements in this development most pertinent to practices of racial reconciliation.

1.2.1 The Anthropological Turn to Practice as a Forerunner to Theology

The most common theological accounts of practice derive from MacIntyre's basic definition. His foundational definition of practice comes from his *After Virtue*:

> By practice I ... mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the results that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[16]

Others differ from this basic concept in subtle to significant ways. Much of the theology about practice today developed out of the field of anthropology and specifically ethnographic research on the ritual and religious practices of various groups. Religion scholar Manuel Vasquez offers a helpful history of theological appropriations of anthropology's work on

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[15] De Graaf points to the examples of Moses and Aaron in Exodus 32 and Numbers 20, who resort to technical means of responding to the people challenging their leadership.

[16] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 175. In their edited volume that serves as the basic theological treatise of this recent turn to church practices, theologians Dorothy Bass and Miroslav Volf adapt MacIntyre's foundational definition to one specifically oriented toward Christian practices: "Christian practices are patterns of cooperative human activity in and through which life together takes shape over time in response to and in God as known in Jesus Christ" (*Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 3. Important to note here is that Bass and Volf add content to MacIntyre's more formal notions of "excellence" and "ends involved." For Christians, they claim, these ends and excellences are what takes shape in response to Jesus Christ. This assertion is closely in line with Bonhoeffer's notion that we are formed into agents who are responsible to Christ—who live in immediate response to the specific callings of Christ.

practice. According to Vasquez, the study of religious practices owes much to the work of Clifford Geertz, beginning with his 1973 *Interpretation of Cultures*. While Geertz helpfully turned attention to lived practices rather than purely doctrinal studies, he could not escape the conventional methodology and treated practices as texts to be enacted and decoded.[17] This attention expanded in the work of Robertson Smith and Marcel Mauss, who rejected the metaphor of ritual practice as text and instead focused their work on the centrality and dynamic nature of practice. For my purposes in this dissertation the work of Victor Turner proves significant. By focusing attention on the pilgrimage aspect of religious practice Turner includes the shifting and adapting nature of religious life in his concept of practices. According to Turner, practices move between periods of liminality and communitas (meaning periods of intense unity and belonging).[18] Rituals and practices help communities navigate these differentiated periods; they become mechanisms with which communities deal with internal challenges like shifting patterns of social relation.[19] For practices of racial reconciliation, this navigation is a crucial aspect of practice. As individuals and groups within an interracial congregation oscillate between periods of intimacy and alterity, or liminality and unity, particular practices may help equip them with the resources necessary to work through moments of intransigence, fragility, misunderstanding, and impasse. According to Turner's observations, a collective understanding of pilgrimage—that a community is progressing on its way toward something sacred (in a physical or metaphysical sense)—helps a community to better respond to the realities they face and relations they maintain and discover on their journey. Rituals and practices provide a means by which to improvise to meet the needs and respond to the challenges that arise.[20] This requires a certain degree of flexibility and lack of structure in the practices—a point that I will return to in describing my examples of practices within a "low-church" congregation.

The final cultural theorist with considerable influence on theology of practice is Pierre Bourdieu (he has been especially influential on those theologians who want to contest various aspects of MacIntyre's model, like Kathryn Tanner and Mary McClintock Fulkerson). Bourdieu further developed the Aristotelian concept of habitus—drawn on considerably in Fulkerson's work—which focuses on the shaping of dispositions that generate and organize practices that are adaptable without presupposing definitive ends or requiring mastery or

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[17] Manuel A. Vasquez, *More Than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 220.

[18] See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969), 94-130.

[19] Vasquez, 237.

[20] Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 171.

excellence in order to attain those ends;[21] one can already see the differences with MacIntyre. Bourdieu focuses on the social structure of practices, that agents are already embedded in historical and embodied rhythms and systems which condition their needs and dispositions and delimit horizons of possible action.[22] For Bourdieu, this state encourages invention within the given limits of a structure which then transform those structures.[23] (This, interestingly, is not far from MacIntyre's notion of traditions as communities of contested arguments over time that continually reshape themselves according to those arguments.)[24]

In short, practices allow agents within a community to negotiate periods of unity and difference, belonging and estrangement, that they experience, yet maintain a common commitment to a common sacred journey. They provide a means for the community to respond to challenges and wounds that arise—even those that arise because of those practices— and contest the structures and borders of that community in order to transform their community. Church practices of racial reconciliation allow for members to negotiate the tensions and blindnesses they experience in one another. They provide a means to identify wounds and structures of injustice or oppression and then contest those structures and transform their community through their commitment to these practices.

1.2.2 Practices in Ecclesiology
With this basic theory and application in mind, I want to extend this concept with a few more elements particular to church formation in a theological register. This means focusing on practices as 1) formative, 2) responsive, 3) embodied, and 4) communal. Practices are *formative*; they form us into people who have the character to be able to properly discern what Christ is calling, through a thorough indwelling within the narrative given to us by scripture

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[21] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 53.

[22] Vasquez, 241.

[23] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 96.

[24] Michel de Certeau supplements this general theory of practice with attention to those on the margins or under the yoke of oppression, with little agency to transform the structures of their community or society. He does this by appealing to "tactics," or calculated actions that operate in the space of a dominant regime but imaginatively subvert the system (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 37). These are practices of local resistance, that may occasionally develop into a larger transformative movement, but usually remain on clandestine level of everyday life. These tactics may include, for example, taking advantage of "company time" to accomplish one's own activities (25). This is a helpful, if only occasionalist, notion of practice. It is helpful in systems of oppression and has been endorsed at times by Black Liberation Theologians like Cone. In many social and even ecclesial contexts such tactics may be necessary to preserve a sense of dignity and solidarity within regimes of power. I will not draw on this form of practice in my account here because I am interested in located models of mutual and common effort—practices geared toward reconciliation amid difference. This does not mean, however, that when these types of practices that navigate the space of difference fail, tactics may be necessary on the part of those seeking justice and equality.

and tradition. Practices, are not extraordinary actions, but are mundane, repeated physical and mental actions that shape agents' desires, loves, and character. They mold our dispositions and form a way of life that orients believers toward this distinctive end or love. As Kathryn Tanner suggests, Christian practices are simply ordinary practices like eating and singing and greeting one another but "done differently, born again."[25] Yet these ordinary actions constitute the shape of the Christian community and its life in the world. "When a community is participating in the practices of Christianity, 'an environment is created in which people come to know the presence of God and experience new being in the world," observes Dorothy Bass. "By active participation in practices that are central to the historical life of the community of faith, we place ourselves in the kind of situation in which God accomplishes the work of grace."[26] It is through the practices of the church community that Christ conforms us into his form. The embodiment of practices not only reflects or communicates a disposition, but it actually creates it through the very embodied enactment of it, by literally shaping the experience.[27]

In addition to their formative ends, practices are also *responsive* to God. Nicholas Healy, drawing on theologian David Kelsey, amends the concept of practice proffered by MacIntyre and adopted by Hauerwas to include the elements of intention and response.[28] Kelsey insists that practices must also be "conceptually formed," which he takes to mean that practices are intentionally formed as responses to divine action and grace to bring us to better

[25] Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices," *Practicing Theology*, 230. In this essay Tanner provides a slightly alternative account of practices to that of most practical theologians—endorsing a notion of their open-endedness, improvisationality, unpredictability, and undefined character—that draws more on the cultural work of Pierre Bourdieu and James Clifford.

[26] Dorothy C. Bass, "Congregations and the Bearing of Traditions" *American Congregations*, vol. 2 ed. James P. Wind & James W. Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

[27] Beyond the work of Volf and Bass, for theoretical, theological, and practical accounts of the formative work of practices see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Manuel A. Vasquez, *More Than Belief*; Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004); Stanley Hauerwas and Samuel Wells, eds. *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2006); James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2009) and *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016).

[28] Healy, 116-120, and David Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 14, 43. Healy helpfully reminds us (in an argument meant as a critique of Hauerwas though I see no reason Hauerwas wouldn't agree), without any intentionality or explanation practices have no role in a community's witness. Healy seems correct when he says, "We must tell the story to those non-Christians to whom we wish to witness." Unintentional and unexplained practices likely also lack the sufficient power to adequately form people—without some explanation as to why and how the community performs them. Lesslie Newbigin says it pithily: "Words without deeds are empty, but deeds without words are dumb" (*Signs Amid the Rubble: The Purposes of God in Human History* ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), xii).

understanding of the God we worship.[29] This is a helpful corrective to promotions of "practice" that seem to originate and reside only in human agency, as well as those that seem to operate solely on the level of subconscious.[30] In terms of responsiveness, we must always foreground the fact that practices are only intelligible as a liturgical response to the Christ whom we worship as creator, redeemer, and Lord of our lives. In this way, formation and responsiveness are integrated.[31] What is responding to God if not being formed, or conformed to the likeness and character of God? As I noted in chapter three, these practices may be located in jars of clay, but that does not mean these outward bodily actions cannot train and renew our character. This addendum, both in respect to responsiveness and intentionality, prevents the concept of practice from becoming yet another abstract notion partitioned from the concrete intelligibility of and practical embodiment within a community. Scripture's presentation of the Christian life also helpfully links the twin aspects of formation and response. Most significantly, Paul writes to the church in Philippi that they should "work out your own salvation," and to do so "with fear and trembling."[32] To this command the apostle immediately adds, "for it is God who is at work in you." Here we see: 1) that Paul understood that salvation was not a momentary event but a process of continual *work*, and 2) that God's action and human action cooperate in the formation of a Christian. Christians are

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[29] Healy worries that the Hauerwasian practitioner may not know why she is performing the practice she is practicing. Healy finds this Kelsian model more appealing because it embraces the whole person by including a "conceptual component within that embodiment"—the component of belief or faith. Healy then adds, "The church has not developed its practices primarily in order to form its members, but in order that we may respond appropriately to God made known in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit" (Healy, 118). Still, it is important to note that intentionality is a subset of one of the four constitutive elements of practice and not a constitutive element itself. This means that some practice ought to be engaged with intentionality, recognizing that human agents are not mechanically formed. Yet is may not be essential for all practices. We must reserve space for the truth that if practices respond to the action of God, the Holy Spirit may cause some practices to work in surprising and unexpected ways beyond human intention.

[30] For an example of the way a commitment to unintentionality in church practice hinders the formative power that congregations actual practices, see chapter 3 in Norris and Speers, *Kingdom Politics*.

[31] In the end, while acknowledging Healy's concerns, surely these two ends—forming members and responding to God—are not incommensurable. The fact that Healy does not recognize this leads him to further suggest that "If our intentionality is Christian, we can bend almost any socially-sanctioned practice into a Christian practice," and then he goes on to cite examples of Thanksgiving, singing the national anthem, even accounting (119). Now granted, all that we do we *are to do* for the glory of God, but this does not mean that everything we do we *can do* for the glory of God. Just calling something a practice does not baptize it as Christian. If this is where Kelsey's definition leads, then Hauerwas employs important boundaries for what Christians can properly claim as a Christian practice.

[32] Philippians 2:12.

agents who *work out* their salvation with the understanding that God's grace is also at work in them, mysteriously and often in hidden ways.[33]

Thirdly, it is important to recognize that practices are also necessarily *embodied*. We have seen the central focus on practices in the work of Hauerwas. Attention to church practices is more subtle in Cone's thought, yet, when Cone comes close to addressing this subject he frames Christian formation in terms of the embodiedness of theology. According to Prevot, for Cone, the "body comes to light as a locus of beauty, of language, and of contact with the divine."[34] This is most apparent in Cone's account of black worship in *Speaking the Truth*, when he describes the "rhythm, the passion, and the motion" of corporate worship. Sometimes the spirit leads you to run, he says, other times to clap your hands, tap your feet, or wave your hands.[35] The various movements of the body signify a response to the divine and transform the body into "channels of grace."[36] Prevot suggests that the body, for Cone, functions as an icon, as in worship it "receives a brilliantly dark light from God and also offers this light to others." The radiance of God's love shines through the visibility of black flesh.[37] This attention to the fleshliness of church practices—the bodily nature of practices in response to the body of Christ and designed to form us into the body of Christ—brings us back to the notion the church as the wounded body. The practices we engage in church are practices of a wounded, sinful body. They may orient our desires to God, but because they are performed by corrupted jars of clay, they are always imperfect, lest we boast. These practices help us to heal the wounds, but with a recognition that like Christ's resurrected body, even as we engage in practices we do so bearing the scars of the times we have been wounded and we have wounded others. These scars become the sites of redemption but remain with us and actually help to shape and focus the practices that may lead us to be a body reconciled.

Finally, practices are not simply bodily acts of the individual; they are also *communal*. They derive from the formative narrative(s) of a particular community, or in response to the guiding narrative (i.e. Jesus is Lord of life and wants to conform us to his image), and are directed

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[33] As I noted in chapter three, the writer of Hebrews also nods to the notion of formation in this passage from the fifth chapter: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5: 12-14). Christians are not born, but are made through a process of training in the faith. Christians move from milk to solid food like a process of infant development and gradually mature in their faith and moral reasoning through training in practice. This obviously suggests that human effort, human training, and practice, are required to mature in faith and moral competency.
[34] Prevot, 303.
[35] *ST*, 21.
[36] Prevot, 303.
[37] Prevot, 304.

toward the end of shaping us as agents into people who possess a particularly-oriented character. For Christians, practices take shape as ecclesial practices—actions performed with community that not only conform us individually to the character of God both mold us together into the Body of Christ. Thus, if my claims are true that 1) formation takes place through practices, 2) Christian formation takes place through church practices, and 3) racial reconciliation is best expressed as a model of conversion, then the church becomes the ideal location for practices of reconciliation. But as we have seen, churches often are not sites of reconciliation. Instead, often, churches are sites that perpetuate the racist tendencies of the wider culture, and in many cases, actually drive those cultural tendencies (and the long racist history of the Euro-American church evidences this).

When Christians speak of the church community of the Body of Christ we recognize that that one Body is made up of all sorts of different bodies—bodies that must negotiate the world, and one another, in different ways. But it is just this embodied aspect of church practices—not only the ways our individual bodies participate in practices, but the way those individual bodies participate with others—that allows for the type of conversion and transformation necessary for reconciliation. This is not to say that other communities or institutions do not also have corporate practices that engender peaceableness and negotiate commonality and distinction. But it is to say that through embodied practices, and the church's hope in the Holy Spirit's work in sanctifying those practices (even when they seem to stumble) and the bodies that participate in them, the church is uniquely suited to shape a community of multiple, different bodies into one Body that still bears the wounds and marks of the particularities that created it.

1.3 Memory, Confession, & Hospitality
With this concept of practice now explained, and the theological motivation for closely examining the practices of local congregations outlined, the remainder of this chapter will examine reconciliation through the lens of specific church practices: those of remembering, confessing, and offering hospitality. I have chosen these three practices because they 1) reflect the proposals of Hauerwas and Cone, 2) identify crucial elements of the process of conversion, and 3) directly address the elements Harvey suggests are typically missing from appeals to reconciliation. For example, Hauerwas emphasizes remembrance in many of his works, and Cone's ideal that all Christians can "become black" in Christ is surely an opening of hospitality. These practices are my constructive attempt to provide concrete examples for churches attempting racial reconciliation and scholars interested in lived practice. They are constructions that draw from the theological, and especially ecclesiological, criticisms of Hauerwas and Cone, but use these criticisms and analyses to generate new practices. If we understand our moral and ecclesiological formation in terms of narrative, and therefore understand any practical attempts to form these communities into communities of

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reconciliation, these practices must attend to the narrative formation of the communities and their particularity as wounded Christian communities. They must, therefore, rightly interpret the story of our past, rightly proclaim the sins and tensions and hopes of the present, and draw on our eschatological hope of the future to rightly understand how these stories of oppression and being oppressed can reconcile on this side of the eschaton. The triad of memory, confession, and hospitality attend to these three story-formed dimensions.

Second, memory, confession, and hospitality are story-formed practices that are constitutive of the process of conversion. If we are to understand reconciliation as a type of conversion that continues as a process of formation, then the practice of recalling from where one has come (a type of witness or testimonial), confessing one's sins and committing to turn from them in repentance, and opening oneself to the work of God by repairing and redeeming relationships (both one's relationship with God and with one's fellow humans) are all crucial elements of conversion as it is traditionally understood.

And finally, put in terms that directly draw on what Harvey suggests is missing in many attempts at reconciliation, memory, confession, and hospitality could also be understood as practices of remembrance, repentance, and repair. These three actions are absent from the "reconciliation paradigm" that Harvey contests. Including repentance and reparation as essential elements of reconciled communities identifies reconciliation as both a process that happens on the inter-personal level as well as on the political and structural level—to materially amend the wrongs of the past and present by rearranging patterns and relations of power. This vision of reconciliation, by entailing these three practices, is inextricably linked and predicated upon liberation, and directly addresses the deficiencies in conventional models of reconciliation.

In each of the following three sections I will begin by analyzing an example of a concrete church practice from a local congregation.[38] All three of these examples, corresponding to the general categories I have identified as memory, confession, and hospitality, belong to the regular practice of one congregation, a multi-racial Evangelical congregation in Charlottesville,

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[38] For more expansive theological accounts of communities that have attempted processes and practices of racial reconciliation, and their successes and failures, see especially the following: for ethnographic accounts see Peter Slade, *Open Friendship in a Closed Society: Mission Mississippi and a Theology of Friendship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption*; for a historical account see the chapter on Clarence Jordan's Koinonia Farm in Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 51-85; for an autobiographical account see Chris P. Rice, *Grace Matters: A Memoir of Faith, Friendship, and Hope in the Heart of the South* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002).

Virginia called the Vineyard.[39] This congregation is ten years old and maintains a regular attendance of about 150. Its membership demographics are split equally between college students and families or young professionals. Most significantly for my purposes, the membership is 51% white American. The original church leaders, consisting of a founding husband and wife pastoral team and later expanding to a larger pastoral leadership team, did not set out to intentionally plant a multi-ethnic church, and it was not ethnically diverse for its first couple of years. However, by drawing on its close relationship with a few ethnic-specific campus ministries from nearby University of Virginia, and with the installation of an African American associate pastor, the church grew to become one of the most diverse congregations in the city. One final thing to note. Because this is an Evangelical, mildly charismatic congregation, the church operates with a "low-church" liturgy. There are few of the typical routinized worship elements one would expect in a Presbyterian or Anglican congregation—save weekly Communion, which is unusual in low-church liturgies—so the practices I examine in the next section, while certainly practices, do not look like the church practices often appealed to by theologians. In fact, it seems to me that at similar points in the argument of other theological works that turn to church practices, an abundance of scholars look to the Eucharist as the practice to best encompass embodiment, remind us of our brokenness in the bread broken for us, or compel us into social service. This is all for good reason, and the practice of Communion at Vineyard would be a strong candidate for examination since it is one of its few weekly liturgical practices. However, I will instead appeal to three more parochial, peculiar, and organic practices. I turn to "low-liturgy" in this project not because high-church liturgy and practices are inadequate to address issues of race. Rather, I do so because low-church practices often receive less treatment in scholarly works and are in need of further analysis.[40] Also, in this particular case, as feminist theologian Lisa Dahill argues, a low-church liturgy may prove to be more beneficial to the purposes of social reconciliation. She writes, "Too often liturgical materials reflect the same taken-for-granted patriarchal bias that Sunday after Sunday, year after year of a person's life, grinds on promoting the virtues needed by those in positions of dominance, and blinding to those on the underside of selfhood . . . to their very different needs, sins, and gifts." Low church liturgies are often more nimble and flexible, which is an advantage to attending to the concrete and specific situations of those in the congregation, rather than a universal applicability or abstraction into principles. In short I highlight these low-church practices in

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[39] This congregation is part of the Vineyard USA, an Evangelical and somewhat charismatic denomination. This church movement has begun to garner scholarly attention. I will focus on the particularities of this local congregation, but for accounts of the movement as a whole, especially its charismatic dimensions, see T. M. Lurhman, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012) and Jon Bialecki, *A Diagram for Fire: Miracles and Variation in an American Charismatic Movement* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017).

[40] Part of this may be my recoiling from a period of my theological development in which the Eucharist seemed to solve all social woes.

order to 1) illuminate less examined practices, while particular to this congregation, replicable in many others, and 2) make a case for the importance of practices that operate on an interpersonal level beneath routinized institutionalism.[41] One of the attractive aspects of looking at this congregation is precisely in the incomplete and flawed character of these practices. It is in viewing these practices within their failures and progress that we come to understand the reality of reconciliation within a wounded Body.[42]

Also, reflecting the emphasis on embodiment in my analysis of practices—specifically how the embodied character of practices allows for the Spirit's work of making multiple, varied bodies into one Body while still retaining the marks of their particularities—I will highlight the embodied nature of each of these three examples. The fullness of our bodies are shaped by actions and practices, Myra Rivera observes, "by seeing, listening, or speaking, by eating or touching, by praying, dancing, or chanting."[43] These bodily actions leave imprints on our flesh and train our bodies to engage with God and others in different ways. Hauerwas's vision of the church is of a Body that holds many, multiply-formed bodies together. But if this claim is true, that the church truly makes up one body amid the empirical divisions within that Body, then we need Cone's pressing toward the concrete and "real" to help demonstrate how this claim can be true. We need to see it "lived" within real concrete and embodied practices. In chapter four I suggested that the work of conversion begins with seeing, and noted in chapter five how Saul's conversion began with a blindness that turned into new sight. Each of the following examples of practices engages yet another sense, another bodily action—expanding the focus to include seeing, hearing, touching, and vocalizing—and demonstrates how the individual bodily action, in harmony with the participation of every individual, works to form and transform a community.

2 Memory
2.1 Memory in Practice
In the recent years, Vineyard has undertaken a discernment process to think through its unique position as a multi-racial congregation. The church leadership understands this as God offering this congregation a unique gift and commissioning them to the work of reckoning with the challenges, shortcomings, and successes of a multi-racial congregation, even perhaps as an example (both positively and negatively) to other congregations who find themselves similarly situated. The first congregational practice to emerge from this discernment process was "Sacred Conversations." This involves a series of meetings held at several points in the year. The gatherings are open to the entire congregation, though each individual group is

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[41] I will address this point more directly in the chapter conclusion.
[42] Dahill, 232.
[43] Myra Rivera, 134.

limited to ten self-selected individuals (members fill out a sign-up sheet). The gatherings, which take place in members' homes, are limited to an intimate small group to better facilitate vulnerable conversations about race.[44]

The small groups are tasked with doing nothing other than *remembering.* Ground rules were established by the group itself, and participants were asked to offer the stories of their first, or most formative, experience of race or encounter with racism. Some participants shared stories of the first time they realized they had a "race." Crucially, this almost always occurred at an earlier stage of life for minorities than for whites. By calling all members of the group to share these stories, but coercing no one to share, this practice was able to avoid the problem of burdening African Americans with revealing their vulnerable and hurtful moments of racism over and over again for the benefit of educating whites.[45] This opened up the independent and mutual histories of black and white members of the congregation, revealing to many that everyone has been racially formed by our cultures and upbringings. For some whites this was the first time they reckoned with the often-invisible dimensions of race. For many it was the first time they were confronted with the problems with their assumed posture of "not seeing color." They recognized that despite the divergent paths of racial formation they had endured, everyone also shared aspects of a common history of the church as a racialized body that often perpetuates racism. In some cases these conversations opened up instances of white fragility, with whites becoming defensive in response to the stories of black participants. In some cases these encounters stalled the conversations or brought them to an awkward and premature conclusion. In the best cases, white participants began to recognize their own fragility for the first time as they reflected on their conditioned responses to hearing the stories of racism.

2.2 Remembering the Body

This church practice signals the importance of memory—remembering the formative stories that gave birth to and shaped our theological, social, and racial imaginations and experiences.[46] If we are to understand reconciliation as a type of conversion, we must

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[44] It is important to acknowledge that while individual participants in these conversations may indeed hold long memories of racism dating back to segregation, and even longer family histories, the congregational memory only dates back ten years. That is, the Vineyard as a national body, and this congregation in particular, does not carry the same institutional and denominational memorial baggage as denominations like the Southern Baptist Convention and Presbyterian Church in America which were basically birthed out of protection of slavery or segregation. Thus, the conversations took place on a more personal and social register rather than on a congregational or denominational one.

[45] Recall Jennifer Harvey's worry about an emphasis on story-telling is that that also places undue expectation on people of color to listen to white stories or tell their own, that it is their job to educate us, in a context of white defensiveness and fragility (Harvey, 79).

[46] This is not to say that this was a perfect practice, or that it achieved excellence. Some conversations failed while others appeared to succeed. The process is ongoing, with a series of Sacred Conversation

acknowledge that conversion begins with a call to remember, to truthfully tell the story of our lives and refigure that story in light of the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. As Luke Bretherton explains, "How, what and who we remember directly relates to the conditions and possibilities of change. In Scripture, the call to remember the story of Exodus is vital for the on-going formation of each generation."[47] After delivering the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, Moses tells the Israelites, "Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm."[48] But the people are not only commanded to recall God's salvation and provision, but also to remember their sins. Later Moses says, "Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God to wrath in the wilderness."[49] Remembrance is also employed as a form of lament when the exiled Hebrews remember Zion as they weep by the rivers of Babylon.[50] But the Bible often envisions remembrance of sins as the first step toward conversion, and reconciliation. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs his disciples, if during their worship they remember that a brother or sister "has something against you," they are to leave

repeated a couple of times annually, with different configurations of members and, often, new members joining. The self-selection may help with avoiding scenarios in which minorities feel compelled to share their own stories of pain in order to educate others, though self-selection could also lead to homogenized small groups. And even in self-selective groups, social cues and reactions may still function as a type of pressure or expectation for minorities to share, even if they do not feel comfortable, while also exposing them to instances of white fragility.

[47] Bretherton, "On Conversion."

[48] Deuteronomy 5:15, and many other times in the Torah. I am focusing in this section on the times humans are called to remember God, not including the even more frequent invocations for God to remember God's people.

[49] Deuteronomy 9:7. I am focusing in this section on how and why God calls humans to remember their sins. The recollection of sins within the divine life is a different matter. I noted in chapter two instances in which God promises to "remember your sins no more" (this occurs in various forms in Isaiah 43:25, Jeremiah 31:34, Micah 7:19, and Hebrews 8:12), and the ways in which some theologians like Miroslav Volf argue that this calls us to "non-remembering"—a letting go of the memory of past atrocities. As I argued in that chapter, I side with Hauerwas on this issue and in distinction from Volf (*Exclusion and Embrace*, 136; See also his *End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2006)). While it is important to the Christian faith that God forgets sins in order to offer the unconditional grace and love of salvation, this does not negate the occasions when humans are told to remember their sins. It is important to remember that the eschaton comes as the new world make from the materials of this old. The eschaton is not a *creatio ex nihilo*, but in the same way that Jesus' resurrected body retains the scars of his earthly suffering, our resurrected selves will similarly retain the scars and memories of our temporal existence. These experiences become the material God uses to make the new creation. As God uses these materials to transform all of creation in a new world, God will use these same scars and memories to transform God's community into a new, Beloved Community ordered completely by love for God and one another.

[50] Psalm 137:1 and Psalm 22:27. Twice in John's letters to the churches in Revelation, these congregations are to "remember then from what you have fallen" and then repent (Revelation 2:5, 3:3).

their offering and "first be reconciled to your brother or sister."[51] Here Jesus directly links remembrance to reconciliation. In the passages from the Hebrew Bible, memory was often invoked to prod the straying Israelites to remember God's work of reconciliation and redemption. On this occasion, memory prods God's people to reconcile with one another; the people remember the ways they have sinned against one another as part of their worship and immediately seek reconciliation. At their best, the practice of story-telling envisioned in Vineyard's Sacred Conversations employs memory to each of these ends: recalling one's past sins and God's provision, lamenting the failures of one's past, and drawing participants to reflect on their reflections on their past as well as their reactions to other people's stories to better understand if a brother or sister "has something against" them.

James Cone also insists on the importance of remembering the past for the moral development and formation of a community. "His insistence on remembering and telling the story of suffering was striking and upsetting to the 'real' of the narrative identity of white, male, American public discourse," recalls Rebecca Chopp. "It sounded angry; it was."[52] Chopp observes that Cone "understood quite well that only by remembering could the irony of . . . the ecclesial public be exposed." That is, more specifically like Thurman and Baldwin also recognized, "remembering brings out the irony of how America and the church were complicitous in forgetting what really happened." And while Cone's insistence on remembering challenges the white church and urges it toward repentance, Cone worries that the white church continues to neglect this history of slavery, Jim Crow, and lynching. This is "Christian history," he says, insisting that "whites today cannot separate themselves from the culture that lynched blacks, unless they confront their history and expose the sin of white supremacy."[53] Chopp notes how Cone himself attempts to keep these images and stories in the forefront; he serves as a story-teller, retelling the alternative biblical narrative to the white preachers who proclaim the status quo; Cone remembers and tells the story of God on the side of the oppressed, of "historical transformation rather than other-worldly liberation."[54]

But memory is important for black churches as well, because memory forges the identity of any community. For black churches, he writes, "Without a knowledge of one's past, such things cannot sustain one's sense of worth in a racist society. A person without a past is a person without an identity. And the absence of an identity is very serious, because without

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[51] Matthew 5:23-24.

[52] Rebecca Chopp, "Reimagining Public Discourse," in *Black Faith and Public Talk: Critical Essays on James Cone's* Black Theology and Black Power, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 153.

[53] *CLT*, 165.

[54] Chopp, 153.

self-knowledge others can make you become what they desire."[55] This worry, that without a practice of recalling one's past, or to put it differently, remembering your story, a community risks allowing other stories to shape their identity, connects clearly to Hauerwas's claim that the project of modernity is the attempt to produce "a people who believe that *they should have no story except the story that they choose when they had no story*." Thus, in the same way Hauerwas worries that the church has allowed the story liberalism tells it to shape its identity and practice, Cone worries that black churches have allowed white churches and white theology to determine theirs. For Hauerwas, the church is fundamentally a community that lives by memory.[56] This certainly means that the Christian community lives through the memories of God's people offered in scripture. But it also lives through the memory of its own, more recent, history. He writes, "The kind of memory which truly shapes and guides a community is the kind that keeps past events in mind in a way which draws guidance from them for the future."[57] Christians and Jews are commanded not to forget, since the very character of their community depends on their accepting God's forgiveness and thus learning how to remember, "even if what they must remember is their sin and righteousness."[58]

Both Hauerwas and Cone point to the necessity of a community recalling its sins as an integral part of its identity, and its moral formation. "Memory is a moral exercise," Hauerwas claims. "We must be the kind of people capable of remembering our failures and sins if we are rightly to tell the story we have been charged to keep, for a proper telling requires that we reveal our sin."[59] And denying this history, and the fact that the white church has for so long denied it, causes this wound to only grow more painful and embed itself only more deeply within ourselves.[60] Remember from chapter two that Hauerwas worries that "We literally lack the language to recognize ourselves across the divisions our history names" leaving us in silence. "As a result, blacks and whites can find no common story that will enable them to heal the wound."[61] For Hauerwas, the only hope lies in the church, because it is only through Jesus Christ that we can find the language to end the silence and the memory that makes possible our remembrance of the wrongs we have done and those done to us.[62] He recognizes

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[55] *MSLB*, 28.

[56] *PK*, 70.

[57] *TT*, 105.

[58] *CC*, 69.

[59] *PK*, 70. Hauerwas can frequently jump quickly to living as a forgiven people, which enables us to "be at peace with our histories" and with one another (*PK*, 124). This certainly expresses a tendency to move perhaps too quickly to God's gracious forgiveness and this forgiveness as a catalyst to bind us together with those we have wounded, and thus his tendency not to take seriously enough the "hidden wound" of racism, white supremacy, and the history of cruelty that wound entails.

[60] *BH*, 142.

[61] *BH*, 143.

[62] *BH*, 146.

that such admonitions can be platitudinous, but believes that only by first recognizing God's forgiveness of our own sin are we set free to remember that sin and reckon with the ways it has damaged others. And for Hauerwas, that is "the way forward: not forgetting but having our memories transformed through the discovery that our sins cannot determine God's will for our lives."[63] Initiating "sacred" conversations where Christians are freed to offer their wounds to those who may previously have been blind—and may have no other means of opening up those spots if invisibility—is one way to stop those wounds from embedding deeper in lives and in the community. It exposes white people to the vulnerability of listening to those stories of their failures, and seeing those failures and sins as part of the community's common story and common history in the church. As Fulkerson and Mount Shoop write, "Our unique experiences, our shared social contexts, and our bodies' idiosyncrasies create in each of us particular and shared 'tellings' of dis-membered stories of race,"[64] and it is important that we feel the freedom to express these stories. These are not stories that block conversation, like "My family didn't own slaves," or "I am not a racist," but ones that open ourselves to hearing the stories of others and responding with a less defensive posture. This opens us to the violence and wounds that were hidden from us.[65] To avoid patterning the same racial hierarchies and structures in society, integrated congregations must seek, what Josh Chen calls a reflexive vulnerability. By this, he means a culture of transparency and interdependency. This is a community that shares a narrative of brokenness—those who have been hurt and those that have done the hurting—and expresses that brokenness openly through communal practices.[66]

In this way, remembering doesn't just reify a memorial in our mind, but it pushes us to action. This is what Fulkerson and Mount Shoop call a "liberative remembering," and Johann Baptist Metz a "dangerous memory"—one that addresses others' stories in their particularity and situation, and responds to those with an openness to being transformed by the encounter

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[63] *BH*, 152-153. In his interpretation of Hauerwas, Michael Duffy warns of the potentially distorting effects of memory: "For one thing, memories are often both interpretive and interpreted, leading to wide variations in their fidelity to earlier events and characters," he says. "Memory can also become 'dangerously conservative,' shutting out the possibility of healing and correction in the future by denying the evil which has gone before" (Duffy, 66-67; quote from Hauerwas, *TT*, 105). Hauerwas, himself, admits that he is not able to discern the ways his own white privilege has impacted his theology. But he writes that, "it is certainly a skill to be able to describe my behavior appropriately and to know how to 'step back' from myself so that I might better understand what I am doing." This requires not a story abstracted from one's endeavors, "but rather comes through having a narrative that gives me critical purchase on my own projects" (*CC*, 144-145).

[64] Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 14.

[65] Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 18.

[66] Josh Chen, "Minority-Dominant Spaces, Reflexive Vulnerability, and Blended Integration," unpublished essay draft.

with those particular stories.[67] Yet it also teaches that through the reconciliation with God that Christ already accomplished on the cross, our sins are actually made part of the economy of salvation, and the new community and new story this salvation produces. The fact that we already belong to this new story makes possible the truthful remembering of our past and its sins (both perpetuated and suffered).[68]

The shared practice of memory illustrated in the Sacred Conversations practice involves the bodily act of listening.[69] We must listen and attend to the stories of suffering or harm that others tell us, even if we are conditioned to dismiss them or become defensive. This practice involves the difficult embodied work of staying put even when our bodies feel and demonstrate discomfort. It is through the mutual embodiment of listening, or not retreating, but actively listening to the memories of others, that the work of the transformation of the whole Body can occur. Listening to others remembering, therefore, serves as the first step to *re-membering* the Body of Christ—broken and wounded, but transformed by the redemptive act of remembrance.

This work of reconciliation, especially for whites like Hauerwas, and the difficult work of recognizing our privilege and uncovering the ways it has shaped and blinded us, begins in memory—in listening to the stories of others. It requires not only remembering our individual history and biographies, and uncovering how those contexts shaped our lives and work and relationships, but also the longer histories of our communities. As Hauerwas rightly concludes, "Any reconciliation that does not require such a remembering cannot be the reconciliation made possible by the cross of Christ."[70]

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[67] Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 30.

[68] *BH*, 151

[69] "The formation of a tradition presupposes collective experience. The living repository of this tradition is the African American church. With collectively experienced trauma, not only does the body remember, as in the case of individual experiences, but the group remembers and can respond in and through group formation" (Matthew V. Johnson, "The Lord of the Crucified," *The Passion of the Lord: African American Reflections* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 5). My aim is to direct this message to white and multi-racial congregations as well. The problem is that these churches don't experience that history as a site of trauma because they were the ones inflicting the trauma, not suffering it. Practices of cross-cultural and cross-racial remembering may provide the means for white people to recognize this history as a traumatic also. In her work on theology and trauma, Shelly Rambo argues for remaining in the "middle" of Holy Saturday. And this seems to be an appropriate metaphor for black Christians and white Christians, those who experienced trauma and those who traumatized to meet in the tension of the middle day, to witness the trauma and allow it to disrupt us into new patterns (See Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*.)

[70] *BH*, 141.

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3 Confession

3.1 Confession in Practice

As a low-liturgy congregation, the Vineyard church has no moment of corporate confession in its weekly worship. Sometimes a call for confession is expressed in a song sung by the congregation, and very often, the language of confession is used in the call to and explanation of Communion, which is celebrated weekly. The invitation to Communion rarely involves the traditional "Words of Institution" and varies week to week with a different, often-lay congregation member explaining the importance of the practice. For what it lacks in consistency—or clarity—this does allow a personalized call to response and confession to be included. During some of the most intense months of the growing awareness of police violence against African Americans and the rising prominence of Black Lives Matter protests, the Vineyard's senior pastor held a worship and sermon series on multiculturalism, which focused primarily on racism and the church's collective history of racism. During the first sermon of the series, the pastor concluded with a call to repentance. Such "altar calls" occur regularly in Evangelical churches, but in this case it was a call for the white members of the congregation to confess and repent for the collective sin of racism, both within the church and in all of white America, both for sins they had committed personally and for those that preceded them personally. The specific call to repentance extended into the invitation to Communion, and to move beyond a homiletic call, the church leadership planned for the weekly small groups to discuss the same theme that week. During these groups, leaders led the classes in an exercise of confession and repentance based on readings of the Psalms and public confession of racism before the other members of the small group.

3.2 Confessing the Body

The act of verbal confession is ingredient to the people of God's worship of and relationship with God. When the Israelites went astray they were called to not "cover up [their] iniquity," but openly confess their transgression and they would receive God's forgiveness.[71] Confession is the open revelation of an individual's or community's sins, harms, and rebellion, and simultaneously serves as a reminder of God's faithfulness to forgive and mediates that forgiveness. Even more, the Hebrew Bible is full of occasions where God's people were called to repent for the iniquities of their forefathers or sins of the community or nation as whole, whether or not they were its direct perpetrators.[72] There is a precedent here for collective guilt and the need for collective confession and repentance—to atone for the sins of one's people

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[71] Psalm 32:5. This did not mean that they did not receive punishment for their sins—a couple hundred years in Babylonian exile evidences this!—but it does mean that even in the midst of punishment, God promises to "blot out your transgressions . . . and remember your sins no more" (Isaiah 43:25).

[72] See Ezra 9-10 and Zechariah 1:1-6 for a prominent example regarding the Israelites returning from exile.

and the past actions of one's people. Confession as the open revelation of sin begins in verbal confession before God, but James also calls the church not only to confess its sin before God, but also to one another, and Paul tells the churches in Galatia to restore the confessor back into fellowship. According to James, it is confession that leads to healing,[73] because confession is not simply a verbal confirmation of one's sins, but a promise to turn away from those sins—to go and sin no more.[74] Confession requires a public confession before those that one has wronged—recall Jesus's words to rectify one's wrongs before worshiping in Matthew 5:23-24—and a commitment to realign one's life so that those harms and wrongdoings cease. The Vineyard call for repentance embeds itself within this biblical tradition: it begins in confession before God and other members of the congregation, and calls for the white members of a congregation to confess for their own acts of racism, the ways they ignorantly contribute to systemic racism, as well as the racism of their forebears that continue to inflict real wounds. The follow up meetings in weekly small group employed the public and verbal dimensions of confession.[75]

Cone and Hauerwas make fewer explicit claims about confession and repentance than they do with remembrance. Still, I contend that the practice of confession is not merely the logical—and liturgical—response to remembering one's story, especially the story of one's sins. I believe that it also follows in the logic of both Hauerwas and Cone's work, even if more subtly. Just as conversion must begin with confession of one's wrongs, Cone argues that any work toward reconciliation must begin with white people repenting—even for the ways in which they have been blindly complicit in systemic forms of racism. Becoming black begins with a decision to turn away from one's whiteness, a repentance of the sinful story that shaped one's life, attitude, and behavior. Likewise, Hauerwas emphasizes the importance of the difficult and vulnerable work of truth-telling (including confessing sins as well as beliefs) as the necessary precondition for seeking forgiveness. He criticizes the church for its failure to focus on confession. Protestants especially don't know how to name sin, he says, because we don't have the discipline of the confession booth, which both makes confession a regular part of one's worship, and also prevents one from turning blame on another.[76] Yet, "Nothing is more

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[73] Galatians 6:1, James 5:16.

[74] John 8:11.

[75] In some ways it is a stretch for me to call this an illustration of a "practice." While the theme of multiculturalism and race permeated through church meetings, small group discussions, and worship, the pastor's sermon on repentance and subsequent small group discussions were a single event. Though the church plans to hold a series on this theme again, and continue to make similar calls to confession of and repentance from racism through its various avenues for confession, the congregation suffers because it lacks the liturgical resources to follow up on a call to repentance with a regular practice of corporate confession. In this case, the "moment may be lost," without intentional efforts to continually raise the topic and incorporate a specific all to confession.

[76] Hauerwas interview.

important for the world than for Christians to learn to confess our sins," he claims.[77] In a decidedly non-triumphalist mode, he claims that church's most potent witness to the world is confession of its own failure.

Hauerwas's stress on truth-telling as an ingredient of the church's witness signals the need not only to share stories of our racialized past, but for those who participate in systems of racism, to offer those stories truthfully as sin, as a progression from my examples of Vineyard's "Sacred Conversations" to corporate confession of racism suggests. This avoids "invisibility," both in Hauerwas's sense of making the church *visible* to the world in its sinfulness and in the sense of making the realities of racism and white supremacy *visible* before a world that pretends to be colorblind.[78] This also highlights one of the most significant points for Hauerwas, drawing again on Bonhoeffer: that truth-telling means learning to properly discern reality. To learn to tell the truth means first off, to learn to properly describe reality.[79] "Expressing the real" begins with properly describing the realities of our situation—that is, the narratives we find ourselves in. These narratives reveal to us the kind of people we are. But this requires the church community to embrace the vulnerability necessary to lay bare the truth of its sin: "In order to expose the small as well as the big lies, a community must exist that has learned to speak truthfully to one another."[80] In fact, the practice of confession forms the counterpolitics with which the church confronts a (white) world bent on obfuscation, abstraction, and avoidance of its past transgressions. "The peace that the world knows too often is built on forgetfulness," Hauerwas observes, "but that is not the peace of the church,

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[77] *PTF*, 25.

[78] In *Performing the Faith*, Hauerwas claims that Bonhoeffer's life work was fundamentally the search for what it means for the church to be visible in the world; "to flee into invisibility is to deny the call," he says. (Of course this grants Hauerwas the occasion to continue his long-running critique of the "invisibility" of the American church, especially the "docetic ecclesiology" of its liberal Protestant strand (*PTF*, 51)). But to flee toward invisibility for both Hauerwas and Bonhoeffer is a denial of God's call because it is to deny the truth that "Christ is the reality of all that is" (48). It is a denial of truth and a failure to speak truthfully in and to the world. And to do so, Hauerwas adds, is to doom ourselves to "live lies that are the breeding ground of violence" (Hauerwas, "Bonhoeffer on Truth and Politics," lecture at the *Conference on Lived Theology and Civil Courage*, June 14, 2003, Charlottesville, Virginia).

[79] Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 360. Examining Bonhoeffer's well-worn essay on "What is Meant By Telling the Truth?" Hauerwas argues that Bonhoeffer's notion of truth is not merely relative or situational. A lie is fundamentally a contradiction of the word of God, even as that word exists within the reality created by God. Truthfulness, therefore, means the practice of "express[ing] the real, as it exists in God" (*PTF*, 66, quoting *Ethics*, 332). This begins with properly describing the realities of our situation—that is, the narratives we find ourselves in. These narratives reveal to us the kind of people we are. We act truly (and morally) Hauerwas writes later—sounding very much like Bonhoeffer—when we act according to what we were created to be (86).

[80] Hauerwas, "Bonhoeffer on Truth and Politics."

which is built on forgiveness. No genuine peace can come from simply forgetting past wrongs, but rather must come from encompassing those wrongs in a history of forgiveness."[81]

In this vein, he specifically calls along with Cone for white Americans to reckon with their own history of slavery as part of any process of forgiveness or reconciliation, as repentance is the necessary predecessor to seeking forgiveness from those one has wronged.[82] Confession requires us to accept responsibility for our actions and our collective history, and often this requires us to listen to the voices of others that can renarrate our story in ways that we are blind to.[83] In this way, confession decenters us, offering our story and "laying it at another's feet, for another's adjudication," as Charles Mathewes observes. This is an ultimate act of "turning toward the other"–both God and fellow–and requires an openness to "transforming, and being transformed by, the other."[84]

This re-envisions the church, before its own body and the world, as a body broken and wounded, and wounding. As Jennifer McBride argues, "the church demonstrates Christ's redemptive work and becomes a vehicle of concrete redemption when its mode of being in the world is confession of sin unto repentance."[85] Thus, the church is that body called to repentance, to take responsibility for social sin, as this directly corresponds to the crucified Christ. She adds that the church witnesses as a "fallen body . . . through confessing its own sin and accepting responsibility for the sin of broader society with which it is intimately related."[86] The church carries on the vicarious work of Christ, but with one key difference, as it not only takes on the guilt of the world but also confesses its own culpability; the church recognizes itself as "the greatest of all sinners."[87] Cone's work supports these claims, not only highlighting the culpability of the (white) church in perpetuating patterns of racism, but in its failure to confess these in humility because of a continuing posture of triumphalism.

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[81] *CET*, 94.

[82] *CC*, 252 n.36.

[83] We confess "in order to renarrate our lives (often by having it renarrated to us by others)" (Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 184).

[84] Charles Mathewes, *Republic of Grace: Augustinian Thoughts for Dark Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 211-212, and 210.

[85] Jennifer M. McBride, *Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6. McBride bases her argument on Bonhoeffer's notion in *Ethics* that the "responsible life" to which all Christians are called entails two elements (as I addressed earlier): acting in accordance with reality and following Christ in acting as vicarious representative of the world. The church, therefore, functions as vicarious representative for all of humanity, taking on the guilt of the world in its imitation of Christ doing the same.

[86] McBride, 123.

[87] 1 Timothy 1:15; Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 95.

For Cone, reconciliation also begins with confession: "Reconciliation means you shut up and listen and get down on your knees and pray that all those people you killed will forgive you without you assuming that is going to happen."[88] Confession is therefore a risk, placing oneself at the mercy of God and others. Invoking the language of conversion he says for white people to become free, they must "become new persons."[89] But it also maintains a corporate dimension for Cone; to be a "sign of the Kingdom in this world," the church must be concerned about holiness and confession, calling on those who "not live according to Spirit of Christ" to repent.[90] He worries that confession has become the responsibility of the isolated individual allowing the church to avoid reckoning with its own complicity. Cone insists that this is why non-religious groups are often on the frontlines of justice movements,[91] though McBride helps us to remember that the church has the resources within its liturgy to draw this work back into its mission by beginning with confession of its own sin. McBride points to Bonhoeffer as a model for her humble ecclesiology, and Bonhoeffer explicitly models the confession of the white American church when lamenting the German Church's complicity with the Third Reich:

> The church confesses its timidity, its deviations, its dangerous concessions. . . .
> The church was mute when it should have cried out, because the blood of the innocent cried out to heaven. The church did not find the right word in the right way at the right time. . . . The church confesses that it has misused the name of Christ by being ashamed of it before the world and by not resisting strongly enough the misuse of that name for evil ends. The church has looked on while injustice and violence have been done, under the cover of the name of Christ. . . . It has witnessed oppression, hatred, and murder without raising its voice for the victims and without finding ways of rushing to help them. It has become guilty of the lives of the weakest and most defenseless brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.[92]

As Charles Mathewes points out, confession can serve as a reminder of our tragic condition—for at the same time that it brings us together and join our stories together, confession also estranges us from one another.[93] It is a risky business because confession before others does not always result in the offer of forgiveness. And this truth reminds us that we will only be fully resolved eschatologically, but we can begin that process here and now with an openness

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[88] Cone interview.
[89] *BTL*, 176.
[90] *BTBP*, 70.
[91] Cone says, "Black Lives Matter is the closest thing to the movement that gave birth to black liberation theology. Black represents the bottom and if the bottom matters then everyone matters. Because if black people matter in American then everyone is going to matter in America" ("God is Black in 2015," *HuffPost Religion*).
[92] *Ethics*, 138-139.
[93] Mathewes, 207-208.

toward the future. This signals the propriety of including lament within confession—perhaps especially in the context of racial reconciliation—to lament that wounds will persist and will not be fully transformed this side of the eschaton. Incorporating lament as part of confession, Lisa Dahill adds, provides voice for those who are sinned-against and gives "expression to the complexity of human enmeshment in evil."[94]

Confession becomes a transformative practice through its embodiment. Confession simultaneously estranges us from the wounded bodies of others *and* conjoins us to them. Sin withdraws a person, or community, into oneself, but as Bonhoeffer writes, "a man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person."[95] Confession is embodied in the submissive act of kneeling, in the sense of touch as one feels one's body move to the ground.[96] The community confesses with and through its Body, and the individual bodies that constitute it. Catherine Bell's work on religious ritual revealed that the practice of kneeling during prayer or confession doesn't simply communicate a value like subordination or submission to God, but it also "generates a body identified with subordinating." The embodied practice actually molds the body, she writes, and "restructure[s] bodies in the very doing of the acts themselves."[97] The bodily action of kneeling, the sensation of touching the floor, of feeling the pain of aching knees, of bowing one's head before God and others, reinforces the individual nature of sin, and in harmony with a community kneeling together, reminds us of the collective nature. It creates a "new human being" and transforms a community through repentance.[98]

Thus, in the midst of this complicity, failure, and lament, confession still pulls us from despair. Even Cone remains hopeful in the power of confession, that through confession and repentance "whites will be redeemed from their blindness and open their eyes to the terror of their deeds so they will know we are all of one blood and what we do to others we do to

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[94] Dahill, 233. Further, Soong-Cha Rah in *Prophetic Lament* suggests lament as a counter to the dualistic triumphalistic and nihilistic narratives that pervade the American Evangelical church. Rah suggests the need for a new language and skills to lament the complex social and racial issues that face American society—and the church—today, beginning with the ability to confront our own culpability in these corporate sins and failures. As Rah concludes, a liturgical focus on the biblical books of Lamentations may offer "a necessary corrective to the triumphalism and exceptionalism of the American Evangelical church arising from an ignorance of a tainted history" (Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015, 198).

[95] Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: DBWE* vol. 5, 106.

[96] At Vineyard, kneeling is not a liturgical requirement during any moment of confession, since it is not scripted weekly, but due to the church's charismatic character, individual persons take many postures during confession and many choose to kneel.

[97] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 100.

[98] Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship: DBWE* vol. 4, 270-271.

ourselves."[99] It is in confession that we submit to a costly form of discipleship. As Bonhoeffer concludes, it is there also that "we receive God's costly grace," and, I would add, begin the process of a costly reconciliation. Confession ultimately requires one to press beyond fragility toward vulnerability and risk, to see ourselves as the broken, wounded people that we are, bound by our fleshliness, dependent on God and others for our salvation. Joe Lenow captures the subjective, vulnerable, and reflexive elements of confession well when writing that for St. Augustine, the act of confession:

> returns us to ourselves, allowing us to see ourselves (for better or worse) in the finite, fleshly, presently-broken state that we inhabit; and, most importantly, to see that very life as the object of God's love. Grace teaches us not to flee the world, but to accept it, and to accept our dependence, our need for companionship, our sufferings, even the death we experience as a result of our separation from God. In surrendering our distorted projections and receiving our lives from God, we receive the whole world back, and are able to find ourselves marked by the same vulnerability we saw in Christ's own life: we enter into this world nursed by the bodies of others, labor in an environment dependent on innumerable creatures, and love in caressing the skin of another.[100]

In sum, this chapter has framed reconciliation by means of two key lenses: as a form of conversion (memory, confession, and hospitality) and through the lens of justice (remembrance, repentance, and repair). The second lens was informed by the criticisms of reconciliation as a shallow and insufficient response to the wicked problem of white supremacy. This frames reconciliation as a deeper work directed toward the structural biases at work in racial inequality, and both signal the work of reconciliation as a process. Conversion begins with remembering one's own story. Our memories confront us with the ways our story has imposed itself on others' in violent ways. The story of my white privilege, invested in a long history of white supremacy, renders the stories and the bodies of African Americans invisible, and functions in explicit and tacit ways to maintain my supremacy while assuring their disenfranchisement. When confronted with this reality, I am called to confess my sin and the ways my story is caught up in the regimes and systems of sin, and repent. The process of conversion then moves from memory to confession and now to the "new life" of discipleship that is opened and vulnerable before God and others. My continual process of conformation to the character of God requires me to be twisted, challenged, and displaced by my encounter with others, reshaping my perceptions, beliefs, and habits to align more closely with Christ the Reconciler. Repentance then signals a turn for the church to engage critically in the deeper work of repair. This may take shape through the giving or advocacy of monetary

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[99] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood."

[100] Joseph Lenow, "Suffering the World: An Augustinian Christology" (dissertation, University of Virginia, 2017).

reparations.[101] But more deeply it seeks, within its body and then as a witness to work within, the world, to undermine privilege and contest manifestations of white power. In the remainder of chapter I will flesh out a vision of hospitality that seeks to repair relationships and institutions through difficult practices of sharing in vulnerability, creating avenues for mutual understanding, and redistributing power. Hospitality repairs the precise wounds that have been inflicted on black people, by making what was once invisible now visible, bringing the marginalized to the center of power by restructuring the power dynamics of whiteness, and avoiding tendencies to require assimilation by guarding against over-identification with the racial "other."

4 Hospitality
4.1 Hospitality in Practice

Vineyard's most profound act of hospitality comes through its practice of worship music. This practice directly contests the invisibility of black bodies and voices even within integrated congregations. Even in many integrated churches, minority voices are often sidelined in decision-making contexts and black bodies are veiled during public moments like worship gatherings. The Vineyard intentionally engages with various traditions of music, from contemporary praise and worship music that appeals to most white Evangelicals to gospel music, to international songs sung in other languages like Korean, Swahili, and Mandarin. Sometimes the music teams integrate these within one service, and sometimes dedicate a single service to a particular cultural genre. One goal is to always ensure that people of color are represented on stage. This is both a value of the church and a natural outgrowth of the church leadership, as the congregation seeks to best utilize the gifts of its congregants. Of the five primary music leaders, who rotate leadership responsibilities, three are white and two are black. This aligns with the preaching responsibilities at the church as well; of the three primary preachers, one is white, one black, the other Asian American, and they also rotate preaching duties. This places minority races in visible positions of leadership in front of the congregation and grants everyone equal power in determining the form of worship—which changes from week to week. There is an intentional self-diminishing of power from the white leaders in the congregation—as I said, it began as a white-dominant church—to recognize gifts in everyone and cede leadership and visibility to minority leaders.

One outgrowth of this, on a more subtle theological level, is Vineyard's charismatic emphasis on "Kingdom theology," which for them usually means looking for the ways in which the Kingdom of God breaks into earthly life through miracles of healing or Spirit-led revelations

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[101] For a compelling case, see Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations.

or insights. The senior pastor says that he has historically made a point of offering these "Kingdom moments" as examples in his sermons. Now, however, when he mentions these "signs of the Kingdom," he finds himself most always referencing God's breaking down the dividing wall between cultures and ethnicities. He invokes moments of racial justice or solidarity as equally significant parts of "Kingdom theology." The presence and leadership of minorities within the congregation, as well as a broader cultural exposure to ecclesial forms unlike the white conventional model, all precipitated this shift. The pastor confesses that he is not sure that most members of the congregation are alert to this change or notice the subtle shifts in his preaching, but he hopes that these will begin to form them to think about these examples of earthly justice when talking about Kingdom theology with others.

4.2 Repairing the Body

Confession of sin alone is not enough. Understood properly, Jennifer McBride claims, confession is completed in the church's "incarnate presence for others, its hospitality that draws people normally divided into the reconciliation of Christ."[102] The Hebrew God has always made hospitality toward the stranger, outcast, and alien a priority for God's people. God commands the Israelites, "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."[103] And this prescription to treat its aliens just like other citizens and neighbors occurs 36 times in the Old Testament.[104] Yet, hospitality is not just about opening one's resources to another. It is also about deeper actions of redistribution of resources and power. The practice of Jubilee, in Leviticus 25, called on the Hebrews to cancel all debts and release all slaves. Those who lost land due to debt or exploitation in the past fifty years gain assurance of the return of that land in the Jubilee. This hospitality to "the least of these," to prefigure the words of Christ, is a practice of repair and redistribution. The same is true in the case of the tax collector Zaccheus in Luke 19, who upon his conversion commits to repay those he has defrauded four times what he stole from them.

Jesus positions hospitality in the center of his gospel, especially in the parable of the banquet, in which he calls his disciples to open their tables to "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind."[105] It is only after the disciples on Emmaus Way feed the stranger that they discover Christ is among them.[106] And, it is only after the Gentiles are welcomed into the Jewish church that the followers of Christ are first identified as "Christians."[107] It is precisely in its

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[102] McBride, 182, 205.
[103] Leviticus 19:33-34.
[104] Walter Kaiser, *Leviticus: The New Interpreters Bible,* vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 1135.
[105] Luke 14:13.
[106] Acts 24:28-35.
[107] Acts 11:26.

hospitality that the church is found to be in relationship with Christ.[108] From the early churches opening their buildings to pilgrims, travelers, and those seeking asylum, to churches today involved in the Sanctuary movement, hospitality is a quintessential sign of love and service to the neighbor. Now the inclusive nature of the music team and worship experience at Vineyard as an example of hospitality may seem to be a far cry from the radical economic restructuring of the Jewish Jubilee. And while there are certainly significant differences between these examples in terms of social and political impact, I draw this connection in terms of a similarity of logic. For a congregation as charismatic as Vineyard, the experience of worship is central to the identity and mission of the community. In many ways it is the most concrete practice of the church, the one that offers a sense of belonging and draws the community together. If a costly reconciliation is one that requires restructuring power dynamics, then the Vineyard's practice of hospitality is an attempt to do just that. It "restructures" the community, not in economic terms, but in terms of identity and sociality by restructuring the visibility of particular bodies, restructuring leadership, and restructuring what counts as legitimate forms and expressions of worship for many white members of the church. While we have yet to see how this liturgical restructuring manifests in more economic and social terms, the fact that the pastor can say that social justice issues are now a regular revised part of "kingdom theology"—that have led to the congregation's involvement in city justice advocacy networks—signals the central and even radical role of this practice.[109]

Hospitality for Hauerwas is "inviting the stranger to share our story."[110] We must recognize that this stranger also has a story, and therefore we engage in mutual witnessing to the multiple and overlapping stories that constitute our lives, though Hauerwas's notion appears one-sided. In other words, a slight corrective to Hauerwas's claim would be that we must respect the differences and distinctiveness of our respective stories while also fostering ways to

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[108] Matthew 25.

[109] Again, this is not to suggest that this practice has been a complete success. One point of these practices is to demonstrate the ways they reach for full reconciliation but inevitably fall short, signaling the contingent and incomplete nature of our work. Since this shift toward a racial justice minded "Kingdom Theology," several core members of the congregation have left. And despite the growing awareness of race and racial injustice among the congregations, misunderstandings constantly occur. For instance, I was present for an occasion when a white man explained that there are more white people on welfare than black people, thinking that he was defending African Americans on welfare against charges of laziness and benefiting from the system. The African Americans in the conversation took his explanation to be yet another white person claiming that class was a more significant factor in oppression than race. Some expressed hurt at his statement, and asserted that the systemic factors contributing to blacks needing welfare are not the same as whites and to conjoin them in this way neglected the long history of structural racial oppression. This is just one example of how even well-intentioned statements and gestures to connect often fall short and elicit more misunderstanding than progress. I will discuss the role of misunderstand as a part of hospitality later in this chapter.

[110] *PK*, 109.

help one another become part of one another's stories. But this is difficult work. On a theoretical level, hospitality requires us to move away from the agonistic view of traditions that enervate our ability to host one another. In MacIntyre's—and Hauerwas's—conceptions, as I've argued, while one attempts to learn another tradition as a "second language," one is still an interloper at best in an alternative tradition, unable to fully shed her own traditioned skin to put on another. According to ethicist Luke Bretherton, "an overemphasis on tradition is . . . a denial of the work of the Spirit. It masks the possibility of direct relationship with God, mediated through Christ in the power of the Spirit, and not through tradition."[111] The Spirit is always at work engrafting unlikely people and social realities into one another. Hospitality therefore is grounded in the "remembrance of our strangeness to God and God's hospitality of us,"[112] and I add, hospitality is also grounded in our strangeness to one another. Bretherton concludes, "Thus hospitality to the stranger is an evangelical imperative: it is a mark of the truthful disclosure of God's nature by a people who themselves are guests of God."[113] Understood in this way, as opposed to a traditioned viewpoint, Christian hospitality, modeled on God's hospitality towards us, is able to embrace strangeness without erasing or abandoning difference. This resonates with Cone's openness toward outsiders, even white people, joining in solidarity with the oppressed. His invitation for whites to become black is itself a radical act of hospitality, an extension of love to the enemy and inclusion of them within the community. He places this invitation in the common kinship of God's family: "we are all of one blood."[114] But this invitation has conditions. As an integral part of conversion, hospitality requires one "to change their pattern of life" in order to make room for the other.[115]

Yet here is where some aspects of hospitality fall short; they do not require a radical repositioning toward postures of mutuality and attention to repairing unequal distributions of power and visibility. Hospitality, as an integral element in reconciliation, is susceptible to the same shallow and cheap modes as "the reconciliation paradigm." Much popular attention has been given recently to the practice of hospitality.[116] Though, as conventionally understood,

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[111] Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (New York: Routledge Publishing, 2016), 75.

[112] Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 138.

[113] Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 138.

[114] Cone, "The Cry of Black Blood." Cone focuses less on the way differences may remain even after these moments of conversion and solidarity, though his proposal is certainly a model of hospitality.

[115] Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness*, 140.

[116] See for example, Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999); Christopher Heuertz and Christine Pohl, *Friendship at the Margins: Discovering Mutuality in Service and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010); Arthur Sutherland, *I Was a Stranger: A Christian Theology of Hospitality* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006); Amy G. Oden, *God's Welcome: Hospitality for a Gospel-Hungry World* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2008); and Loni Collins Pratt and Father Daniel Horman, *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011).

hospitality is usually imagined as a person or community of privilege opening up space or hosting those who are underprivileged, oppressed, or fleeing. It is not a mutual work, but a response to some wrong in which one party still maintains the power and privilege while the other endures a demeaning and dehumanizing loss of agency. Some of the scriptural passages above reinforce this image in many ways. The idea of "hospitality" can (intentionally or not intentionally) contribute to disparities of privilege and power between majority and minority people. Like reconciliation, hospitality can often generate the maintenance of power over a suffering and vulnerable other or a quick and easy over-identification with them. Hospitality includes the concepts of solidarity and empathy, but I am unconvinced that these alone rescue hospitality from this universalist temptation. The term solidarity has become popular of late, but again, I wonder if this too allows for easy identification. Is it possible for a privileged person to truly express solidarity with the poor and oppressed without concretely entering into a situation of poverty and oppression herself?[117] It seems there must be some form of material identification for hospitality to avoid operating in one direction. Likewise, empathy assumes a degree of similarity between persons or groups.[118] As pastoral theologian David Augsburger suggests, empathy often falls short because it fails to account for differences in context. In other words, we assume that the perceived differences that empathy attends to take place us within the same "world of reality," and this blinds us to deep contradictions of basic perceptions along cultural boundaries. In such cases empathy doesn't adequately challenge the assumptions of universality of the dominant group, a universalism that "sustains illusions of knowing the unknown" and "[extends] self-knowledge in an amoeba-like absorption of whatever is encountered."[119] Thus in cross-cultural situations of unequal privilege—like race

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[117] This is not to say that all accounts of solidarity fall prey to this shallowness. In *Enfleshing Freedom*, M. Shawn Copeland offers a richer account of solidarity, one not confined to feelings of sympathy (that operate with a division between "us" and "other") or responsibility (that risk devolving into paternalism), but builds on these toward a notion of mutuality rooted in a belief in the interdependence of all creation. This model engages particularity and appreciates difference, while still seeking the universality of Christ's love for all, and implicates the benefactors of past oppression in responsibility for the residuals of that past in the present. This mandates particular tasks determined by our different social locations (100). This is also true in Gustavo Gutierrez's principle example of solidarity is voluntary poverty, taking on poverty for the purpose of protesting against poverty and even seeking to abolish it. He conjoins solidarity and protest; solidarity for him is an act of liberation, renouncing one's privilege as a way of liberating others from oppression (Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, revised edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 172). Likewise, Lisa Cahill has offered a nuanced approach to empathy

[118] Roslyn A. Karaban, "The Sharing of Cultural Variation," *The Journal of Pastoral Care* vol. 45 no. 1 (Spring 1991), 28.

[119] David Augsburger, "Interpathy Re-envisioned: Reflecting on Observed Practice of Mutuality by Counselors who Muddle along Cultural Boundaries or are Thrown into a Wholly Strange Location," *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*, vol. 34 (2014), 18.

relations in the U.S.—empathy as it is traditionally understood and practiced falls short.[120] Richard Miller observes that "our lives ineluctably oscillate between experiences of intimacy and otherness," and often our attempts to negotiate this tension result in collapsing into either a false sense of empathy or estranged alterity.[121]

In short, there are limits to any attempt to enter another's subjectivity. This is already a common refrain among black and womanist theologians. Emilie Townes notes how "categories of otherness and difference can swerve toward abstractions at best and become tools for hegemony at worst."[122] Empathy is not the same thing as experience, and the hubris to think that we can fully empathize with those who have radically different experiences is damaging; it does not fully recognize the messiness of life and, in Townes's words, constricts our ability "to accommodate the mélange of creation."[123] The notion that we can be "aware of another person's feelings and experiences only on the basis of empathetic inferences from our own veers into solipsism" and often results in either romanticization or trivialization.[124] Reggie Williams adds that empathy easily becomes distorted because in its traditional sense—and its dependence on perception—it can be "prone to projection, in which the dominant, self-determining, autonomous persons within the social hierarchy bounce their image off the fungible body of fixed, commodified human subjects, only to see their own reflection returned to them."[125] In many ways, these expressions parallel Hauerwas's concern over whites taking on the story of African Americans as their own (and what I fear colorblind white people will do with Cone's openness to whites becoming black). His is a colonialist fear, that by entering into the black story as a white person, he will only take over and project his own interests and agenda onto the work and interests of blacks. Put in terms of pastoral theologians, he rightly worries that "colonizers interact with colonized others only as

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[120] Again, this is not to suggest that all accounts of empathy are insufficient. Lisa Cahill is an example of a scholar who offers a treatment of empathy that accounts for the shortcomings identified here. She argues that empathy should begin with reasoning from concrete, practical experiences and cross-cultural social encounters leading to judgments that one always holds provisionally and open to adjustment (Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11-12). Beginning from a similar starting point as Cahill, I outline a nuanced account of empathy in this chapter, drawing on the insights of postcolonial pastoral theologians attending to cross-cultural relationships and conflicts.

[121] Richard Miller, *Friends and Other Strangers*, 5.

[122] Townes, "To Be Called Beloved," *Womanist Theological Ethics*, 185.

[123] Townes, *Womanist Ethics*, 114.

[124] Townes, "To Be Called Beloved," *Womanist Theological Ethics*, 185.

[125] In these situations of inequality, notes Williams, empathy "can be distorted to make it another way of keeping the subject in subjection, requiring an imagined white body overlaying a black one to humanize it" (Williams, *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus*, 3-4).

constructed in the internal world of the colonizer." This is predicated on a presumed foreknowledge of the others that is not open to revision.[126]

Thus, on the one hand, silence often justifies and normalizes the violence of commission and omission and renders these injustices invisible. Yet, on the other, we are faced with Hauerwas's colonialist worry: is it even possible for a person of privilege to speak other than through colonizing means? He rightly perceives the human (white) tendency to possess that which we desire, even if it is a good end like reconciliation. Desires to heal the wounds made apparent by white supremacy are often entwined in the oppression of white supremacy itself.

In response to this dilemma, I offer three resources from postcolonial pastoral theology to address many of the difficulties in cross-racial practices of hospitality: interpathy, co-authoring, and "good enough." Thinking through a postcolonial lens, pastoral theologian Melinda McGarrah Sharp affirms that empathy involves the basic "embodied hope that other human beings are understandable;" but also re-defines empathy as "recognizing the imprint of other human beings in one's sense of self."[127] This move redirects empathy as primarily something to do with the subject who is empathizing rather than the object of the empathy. Empathy is often expressed by the colloquialism, "walking in another's shoes," although McGarrah Sharp identifies how such expressions fail to grasp the boundedness of our experience and understanding. Instead, empathy in her model recognizes that humans are understandable while still acknowledging that "I don't know the whole of you and you don't know the whole of me." More accurately then, empathy is a more provisional endeavor: it respects that your shoes are yours and that I could be wrong in trying to understand how it feels to wear them. It imagines in dialogue with you what the contours of your shoes might feel like on my feet.[128] Empathy is actually primarily about better understanding myself as one in relation to you, rather than fully understanding you.

In the context of race relations, hospitality, for white people, is not about better understanding another's blackness, but about better comprehending our own whiteness first. It is allowing our whiteness to become visible to us. Then we may begin to understand how that whiteness affects the world and affects the other's experience. Empathy requires whites to reckon with their pretensions to colorblindness, their "uninterrogated whiteness," and begin to first recognize how that whiteness affects the way they see the world and see others, before they can begin to understand those others.[129]

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[126] Melinda McGarrah Sharp, *Misunderstanding Stories: Towards a Postcolonial Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 158.
[127] McGarrah Sharp, 134. Thank you to Amy Canosa for pointing me to this source.
[128] McGarrah Sharp, 145.
[129] James Baldwin offered a similar insight in a letter he wrote to Angela Davis:

Postcolonial pastoral theologians have coined the term interpathy to describe this revised notion of empathy—a condensed form of "inter-cultural-empathy." They define the concept as "intentional cognitive and affective envisioning of the thoughts and imagining the feelings of a truly separate other as they occur in another world of reality—another culture, another worldview, another epistemology."[130] It requires one to "be a tentative visitor in a second culture;" to fictively enter the position of another, not in order to be its transformer, but to put away tendencies to want to change the other or arrogance that one's way is better.[131] Counter-intuitively, it suggests one can best enter another's story only by recognizing a greater distance between oneself and a cultural other and the obstacles in between.[132] In this way, hospitality is a continual negotiation between alterity and intimacy: never presuming to understand fully, never projecting one's particularity onto others, and always remaining cognizant of the tendency to colonize. Interpathy does not ask the other to return the image that one projects on them, and in this sense may hopefully mitigate white fragility because the attentive listening that interpathy requires can help to calm defensiveness and self-assertion.[133]

> As long as white Americans take refuge in their whiteness—for so long as they are unable to walk out of this most monstrous of traps—they will allow millions of people to be slaughtered in their name, and will be manipulated into and surrender themselves to what they will think of—and justify—as a racial war. They will never, so long as their whiteness puts so sinister a distance between themselves and their own experience and the experience of others, feel themselves sufficiently human, sufficiently worthwhile, to become responsible for themselves, their leaders, their country, their children, or their fate. They will perish (as we once put it in our black church) in their sins—that is, in their delusions. And this is happening, needless to say, already, all around us ("An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis," *The New York Review* (January 7, 1971)).

[130] Augsburger, 16. Augsburger coined the term in his earlier book *Pastoral Counseling Across Cultures* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986). Augsburger grounds this theory theological, modeled on Christ's incarnation, a move picked up by Edward P. Wimberly ("Methods of Cross-Cultural Pastoral Care: Hospitality and Incarnation," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* vol. 25 no. 3 (Spring 1998), 188-202), as he attempts to link incarnation with the womanist Christology of Jacquelyn Grant (*White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

[131] Augsburger, 15.

[132] Karaban, 29. For more on interpathy see also Aart van Beek, "A Cross-Cultural Case for Convergence in Pastoral Thinking and Training," *Pastoral Psychology* vol. 59 no. 4 (August 2010), 471-481, and Edward P. Wimberly, "The Cross-Culturally Sensitive Person," *The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* vol. 25 no. 3 (Spring 1998), 170-187.

[133] In other words, this model "slows down reactivity so that one can be receptive enough to allow brain physiology and functions to mirror the feelings and perceptions of the other" (Ausberger, 18). It generates a "physiological attunement" that harmonizes the two and allows one to "play on the other's playing field."

For postcolonial pastoral theology, reconciliation is only possible within a process of opening oneself to an intercultural encounter that leads to shared vulnerability.

Another method of overcoming the false dilemma of avoidance and colonizing is by conceiving of hospitality as a practice of "co-authoring." Co-authoring stories helps conceptualize the truth that no one person authors any of the stories of our lives; rather, all stories have multiple authors.[134] Hauerwas's reluctance to engage in discussions of race and theology because it is "not his story" neglects the fact that the story of African Americans and the black church is in part a story already authored by him, and every other person, black or white, in America. Understanding ourselves as "co-authoring" the stories we tell and the theologies we write will help us to see the role that we play and also provide a means for us to participate—as Cone asks us to do—without co-opting or possessing. This includes those on the side of privilege not only offering, but also accepting hospitality as a means of challenging privilege. "Co-authoring is a practice of navigating tensions around silence and voice through humility and care," McGarrah Sharp writes. "Telling, retelling, hearing, and overhearing" one another's stories, we "recognize human finitude that both prevents complete understanding and recognize that narratives of complete understanding therefore necessarily dehumanize."[135] She calls for cross-cultural conversation partners to rest in the tension that results from misunderstanding one another's stories. Misunderstandings result from a failure to see properly—to see the other person or community it their context and particularity—a product of our finitude. They result from our attempts to universalize projections of ourselves onto others. Trying to understand too quickly does in fact result in possession and colonization. Yet, it is precisely in the misunderstanding that those of us in privilege begin to learn. As Gillian Rose observes, any true process of learning "works precisely by making mistakes, by taking the risk of action, and then by reflecting on its unintended consequences, and then taking the risk, yet again, of further action, and so on."[136] Even as we attempt to reconcile and receive one another in mutual love, we will continually wound one another. Yet these woundings may now be seen for what they are, and incorporated into our co-authored narrative as occasions to reconfigure our relationship and try again. We begin to understand the "other"—especially the oppressed and marginalized other—not only as those in need of liberation, but also liberators. In our efforts to reconcile ourselves to them, they enable us to be reconciled to God.

The example of worship music at Vineyard illustrates the uncomfortableness, yet importance, of co-authoring and interpathy. This practice not only makes minority bodies visible and

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[134] McGarrah Sharp, 125.
[135] McGarrah Sharp, 126.
[136] Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 38.

voices heard, but it pulls the voices of every individual in the congregation into a literal harmony, while still allowing for space and difference. When the congregation sings songs from a particular musical genre, some in the congregation will be unfamiliar and uncomfortable. When the congregation sings in a foreign language this occurs more acutely. The Body is united in one voice while individual voices negotiate the tensions of the unknown. In an act of hospitality to all, the congregation co-authors its worship together, both in the moment of singing and in the redistribution of decision-making and leadership power. Broken voices struggling to find the words become a reminder of our brokenness and our hope for harmony. Separated bodies, displaying discomfort, become a reminder of our divisions and our commitment to one Body.

This revised concept of hospitality contains key insights for both church practitioners and theologians. For white theologians like Hauerwas, reluctant to engage in conversations on race, McGarrah Sharp's advice rings similar to Cone's—just write.[137] But write provisionally. Offer the "situated wisdom" of your setting, experience, and context—your side of the multi-authored story that you are telling. Hold your wisdom lightly and offer it gently, vulnerably, and open to critical response from the other. This, she writes, "negotiates tensions around silence and speech in part by being vulnerable to questions about my understanding and misunderstanding."[138]

For church practitioners, this notion of hospitality invokes a third concept that is crucial for my account of reconciliation: that of being "good enough." In this dissertation I have appeal to a "deep" or "costly" notion of reconciliation, meaning one that places the burden on the white oppressor and calls for white people to reckon with their own whiteness before asking anything of their black brothers and sisters. It seeks a convivial form of hospitality, not one that asks the oppressed to open their lives and communities to whites, but asks for a mutual vulnerability that seeks to undermine supremacy and privilege—to repair the damages done—by reversing relations of power. In some cases, this requires accepting physical risk, placing one's body on the line along with those "others" with whom one now shares community. Cone suggests this as an important part of hospitality when he offers as examples of white people who have truly "become black," the white Freedom Riders who stood in physical solidarity with their black brothers and sisters and often suffered physically for their comradery.[139] Costly reconciliation requires discerning the concrete situation and accepting a vulnerability that may lead to physical risk. True solidarity cannot exist unless one's practice of hospitality pushes one to sever all means of retreat and become fully exposed and vulnerable to all the

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[137] "I would prefer a white person talk about [race] and screw it up, and then I can tell you that you screwed up," Cone told me. "You can't stay together unless you talk about it" (Cone interview).
[138] McGarrah Sharp, 129.
[139] Cone interview.

same things to which the oppressed group or person is vulnerable. And while Cone's examples of the Freedom Riders come close to this, or may even constitute the few examples of this, I doubt that in the case of racial injustice, most white people can ever actually achieve this.[140] Even if we wanted, as I said in chapter five, the sheer fact of our skin color—and the way it generates favorable social perceptions and treatments—stops us short of bridging that gap, and then burning that bridge behind us. So, just as importantly, costly reconciliation also tempers expectations of success. McGarrah Sharp appeals to the concept of "good enough," which she adapts from object relation theory, to address this point.[141]

The concept of "good enough" identifies dangers in the popular notion of "best practices" and avoids the potentially dominating and colonizing effects inherent in aiming for perfection: seeking to achieve nothing short of perfection actually constricts the potential for healthy interrelational development. In the context of intercultural or interracial relationship, good enough describes relationships "that recognize limitations, possibilities, and responsibilities of persons oriented in relationship with other people."[142] This concept offers a model of how to participate in the stories of the racial other in ways that may circumscribe Hauerwas's concerns about colonizing, as well as his subsequent avoidance of these relationships, while also avoiding the dangers of the fluid notion of interracial relationship proffered by Cone. The idea of aiming for "good enough" reconciliation recognizes the epistemological obstacles inherent in intercultural relationships as well as the power of systemic oppression and domination that inhibit interpersonal relationships.[143] McGarrah Sharp describes good enough relationships as those that 1) account for institutional brokenness, 2) allow for participation of multiple perspectives, 3) permit uncertainty, ambiguity, and misunderstanding within the development of relationships, and 4) resist the perfectionist wish that relationships maintain a solidified status quo.[144] To prematurely patch up misunderstandings, even for well-intentioned desires for answers, understanding, and reconciliation, restricts possibilities and can end up re-concretizing oppressive attitudes and

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[140] Bonhoeffer came close as well, at some point recognizing that his fate was now caught up with "the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled" ("After Ten Years," from *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 17). He had achieved a "view from below." While he could never fully comprehend the vulnerability German Jews had been experiencing for many years for all of the inter-cultural reasons given in this section, he did all he could to sever any means of retreat back to his protected life and ultimately shared their fate. Yet, significantly, Bonhoeffer underwent a process of conversion of about ten years to arrive at that point.

[141] This concept is derived from the proposal of "good enough parenting" in the work of psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott. See especially his *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (New York: Penguin Books, 1973).

[142] McGarrah Sharp, 20.

[143] McGarrah Sharp, 35.

[144] McGarrah Sharp, 37.

structures.[145] This means living in the proleptic tension of provisional answers, solutions, and misunderstandings without masking those as certainty. It sees living between risk and possibility, in what McGarrah Sharp calls "the liminal space of potentiality," as generative of the mutual vulnerability required for reconciliation.[146] It recognizes that the work is never finished, and reconciliation within a wounded Body will continually hit obstacles, fall short, and start again.

A good enough reconciliation offers a more provisional understanding and provisional vision of reconciliation for a provisional church—on the underside of the eschaton, until all the cosmos will ultimately be reconciled. Until then we exist in a state of brokenness, where reconciliation is possible, with difficult work and reliance on the power of the Spirit, but is not complete. This model recognizes the church as a wounded Body. Postcolonial pastoral theologians understand this form of intercultural relation, this process of "co-authoring" our way slowly toward true empathy and authentic relationship as "being on the way."[147] This is a tempered view of the possibilities of reconciliation as well as a chastened ecclesiology, a recognition that the church is still the broken and wounded Body of Christ. This metaphor identifies the church—that Body of people who originally called itself "the Way"—as a Body moving toward reconciliation, yet always revising, always adjusting, and always self-correcting by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

5 Conclusion: Everyday Formation

In this chapter I identified church practices of racial reconciliation. After drawing on Bonhoeffer as the theological hinge between Cone and Hauerwas I offered an account of church formation and then a theory and theology of embodied practices as the means of this formation. These practices take place within a wounded Body of Christ that moves between moments of wounding and healing, unity and estrangement. They are meant to truthfully reveal those wounds, create opportunities for repentance, and open the way for mutual acts of hospitality that radically restructure the power dynamics of the church community.

Yet, this chapter ends on a somber note—recognizing our finitude and certain failures. It envisions the church community as a provisional and wounded Body on the Way to glory, but pilgrimaging slowly. Reconciliation is difficult work. It is a wicked problem we are dealing with, and provisional victories and learning from failures is likely the best we can do for

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[145] McGarrah Sharp, 173.
[146] McGarrah Sharp, 176.
[147] Andrew Lester, *Hope in Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 59-71; and McGarrah Sharp, 175.

now.[148] Still, this does not mean that hope is lost. This chapter submits three practices in the hope that in their embodied and communal nature, they might reveal a Way of slow transformation. These three practices, and the examples I have provided, all signal a more subtle approach to the formative potential of church practices. These are not the direct, ritualized activities one often associates with church practices—like preaching, Passing the Peace, or celebrating Eucharist. These are certainly intentional practices, but also organic and contextual, operating beneath the institutional array of practices. This is certainly conditioned in my examples by my choice of a "low-liturgy" congregation. However, I also think it identifies something important about any religio-political work, but especially the work of reconciliation. Alexis de Tocqueville observed that religion was America's first political institution not because it intervened directly in politics and not because clergy made political proclamations from the pulpit, but because it more subtly and slowly shaped the mores, attitudes, and behaviors of its members.[149] The political impact of religion operates at the level of "everyday ethics" and quotidian acts of formation. In this light, these practices recognize the ways that ideas and attitudes are disseminated within smaller social groups more readily than by institutional professions. Sacred conversations among friends and acquaintances is likely to shape a person more than formal proclamations from a pulpit—though both actions must function in mutuality.[150] For those longing for racial reconciliation, the difficult work will be systemic but also personal, grand but also mundane. While tempered, I hope that this is still a hopeful account of the possibilities of reconciliation. Through remembrance, confession, and hospitality—through the tension of alterity and intimacy and commitments to co-authoring stories across divisions—the wounded Body of Christ still breaks down dividing walls and reminds us that all tribes and tongues will worship together, in their particularity as well as their common kinship as the people of God.

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[148] It occurs to me that the tone, and even content, of a writing project will always be influenced by the emotional disposition of the author during the period of writing. This dissertation ends on a more somber note than I anticipated when I first began this project. I imagine this is due to personal circumstances while writing the dissertation as well as a devastating series of national events over the past two years—many mentioned in chapter one—that leave me less optimistic about the prospects of real, lived experiences of racial reconciliation. This dissertation would have looked very different and more hopeful if written under even slightly different circumstances, and we may hope that its future iterations may indeed.

[149] See Tocqueville, 339-352.

[150] I thank my students in the 2017 NCSS program at Wesley Theological Seminary for class discussions that helped me to think along these lines.

Conclusion | *Church: Embodied, Broken, & On the Way*

I began this dissertation with the story of Jesus traveling into the far country and meeting the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. This story depicted Jesus as one who transgressed ethnic boundaries, reached out to a marginalized ethnic minority, and foretold that Jews and Canaanites would one day worship on the same mountain together. In my account of that story I did not reflect on the part where despite his ostensible "racial" inclusivity, Jesus maintains that salvation comes only through the Jews. On one level, this is simply true because Jesus brings salvation and Jesus himself was Jewish. But on a deeper level it reminds the Samaritan woman—and modern readers—that the Jews, not the Canaanites nor the Gentiles, were God's chosen; Jesus was sent to the Jews.

This reflects another encounter between Jesus and a Canaanite woman in Matthew 15. In this passage Jesus has ventured further into Gentile territory, beyond Samaria, across the Syrian border to the Canaanite coastal region of Tyre and Sidon. A Syrophoenician woman approaches asking him to heal her daughter.[1] Actually the woman comes shouting at first, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon."[2] Jesus at first ignores her inappropriate outburst and then responds, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Gaining her composure, she kneels next to Jesus and again begs him

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[1] The terms Canaanite and Syrophoenician are not synonymous designations (Matthew employs one and Mark the other in their versions of this story). Syrophoenician designates the woman a slightly socially higher Hellenized status whereas Canaanite was a more encompassing term but typically referred to the rural population. This identifies her as a descendent of the Canaanite inhabitants, like the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4 with which I began this dissertation. The point is that she is a Gentile and "representative of the despised indigenous population with which Israel was not supposed to fraternize" (Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew: Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 178).

[2] This episode comes from Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30. There are slight variations between the passages, as indicated in the note above, but I will not focus on those here. It is not lost on me that both of the encounters I engage in this dissertation feature Jesus interacting with a woman. There is surely much to say on this issue also, but I will focus my interpretation on the ethnic/racial issues involved. My thanks to Ashleigh Elser for prodding me not to only focus on the "easy" passage.

for help. This time he offers one of the most perplexing lines in the Gospels: "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus had forbidden his followers from giving what is holy to dogs—a deeply offensive image for outsiders in the ancient world.[3] Undeterred by his rather hostile insult, the woman replies, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." At this, Jesus praises her faith and heals the Gentile's daughter.

This is not the Jesus we are accustomed to seeing. Many of us are tempted to sanitize this story with some account that saves Jesus from his words. Despite his apparent cruelty, the irresistible smile of Jesus and twinkle of his eye would have connoted the truth. Or perhaps, his statement was some sort of ancient inside joke.[4] Unfortunately, there is not good evidence to suggest either. So we are left with an image of Jesus rejecting this woman's request simply because she was not a member of the proper ethnic group. He was sent to the Jews, not to her people. On the one hand, this is a good reminder to all non-Jewish Christians—but especially white Christians who often fancy ourselves as God's elect—that none of us were chosen. We are all Gentiles on the outside, begging like this woman, to be grafted in to the salvation promised the Jews. White supremacy certainly has no grounds for legitimacy in our salvation history because we are all outsiders to God's election. But on the other hand, this raises the fearful question: Is Jesus racist? Bearing the same Jewish name as Joshua who slaughtered countless Canaanites several hundred years earlier, Jesus not only refuses to help her—in direct opposition to his parable about helping the wounded Samaritan alongside the road—but refuses with a racial epithet. He calls her a dog.

It is not my intention here to explain or justify Jesus' words. I am most interested in what happens next. In an almost improvisationally-motivated step, the Canaanite woman over-accepts Jesus' insult, concedes the point, and presses forward: "Yes, and?" Even in the face of a verbal wall of ethnic division, nevertheless, she persisted. Yes, even the dogs take the scraps from the master's table. And it appears here that she wins the argument. Her clever rhetorical

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[3] See Matthew 7:6 and Revelation 22:15, noted in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed., ed. Michael Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17 NT, and *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 75. Ched Myers notes that Jewish writers sometimes refer to Gentiles as dogs in referencing their unclean and shameless character (Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 204). The story dramatizes the traditional ethnic hostility between Jews and their Gentile neighbors.

[4] Jason Byasee, "Honorary Jews," sermon in Duke University Chapel, August 14, 2011. Many interpreters point to the fact that both Mark and Matthew use the diminutive form of the term, κυναρίοις, which images household puppies rather than wild, stray canines in an attempt to soften the blow of Jesus' words. However, this hermeneutical maneuver simply does not work since there was no diminutive term in Jesus' Aramaic (M. Eugene Boring, *Matthew: The New Interpreter's Bible* vol. 8 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 336).

move to defend the rights of her people to the liberation that Jesus offers impresses the Teacher and wins the day. Jesus learns from her, and changes his mind. Even if you came for the Jews, we may all be blessed through your actions, she says. Even if there are ethnic walls, occasionally a window opens. If it is important enough for the Gospels to offer us this strange episode of Jesus listening and learning a lesson from a despised ethnic minority, and ultimately praising her faith for it, surely we must attend to its lessons as well. Jesus allows himself to be vulnerable, even shamed, in losing an argument to a Gentile pagan in order to include her and her people in "the new community of the kingdom."[5]

This story does not undermine the glorious eschatological, ecclesiological vision we saw in the first story. Redemption and healing still come between and across ethnic and racial lines. The miracle of overcoming prejudice and ethnic boundaries still occurs. All will still worship together in Jerusalem. Yet this story signifies the difficulty of this work. Even the best Christians resist. Even the Teacher must listen and learn and be shamed. Like Jesus, we must allow ourselves to be brought low and made vulnerable, to realize that God's kingdom has no racial boundaries. We must be open to hearing the stories of others, with our ability to misunderstand those stories, our willingness to be corrected by those stories, and our recognition of the difficulty and potential danger of entering those stories. The way of reconciliation is a good way, but it is a fraught path, a Jericho Road teeming with obstacles and demonstrating our shortcomings. It is a way that requires guidance by the Spirit, submission to those who have been wounded by oppression, and ultimately learning together to walk forward across treacherous terrain. Sometimes it will only lead to further groaning and lament. But sometimes it will lead to healing.

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Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Marcia Mount Shoop begin their account of race in white churches as follows: "Our stories tell us who we are, at least that is what Christianity tells us. Our salvation story, the stories of scripture, and testimonies of faith define us and inform our religious identities." Yet, they wonder, "What about when our stories are incomplete? Or worse yet, what about when our stories about ourselves are lies? What about when stories dis-member or contort part of the Body of Christ by denying truth, silencing dissonance, or ignoring wounds?"[6] Though scripture and worship continually remind us that we embody a shared story as followers of Christ, "instead of seeing all nations and tongues represented at the table, often we look around and see people just like us."[7] *The story of the black church is not my story.* This is a symptom of white-dominated churches aspiring to a posture of

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[5] Myers, 204.
[6] Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 1.
[7] Fulkerson and Mount Shoop, 2, 11.

colorblindness that blinds white people to the effects of our own color. Not only our church practices, but our churches themselves as the Body of Christ, remain broken as long as we neglect our distorted racial history and the way that our own racial perceptions define whose bodies gather together on Sundays. Christ's broken body that hung on the cross serves as a reminder of the literal brokenness and dismemberment of the Body; not only the church universal visibly fractured by racial privilege and segregation, but the literal fractured, broken, and dismembered bodies of African Americans, dark flesh torn apart by actual violence, unleashing a wound that spreads through the whole Body. It is only in a state of white Christians recognizing that we are the enemy in need of love and forgiveness that reconciliation will be possible.

Yet, it is our refusals, shortcomings, and confessions of them that propel the church forward and remind it that it is a community of sinners in need of grace. Serene Jones helpfully describes of the church as both a "graced community" and "sinful community," highlighting the disparity between reality and hope and holding them together in "eschatological tension."[8] We are divided, and this division has profound consequences because we are an embodied, fleshly, and wounded church. Only by naming these wounds that white forbearers inflicted, the wounds upon which our privileged lives now exist and flourish, can this broken Body and torn flesh be transformed. Writing of these wounds, James Baldwin writes of the memory of the auction block reflected in every aspect of white America. Yet, "Now he is bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh; they have loved and hated and obsessed and feared each other and his blood is in their soil. Therefore he cannot deny them, nor can they ever be divorced."[9] Echoing the Apostle Paul, *not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for humankind*—whites and blacks are bone of the same bone, flesh of the same flesh—Baldwin does not suggest a universalism bleached of the particularity of color. Whites and blacks have not experienced history, church, or theology in the same way. We have traded on opposites sides of the same story, but it is the same story; and viewed eschatologically, we share the same end. The call for the church to be reconciled, therefore, is not a call for assimilation, it is not a call to overlook color, and it is not a call to allow our differences to build walls between us. It is a call to celebrate the multi-faceted particularities, colors, gifts, experiences, and stories that come together to make us one story and one Body. Cone claims, "No gulf between blacks and whites is too great to overcome."[10] It is a call, as the Canaanite woman prods us, for clever and imaginative ways to push through the boundaries and seek new resources to work together amid our differences.

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[8] Serene Jones, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology: Cartographies of Grace* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 159.
[9] Baldwin, *Notes*, 125.
[10] *CLT*, 166.

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In a note in a previous chapter I suggested that the attempt to enter another's story is like trying to submerge a ball in water. Buoyancy is the way our Christian Baptism is an embodiment of this tension, or more accurately, an embodiment of our resistance to entering one another's stories. Whites are always able to re-emerge above the water and leave that subaquatic experience behind. Even as we are brought into Israel's story our fleshly and bodily history operates as this buoyancy, preventing us from becoming Christ-like. Whites float above the wake, unwilling to experience submersion into the history of the slave ship and auction block and lynching tree; unwilling to be fully immersed into the story of another, or the story that connects us all. White refusal to be submerged is a refusal to be fully baptized. Paul's words in Galatians 3:28 may relativize fleshly difference in terms of the flesh of Christ—in baptism there is no longer Greek or Jew, male or female. Yet, as the flesh of Christ, the flesh of the church is marked by these bodily differences, even if they are subsumed into the flesh of Christ, and even "trumped" by the flesh of Christ as Copeland admits.[11] While in Christ there is no white or black, the Body of Christ bears the marks of our black and white flesh, and bears the wounds inflicted on those bodies—both in its resurrected form awaiting the redemption of all things, and in the church, the earthly form of the Body of Christ awaiting the same.

This means we must understand the church not as a fixed institution, but as a body "on the Way."[12] "It was the way of Christ rather than either the world or the person of Christ that provided the norms for the life of the [early church] community," writes James Evans. The early church's claiming upon itself *the Way* of Christ signaled the demands Christ set for "an interpersonal, relational, liberated, and loving witness in the world." As Evans understands it, "Beyond mere 'being' or 'doing,' the way of Christ points to the praxis of faith," and "the essence of this Christological praxis is relationship."[13]

Thus, as I have argued, the church is a community of formation, of people in relationship, and this means it is a community contingent, provisional, aspiring, failing, and confessing—a church on "the Way" to greater glory and virtue while currently bound by the limits of our creaturely finitude. Similarly, Michael McCarthy describes Augustine's view of the church as a "reality in process."[14] The church journeys through this world, on its pilgrimage to be home with God. But in the violence and strife of the here and now its voice is mostly one of groaning—"this is not a place of rejoicing but of groaning, not yet a place for exultation but

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[11] Copeland, 81.

[12] This is the writer Luke's favorite name for the early church, the label the community gave to itself, twice from the mouth of Paul. See Acts 9:2, 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, 24:22.

[13] Evans, 112.

[14] Michael McCarthy, "An Ecclesiology of Groaning," 35.

still a place of lamentation."[15] Preaching during a time of high tension for the church, Augustine suggests that it is by lamenting with the psalmist that the church "comes to learn what it is and comes to be what it is."[16] "To be a member of such a mixed body," notes McCarthy, "is to groan mightily at the obvious iniquities and imperfections that incorporation entails. To find oneself in such a body is to share in the laments so powerfully voiced by the Psalmist: 'My heart bellows in its groans. All my desire is before you, Lord, and my groaning is not hidden from you' (Psalm 37:9-10)"[17] The church as the fleshly existence of Christ on earth groans on behalf of Christ—even for its own sins.[18] As Christ's body groaned in the Garden and groaned on the cross, bearing the sin of the world, so the church as the Body of Christ groans as we bear and reckon with the sin of racism that has torn our flesh apart. In the midst of progress and set back, it groans for the heavenly city when all will be reconciled.

Augustine's reflections on groaning warn us against premature solutions and easy answers— against cheap reconciliation. We must contend with the warnings of Hauerwas about the difficulty of entering another's story. But we must also contend with his evasion, and those of countless white Christians and theologians who deny there is a problem or remain oblivious to the ways their own whiteness creates "the problem of race." We must both contend with any over-eager attempts at identification and solidarity, and contest those who refuse to give reconciliation a chance. Yet this work of costly reconciliation commends patience and diligence, progress and failure, misunderstanding and repentance: the hard, incremental work of reconciliation on this side of the eschaton. It means many will have to muster up the strength to listen during difficult conversations, to overcome the fragility that tempts us to stop, and to rejoice over small advances and minor repairs. Augustine's vision also offers a complicated and tempered vision of joy, hope, and redemption—of the world reconciled to God and to one another. "How does the Word experience toil? How does it groan, the Word through whom all things were made? If he has thought fit to share in our death, will he not give to us his life? He has raised us up in great hope, when we groan in great hope. Groaning includes sadness, but there is a groaning which includes joy too."[19] Through our memories, confession, hospitality, can we be "formed into a body which transfigures the world's violence through self-sacrifice and reconciliation"?[20] The practices of the Body of Christ in the ways I

[15] *Enarrationes in psalmos*, on Psalm 54.3. Translation by McCarthy. See also, Augustine, *Exposition of the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: New City, 2000-2004).
[16] McCarthy, 27.
[17] McCarthy, 26.
[18] Augustine warns us that "you may never exclude the head when you hear the body speaking nor the body when you hear the head speaking." When they each speak their "voice is one" (*Enarrationes in psalmos*, on Psalm 37.6 quoted in McCarthy).
[19] *Enarrationes in psalmos*, on Psalm 101, quoted in McCarthy.
[20] William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 251.

have attempted to outline in this dissertation can be a countersign to the violent practices that devalue the raced, wounded, broken body—both in the world and in the church itself. "The establishment of the church is re-creation of the world," Gregory of Nyssa wrote. "But it is only in the union of all particular members that the beauty of Christ's Body is complete."[21] Through the flesh of Christ, Copeland notes, "we are drawn by that eros, his radiant desire for us, and we too seek to imitate his incarnation of love of the Other, love of others."[22]

In this dissertation I have attempted to weave together many arguments about epistemology, tradition, ecclesiology, and racial formation. In the end, I hope this has primarily challenged white theologians, and especially white traditionalist, postliberal, Hauerwasian theologians, to engage with work of black theology, to recognize affinities, and to allow the criticisms and liberatory vision of black theology to pull our projects up short. Witnessing our own whiteness may send us into interrogative modes of self-reflection and draw our attention and methodologies to places previously unseen. I hope it has warned those too eager for cheap reconciliation and those who disavow the project completely, of the difficult necessity of reconciliation within the limits of our fleshly existence. I hope my appeals to specific practices of formation, and turn toward postcolonial theories of the limits of subjectivity grant us caution and give us hope that as a community on the Way, the church can be a site of fruitful, difficult, and costly reconciliation.

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As Hauerwas approaches the end of his career, one filled with forays into ecclesial triumphalism and aspiration severed from the empirical reality, I still contend that his ecclesiology ought to guide our thought. Certainly deficient, especially in the way it miraculously avoided the single most pressing issue for the church today, his ecclesiology has significant moments of chastening—even realism. In fact, as he has been forced to reckon with the continual failure of the church through his life—while constantly goading it toward a better virtue—in his later works, Hauerwas's vision has become more chastened. As I conclude this work by pointing to the image of the wounded Body on "the Way," I will end as I began. I have argued throughout that Hauerwas's theology, despite its shortcomings, holds many resources to help us in this work of costly reconciliation—of remembering, repenting, and reaching out to embrace others. Perhaps those resources begin with his words here:

> To be a Christian has never meant that we cease to be human beings. To be a Christian does not mean we are endowed with virtues that empower us to bear the terrors of this life without difficulty. We are human beings. We are

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[21] Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Making of Man," in Gregory of Nyssa, *Dogmatic Treatises*, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1979), 13.
[22] Copeland, 84.

inheritors of histories that involve cruelties so horrible there can be no way to make what was done undone. For those of us who have survived without being too scarred by the past, the temptation is to relieve our guilt for so surviving by identifying with those who have paid the price for our survival. Yet too often such tactics fail to acknowledge that those more injured than we are also the difficulty or reality. . . . There is indeed something the church cannot do. The church cannot make the difficulty of reality less difficult. What I hope the church can do . . . is help us bear the difficulty without engaging in false hopes.[23]

In the end, we may not be capable of creating the Beloved Community during this world; only a community capable of walking together as a pilgrim family on the Way to its Beloved, who promises to make all things new.[24]

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[23] *ATE*, 157.

[24] Revelation 21:5.

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