Call to Worship

Liturgy, Music, Preaching, and the Arts

Dismantling Racism in Worship

Volume 55.2

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Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music*

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Dismantling Racism in Worship

Published by the Office of Theology and Worship
of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).
The official journal of the Presbyterian Association of Musicians

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Continuing the tradition of *Reformed Liturgy & Music* (1971–2000) and ***Reformed Liturgics*** (1963–69), *Call to Worship* seeks to further the church's commitment to theological integrity, corporate worship, and excellence in music, preaching, and other liturgical art forms.

Editor: Kimberly Bracken Long

Theology, Formation, and Evangelism
Ray G. Jones III, Director

Address editorial and advertising correspondence, materials for review, and unsolicited manuscripts to:
Kimberly Bracken Long
Editor, *Call to Worship*
1317 Broadview Drive
Cambridge, MD 21613
Phone: (404) 626-0481
E-mail: kim.long@pcusa.org

Send change of address and subscription requests by phone or email to:
Presbyterian Publishing Corporation
(800) 533-4371; customer_service@presbypub.com
or subscribe online: pcusastore.com
(search for *Call to Worship*)

PAM members should submit change of address via:
E-mail: pam@pcusa.org or
Phone: (888) 728-7228, ext. 5288

PDS# 21162-21-002

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Indexed with abstract in Religion Index One: Periodicals, American Theological Library Association; available online through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Services) and DIALOG; by Music Article Guide and by Religious and Theological Abstracts. This publication is available in microfilm from ProQuest.

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database,* a product of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Drive, Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606; e-mail: atla@atla.com; online at atla.com.

Presbyterian Association of Musicians
PAM National Office
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202-1396
Phone: (502) 569-5288
Fax: (502) 569-8465
Web: presbymusic.org
Kelly Abraham, Executive Director
kelly.abraham@pcusa.org
Andrew Perkins, Communications Specialist
andrew.perkins@pcusa.org

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Introduction

Kimberly Bracken Long

The pages you are reading are a labor of love: love for God's people, love for the gospel, love for a broken world. These words will be hard to read. Most of them were hard to write. It is my hope—and the hope of the authors and artists represented here—that what you encounter in this issue of *Call to Worship* will make things easier. That it will be easier to confront the racism that is within us all. That it will be easier to have the difficult conversations we need to have. That through our worship—in and out of our sanctuaries—we will be better able to do God's good work of making justice, wronging rights, and healing wounds.

The articles you will read here grow out of real-life experiences. The authors show a remarkable willingness to be truthful—even vulnerable—as they reveal previously unasked questions and challenge commonly held assumptions. You will find yourself shouting "yes!" in agreement and you will wince in unwanted recognition. In the end, I pray that these words and images will help lead us all to be a more beloved community.

Phillip Morgan and Claudia Aguilar Rubalcava lead us to think more deeply about how and what we decide to say and sing in worship. Tony McNeill and Carlton Johnson enlighten us about the history and practice of music in the Black church tradition and how the whole church benefits from singing those songs. Alonzo Johnson and Lis Valle describe ways the arts have been, and can be, used in confronting racial injustice in the church, and Carolyn Helsel advises preachers of predominantly white churches on how to resist and defy racism in their preaching. The arresting contemporary icons of Kelly Latimore, accompanied by his commentary, will invite your contemplation and your prayer.

I am delighted to introduce four new columnists in this issue. Erika Rembert Smith writes on liturgy, drawing on her experience as pastor of Washington Shores Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Florida, a congregation established as a Black church in the 1950s. Stephen Fearing, also new to *Call to Worship*, writes on preaching from Beaumont Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky. Marlon Hurst, our music columnist, is a longtime PAM member and serves as director of music and arts at First Presbyterian Church, also in Lexington. Readers of the journal will recognize Amy E. Gray, our arts columnist, as the talented artist who provided us with two years of compelling original art for our pages before writing for us.

The black-and-white art appearing throughout this issue is courtesy of A Sanctified Art, whose work has graced these pages on several occasions. You may find out more about their work—and how you can obtain their images for your worship—on their website, sanctifiedart.org.

I pray that God will work through these pages as the Spirit has worked through the minds, hearts, hands, and voices of these faithful contributors. May Christ lead us closer to his reign of justice, peace, and unending love.

Kimberly Bracken Long, Editor

A Dream Confirmed
Lisle Gwynn Garrity

In this image, Mary and Elizabeth's bodies are tenderly intertwined. Halos, like crescent moons, encircle each of them and their wombs, signaling the cosmic change they bring forth.

Feature Articles

Dismantling Racism Begins with Worship

Phillip Morgan

I currently serve as director of music at two congregations, one United Methodist and the other Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), that stand a block away from each other in Old Louisville. The church buildings are situated a little over a mile from the heart of the protesting that made national news after the unjust death of Breonna Taylor. Both congregations are committed to social justice and actively engage in work that calls for us to dismantle racist systems. These communities of faith have been a beacon for social justice and change in our city and the world. Their work is meaningful and a great part of why I choose to serve there. I believe in what both of these great churches say and do about the work of eradicating poverty—both are located in one of the poorest zip codes in the nation—and the steps they continue to take in dismantling racism.

A few months ago, however, I discussed with David Bjorlin his great article in the Poverty and Liturgy issue of *Call to Worship* (vol. 54.3). In that article he addresses the use of the phrase "the poor" in congregational song, and a question he posed kept nagging at me. He asked simply, "Are we singing *about* those experiencing poverty, or *with* those experiencing poverty?" Likewise, I have begun to examine my own congregations' practices and choices around weekly worship and wonder, "Is this act of worship *about* dismantling racism, or is it in itself *actively* dismantling racism?"

In "Worship and the Church's Mission in the World" (W-5.03) of the Directory for Worship,[1] each section begins with the words "God sends the Church . . ." making it seem that the work we must do happens outside the sanctuary walls as we are sent from worship. But there are clear directives for this work of God to begin in our worship services. Those sections that begin with "God sends the church . . ." continue with "In the Service for the Lord's Day . . . ." In W-5.0303 we read:

> In the Service for the Lord's Day, Gods call to compassion is proclaimed in the Word and enacted through the Sacraments. We confess our complicity in oppressive structures, pray for those who are hurting, offer our resources to alleviate suffering, and commit our time and energy to care for those in need. Following the example of Jesus Christ, we pledge that we will respect the dignity of all, reach out to those judged undeserving, receive as well as give, and even risk our lives to show Christ's love.

Furthermore, we find in W-5.0304, "Justice and Peace," the following:

> In the Service for the Lord's Day we proclaim, receive, and enact reconciliation with God in Christ. Through the proclamation of the Word we are given the assurance of freedom and peace in Christ and are inspired to share these gifts with others. Through Baptism and the Lord's Supper we are united with Christ, made one in the Spirit, and empowered to break down the dividing walls of hostility that still separate us from one another. We confess our participation in unjust systems, pray for an end to violence and injustice, offer our gifts to support Christ's liberating work, and commit ourselves to pursue peace and justice in Jesus' name.

Phillip Morgan is director of music at Central Presbyterian Church and Fourth Avenue United Methodist Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

It is relatively easy for our service to proclaim that God sends us into the world to dismantle racism, but much more difficult to do that very work "in the service for the Lord's day."

I share all of this as introduction to my work for several reasons. First, I present my experiences in this article not as a scholar on the subject of religious institutions dismantling racism but as a worship practitioner actively engaged in this work alongside wonderful colleagues and caring congregations. Second, I offer these words to assure you that I believe in the work you do each day to dismantle racism. But I offer here not moments of our triumph but ways in which I feel we have erred and from which others may learn. The experiences I will share were hard ones. But in most cases the reflections on my experiences were met with listening ears, and our worship life shifted accordingly to be more in line with our belief that we live in a world built upon racist systems, including those established by the church, and that God calls us to change that reality. Lastly, I wish to offer to you my experiences and the work practices I have formed as a Black man who serves in predominately white congregations. Martin Luther King Jr. referred to 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning as the most segregated hour in America. I believe that our worship lives have something to say about that disparity, and it is a conversation we must begin to have honestly with ourselves if we are truly committed to the work of dismantling racism, especially in our sanctuaries.

It was the 2013 Transfiguration of the Lord service at Central Presbyterian that started me on a journey to explore all of these thoughts. Each year, the congregation observed the liturgical day with a Mardi Gras-themed service. A Dixieland jazz band provided the music, and I was ecstatic to learn that the longtime band leader was someone I knew as a kind soul during my college education. The congregation also went all out. People were invited to dress in a style reminiscent of New Orleans Mardi Gras celebrations; beads were made available for people to wear during the service; the choir donned especially colorful hats, shirts, ties, and vests made by a longtime choir member. The comment I heard most often was, "It's a lot of fun." The service was no different in order and the liturgy remained faithful to our weekly sensibilities.

All of the music, however, was chosen to accompany the "feel" of the service. We sang hymns that could be played in a New Orleans jazz style—"Blessed Assurance"; "What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine"; "Just a Closer Walk with Thee"; and "When the Lord Redeems the Very Least" (the new hymn text in *Glory to God* more commonly known as "I'll Fly Away"). As the postlude the band played "Just a Closer Walk with Thee," then transitioned into "My Old Kentucky Home." People stood, swayed, and sang along, responding with thunderous applause at the end. There was even the tradition of a kazoo chorus on one of the hymns.

During rehearsal of the anthem for that Sunday—the same one the choir had sung for many years—a choir member shared that they had been afraid of what I would think of this service. My response was that I had chosen to work there because I believed in what this congregation did and valued their high level of music in worship. "I'm here to add to your traditions, not get rid of them," I said, the exact words that would cause me a bit of grief.

As a gospel musician, musically I had never felt more at home during a worship service. This seemed like a great opportunity for me to share my gifts fully with my new congregation. At the end I realized I had not had a lot of fun.

As a gospel musician, musically I had never felt more at home during a worship service. This seemed like a great opportunity for me to share my gifts fully with my new congregation. At the end I realized I had not had a lot of fun.

It took me several years to say those words out loud.

When I did say them, it took me longer to say why. It was easy to pretend that in some way the service was beneath me. But that didn't hold, because by then I had clearly shown that I was the music director who loves exactly what we were doing musically in this service. I had come to Central because I knew that worship would be filled with great music of all kinds. It was harder, nearly impossible, to say that it felt racist.

I think the exact moment came after the Mardi Gras celebration four years later in 2017. We had decided to gather in small groups during Lent for a book study of James Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree.* To begin working on worship

planning I read the book well before Lent began, and it was sitting with me as Mardi Gras came and went.

That year, a colleague shared their own hesitancy about including the song "My Old Kentucky Home" in worship. I found the courage to say, "I really don't like this service." When asked to share more, I pointed to James Cone, noting that in nearly each page of his book he mentions hymn titles that helped worshiping communities of Black people through atrocities. These were some of the hymns we sang on Mardi Gras Sunday. I remember saying, "When my grandmother sang "Blessed Assurance," she cried; she didn't think it was fun."

I remember saying, "When my grandmother sang "Blessed Assurance," she cried; she didn't think it was fun."

There was a silence among the staff that let me know that I was being heard. When others spoke, one of the first questions was, "Do you think we should stop doing it?" I reminded myself and everyone in the room that our congregation really did love the service; it was one of our highest-attended services after Christmas Eve and Easter. I restated my commitment about growing traditions and not throwing them out. From that point on, over the next few years the planning for our "fun" service, at least among our small staff, was sensitive to what I felt. Our planning, and the subsequent services, came to reflect who we really were and what we believe.

We began to ask questions that were more in line with the planning we did for all of our other services. We were no longer planning around a style but around the Word. Some of those questions were easy shifts; we asked, "What hymn connects with this text?" rather than "What opening hymn can the jazz band accompany?" Other questions arose from honest conversations about the service that needed time and prayer, such as, "If this is one of our highest-attended services, shouldn't the service look more like this every week?"

I am eternally grateful that I work in a place where those questions could be asked and where we would be faithful in finding an answer to them. I am grateful that our congregation's taking bolder steps in naming our commitment to dismantling racism led me to be able to articulate my own struggles. It took me years to fully express my feelings, not because I didn't feel safe to do so, but because I didn't really know what the feelings were.

We still do the service each year (save this year due to the pandemic), and we still sing "Blessed Assurance" or "What a Fellowship." But now, for me, it feels totally different. Because we have changed our approach in planning the service to be centered around the Word and not the worship atmosphere we hope to create, we are now able to worship in a way that includes styles that are not often seen in predominately white Presbyterian congregations, but without totally abandoning, or sometimes mocking, the traditions of those who have loved them for generations or the traditions of those learning to embrace them. Now when we sing, I hear my grandmother singing along with us, and I cry in her place. It is actually a lot of fun.

At this point you may be thinking that you never have done, nor would you do, such a service. But I think many people make similar mistakes in worship planning all the time. There are many times when, in an effort to be more diverse and inclusive, certain choices can lead to what feels like religious minstrelsy. We rightly sense the need to include more voices and styles in our planning, but if we do not possess a fuller understanding of the worshiping practices (in addition to the musical styles) of other races, pieces of music and liturgy can end up being superimposed onto worship. This ultimately creates an experience that feels jarring for those whom we wish to more fully include, and still seems overwhelmingly white. Creating a moment in worship that is only about the diversity of said moment and based largely on white perceptions of a tradition rather than actual experience, or knowledge gained from those steeped in the tradition, does not accomplish the work of dismantling racism in the Service of the Lord's Day.

In his book *Presbyterian Worship: Questions and Answers*, David Gambrell responds to a question about style of worship: Should Presbyterian worship be traditional, contemporary, or blended?

He answers,

> All of the above! Presbyterian worship is traditional in that it is grounded in Scripture, established on the practices of the ancient and ecumenical church, and guided by the principles of our theological ancestors in the Reformation. Faithful worship must also be contemporary: attentive to the present concerns of the church, community and world; voiced in the common language(s) of the people; and responsive to the leading of God's Word and Spirit in this age. Our worship is always blended; in the profound unity and rich diversity of the body of Christ, with myriad languages, customs, and styles, we join our voices with the saints of every time and place to praise and glorify God.[2]

Worship should be all of the things all of the time. Not just on the Sunday before Mardi Gras. Perhaps the congregation considered the service as "fun" because we did not regularly worship in a wide array of styles. This realization resulted in changes in our worship life and in my work at Central. I became very intentional about including more music of nonwhite traditions, and we realized that music is tied to the work we hear God calling us to do. Previously, I had shied away from incorporating much African American sacred music because of the congregation's commitment to inclusive language. I realized, however, that if we were going to sing from another tradition and mean it, it had to become more a part of us. We found a way to sing with the marginalized, not sing in a way that we thought marginalized communities sang.

In aiming to make sure that our diets of sacred music more consistently include music of nonwhite traditions, allowing them to fully become a part of our body of religious song, we must also be careful that we aren't including certain worship elements for inclusion's sake. My friend Dr. Tony McNeill warns that there is danger in aiming solely for what we often call blended worship. Speaking at the Just Worship Conference in 2019, he pointed out that those who strive to make all voices heard as much as possible can get into the practice of checking boxes on a worship "must-have" list. What is the traditional hymn? What is the contemporary song? What is the piece in a foreign language? What piece of liturgy is from a nonwhite tradition?

Instead, we should be planning worship that is convergent, he says. Convergent worship is where the elements are curated in connection to the Word. If you have expanded your congregation's views around style, you can begin to think in a way that is more convergent. Blended means all styles are present; convergent means all styles are present to more fully glorify God. The desire to create something that looks like the whole people of God is wonderful but can lead to traps of its own.

This past February, the pastor of the United Methodist church I serve—who is also African American—said that we would be including a series of Black History moments in worship. Lent also began that month and I thought that the ties we could make highlighting moments of struggle and triumph in African American history and the season of Lent could be powerful. I was encouraged, however, to pick music and liturgy based around a sociopolitical/historical theme rather than what Scripture had to say to us in that season.

When the pastor insisted that I include "Lift Every Voice and Sing" in the first service, I responded that the hymn I had selected (and had already prerecorded) had been chosen because of its connection to the preaching text for the day. The pastor responded that Black excellence was what was needed for the service.

This hurt in a different way. I had always made a commitment of including a wide variety of music in worship and was convinced that the best way to accomplish this was to encompass a wide range of music as often as I could. When I began serving the congregation, I was excited that this congregation was more racially mixed than any other I'd worked in before. I wouldn't be just sharing the traditions of others with white people; we would all be sharing our traditions with one another. I thought that this had become one of the highlights of our worship and a strength of my leadership. To hear from the pastoral leadership that we needed Black excellence on one particular Sunday made me feel I'd failed at that. It also felt as though I was told I wasn't being Black enough.

After taking a deep breath, I responded that I thought we always had Black excellence because our community had two Black worship leaders doing their job excellently and, I pointed out, that there had not been a single week that we didn't have music representing nonwhite traditions. Unfortunately, there was no further conversation

and we did not wrestle with the tough questions that could lead us to a deeper understanding of the worship life of our congregation.

I did include "Lift Every Voice and Sing" in our service. But it never really fit. The service felt contrived and seemed to be pandering. In trying to create an entire service with music and liturgy that were not in our shared traditions, we had still missed the mark. The service was *about* Black people; we were not being invited to pray *with* them.

A gospel selection on the first Sunday of Advent can actually amplify that unheard voice better than on the first Sunday of Black History Month.

This tendency is prevalent when planning services around themes of Black History Month, Martin Luther King Jr., Women's History Month, and even World Communion Sunday. I have been a culprit in all I've just listed. But what I have learned is that we honor all of those voices more when they are present on days that have no special significance or tie to their race. A gospel selection on the first Sunday of Advent can actually amplify that unheard voice better than on the first Sunday of Black History Month. We should be planning worship in a way that encompasses a wide range of traditions all year long and in a way that removes the novelty of such liturgy and music. That is the system we should be dismantling actively during the most segregated hour.

We do this most fully by marrying new-to-us traditions with those long held by our communities. At the Just Worship conference where I first heard Tony McNeill share his thoughts about convergence and its power to enable our worship services to enact justice, there was a moment in the final worship service that moved me in a way that I had not experienced before. I have written about it before, but I think it bears repeating as a final illustration and summation of what I hope I have been encouraging planners to strive for in crafting worship.

After the sermon, Tony began to play strains of "Take Me to the Water," a traditional Negro spiritual that is a pillar of congregational song in the African American tradition. Rev. Kim Long then made her way down the narrow chapel to the baptismal font, where she submerged sprigs of rosemary into water. We then started to sing. The singing was tame at first, but as the aspersion began, the singing soared.

As we stood, I felt my body begin to sway. My grandmother used to sway as she held me in her lap and sang. Remembering her and almost feeling her arms around me, I felt my voice begin to break as memories flooded my heart of saints of the past glorifying God for the gift of baptism.

As the water hit me and I heard Dr. Tony McNeill prompt us to sing "I Love Jesus," I began to feel not only the water from the font but the water of tears streaming down my face as I wept. I heard Rev. Paul Roberts softly whisper "Yes!" behind me. It was that same spiritual response I often heard in my childhood when we sang these words and rejoiced at the promises of the sacrament.

I was overcome. In that moment I knew that this singular moment in some way was doing the work I feel called to do as a Christian and as a church leader. Tony and Kim could have easily crafted a sequence where the renewal of baptism was followed by the spiritual, but in joining the traditions together they had broken the pattern of the way we do things to speak directly to the hearts of more children of God. In that moment, for maybe the first time, I felt fully Black and fully Presbyterian. The traditions of my ancestors' faith and racial identity were being honored; the renewal of baptism was reaffirming what I have come to know of my own faith as true; and I felt something inside me whispering, "This is it. This is worship. This is what you have been called to do with other people."

I believe that the spirit is whispering to all of us that we are called to be creating and leading worship that honors and makes a welcome home for the full diversity of God's people, and the spirit is further inviting us to join in that endeavor through the work of our denomination's Matthew 25 initiative. As we hear the call to dismantle racism in the world, let us begin by reviewing our own worship practices and dismantling the most segregated hour.

Notes

1. Directory for Worship, *Book of Order 2019–2023* (Louisville, KY: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2019), W-5.03.
2. David Gambrell, *Presbyterian Worship: Questions and Answers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 25–26.

Fighting Racism in Worship

Claudia Aguilar Rubalcava

For we are more than just a footnote
in history
called to be a people, a nation.
More than just a cultural oddity
for we are reclaiming who we are spiritually
more than a way to excite your worship
diversity.[1]

Worship is at the heart of our lives as communities of faith. In her book *Fashion Me a People*, author Maria Harris identifies in the book of Acts five "classical activities of ecclesial ministry: *kerygma*, proclaiming the word of Jesus' resurrection; *didache*, the activity of teaching; *leiturgia*, coming together to re-present Jesus in the breaking of bread; *koinonia*, or community; and *diakonia*, caring for those in need."[2] Church is more than worship, but worship shapes our whole theology and understanding of who we are, who God is, and what our mission is in the world. These activities take place in spaces specifically designed for them, but most, if not all, of these activities are part of worship. This is why worship shapes our theology—and therefore, our way of being in this world—more than any Sunday school class ever will. We learn who is to be included in our lives when we see who is invited at God's table during communion. We learn that God's faithfulness is great because we sing "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," and that idea comforts us through the last of our days, when we may not remember our own names anymore but we remember that idea. We learn that loving our neighbor entails loving someone we do not know at all when we touch a stranger's hand and utter the words, "The peace of Christ be with you."

And we learn because we embody. That is the power of worship. We see who can preach the good news, we listen to the Scriptures, we speak the prayers, we sing the hymns, we taste the wine, we smell the bread, we touch our neighbors. Worship is the great classroom of our faith.

As we seek to live out the kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven," worship is one space where we learn a theology that embraces and celebrates diversity or monoculturalism, and sadly, the space where many of us experience subtle and blunt racism. My personal encounters with racism in worship have informed, challenged, and transformed the contents of this article, so please know that this article reflects the observations I have made as a Presbyterian-raised-Baptist-and-Catholic, Mexican-born-and-raised, American woman.

The Danger of "All Are Welcome" Signs

I have seen "All Are Welcome" signs pop up like daffodils in springtime in the last few years. They have the best intentions, especially after a few years of aggressive speech towards immigrants, people of color, and the LGBTQ community. But these signs can be misleading.

I remember walking into a church that had that sign. Actually, it had a more specific sign that stated "Immigrants and refugees are welcome." That was me! I decided to attend worship there on a bright spring morning. Aside from the sign, nothing welcomed me. The bulletin, the music, the lack of weekly communion (I know that is a difficult topic for many Protestants), the way people dressed, the language spoken, the darkness of the sanctuary, the poor signage—nothing said, "You are welcome here." This church was a church for upper-middle class people of European descent. The

Claudia Aguilar Rubalcava is pastor of First Mennonite Church in Denver, Colorado, and a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

sign welcomed me, but the worship service sent a different message. I did not return to worship there outside of special occasions when my job required me to attend.

Similarly, I was invited to preach or lead worship in some capacity in three different churches on World Communion Sunday. The music was diverse, there were breads from all over the world, and multiple languages were spoken. We had potlucks with foods from every continent, so the smells infused the sanctuary. My heart was beaming with joy and I felt at home in all three of those churches. But I was never invited to worship or lead worship in those spaces outside of World Communion Sunday. It took me a few years to realize I was nothing more than an exotic animal in a cage.

So, what do we mean when we say, "All are welcome"? Is it just a catchy phrase of a marketing strategy designed to attract younger crowds, or are we actively working Sunday after Sunday to make sure everyone feels welcome in our space?

In order to answer this question, let us explore how racism takes place in worship as it relates to the most basic questions—the ones we often forget to ask because their answers have become automatic to us: what, who, when, where, how, and why.

What?

What do we sing? Music is the language of the heart, the language we speak even when we forget how to speak. We learn most of our theology from hymns. Hymn selection is one of the most overlooked areas in worship. We sing what we are familiar with and avoid new musical expressions that may make us uncomfortable.

Singing in unfamiliar tune patterns is uncomfortable. Asian hymnody is so foreign to me that I have a hard time keeping up with the tune. I am a terrible clapper, so clapping on the first and third beats is hard for me, but clapping on the second and fourth is near impossible. But difficulty or discomfort should not be obstacles for us to include a variety of musical styles. Our faith tradition is one of difficulty and discomfort.

Using the native language of a hymn is a rare practice in worship, but one that is deeply appreciated by those of us for whom English is not our native language. Singing a hymn in its original language may help us understand the musical part of it. But it is more powerful than that: translations are usually done by native English speakers—mostly missionaries—who often miss some of the original intentions of the hymn and modify the theological concepts that may make Americans uncomfortable.

Hearing a different language is uncomfortable. Regardless of how conservative or progressive a community is, whenever I have prayed in Spanish, inevitably someone asks me to translate the prayers for them. The urge to know what is being said goes from mere curiosity to wanting to control the theology behind a prayer. But if we can live into the mystery of the resurrection, can't we just live into the mystery of the words others are praying? Can't we just trust their prayers are coming from the heart and that God will listen? Can't we just dwell for a few minutes in the frustration many of our immigrant siblings live not understanding the language being spoken?

And even when we do not understand fully what we are singing, we must keep in mind we are singing and praying to the Holy One who created all cultures, musical styles, and languages.

Listening to music and prayer in other languages makes us more empathetic toward the immigrant experience, and by being uncomfortable, who knows? We may be entertaining angels.

Listening to music and prayer in other languages makes us more empathetic toward the immigrant experience, and by being uncomfortable, who knows? We may be entertaining angels. The congregation I served a few years ago sang "Khudaya, rahem kar (Have mercy on us, Lord)" in its original language, Urdu, every week during the prayers of the people, knowing that the possibility of any Urdu speaker attending worship at our church was minimal. During a meeting of interfaith communities, I was paired with a Pakistani woman. We were asked to talk about something we had in common. I mentioned we sang a hymn in Urdu every week and she asked me to sing it for her. After graciously correcting my pronunciation, she said to me with tears in her eyes, "I have not heard my language spoken by an American before." A week later, she was sitting in one of the front pews of our church.

Recommendations

- Introduce one new hymn every month, singing it every week. This is a great accompaniment to a sermon series, a liturgical season, or even the lectionary.
- Use your denominational resources. Several denominations have multilingual liturgical resources, many of them available for free.
- Ask your neighbors whose language you are utilizing how to pronounce the words. Great conversations can arise from this question! Teach your congregation to pronounce things correctly.
- Prepare to be uncomfortable. This work won't always be easy, but it will always be life-giving.
- Invite guest musicians on a regular basis to play different musical genres. If this is not possible, you can send a link to a song from a different culture in your newsletter.
- Incorporate easy congregational responses in other languages; for example, "*Gracias Dios*" during a prayer of thanksgiving or "*As-salamu alaykum*" during the sharing of the peace.

Who?

An image speaks more than a thousand words. Who is invited to lead worship and preach week after week shapes our theology of the *imago Dei*, the image of God. If white, middle-aged men are the usual worship leaders, we are leaving behind the vast majority of people created in the image of God.

Including children, women, and people of color in our weekly rotation of worship leaders deepens our understanding of who God is and who our neighbors are. And whenever we hear in the news that yet another Black person was shot by the police or that children are still in cages in border detention centers, we will be more likely to see that person as a sibling and not a threat.

Recommendations

- Include at least one worship leader who is not a white, middle-aged man every week. Many of us are visual learners and will be influenced by the leadership in our worship spaces.
- Ask children, people of color, and women to read the part of "God" when reading Scripture, reflecting the *imago Dei* in its fullness.
- Invite guest preachers (as your budget allows) or swap pulpits with preachers from other traditions and cultures. Your community will feel refreshed after hearing new voices.
- If you use visual illustrations—bulletins, videos, or slideshows—include images of the Divine that represent different cultures and ethnicities.
- If the imagery in your sanctuary is Eurocentric, incorporate pieces and images from other cultures. Use art made by people of color.
- Include at least one quotation from a person of color in your sermons every Sunday. It is a fun challenge! By doing this, you will create a culture where your community learns *from* and not just *about* people of color.

When?

When do we have worship? Assuming that 11 A.M. on Sunday morning works for every group of people is not helpful. Depending on the geographical location of the community of faith, there may be immigrant and refugee groups who long to attend worship but cannot because they work on Sundays. Or there may be people who work in a factory where Mondays are the day off.

This question is directly related to the previous two, what and who. When do we sing and pray the music and prayers of other peoples? When do we include preachers and worship leaders of other traditions and cultures in our worship services?

World Communion Sunday is not the answer. Not if that is the only day we remember we are inextricably connected to our siblings across the globe. Not if we forget about the Burmese church down the road on a regular Sunday.

For the rest of the year, the answer varies from congregation to congregation, depending on the level of comfort and commitment to expanding the worship experience from one that is monocultural to something different.

An older Chinese man started attending a local church consistently. No one in the congregation knew where he was from until a member of the church, a Chinese-born man, returned from vacation. Without any indication from the church leadership, the church member translated week after week the entire bulletin for the older man, who was visiting his daughter in the United States and walked four miles every week of the summer to attend worship.

Recommendations

- If non-English speakers worship with you, offer a brief translation of the headlines in the bulletin. Finding translators to make worship accessible is easier than you think, and denominational offices often offer those services.
- Try to have at least one service per month on a weeknight. This will offer a time to worship to those who cannot worship on a Sunday. Such a service is also the perfect space to experiment with different styles of music, liturgy, and preaching.
- Use fabrics from different cultures to decorate the sanctuary throughout the year.
- Celebrate diversity in your worship services on dates other than World Communion Sunday. You can dedicate one Sunday per month to celebrate diversity or celebrate specific cultures during times designated by the larger culture, for example, Kwanzaa, Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Asian Pacific American Heritage Month.
- Invite worship leaders who have been invited to lead during World Communion Sunday to do so at other times. Make them feel your appreciation year-round.

Where?

This is a less obvious question, one that gets ignored often. Space and its configuration are as important and tricky as any other aspect of worship.

Different cultures assign different meanings to specific objects and spaces, so addressing the question of where is directly related to who you want to welcome. Are you sending the immigrant community to the basement for their worship service? Are there flowers or colors that may have a negative meaning for your neighbors? Would having a kneeling space provide a place of comfort? Does your sanctuary have triggering imagery for people who experienced colonization? Are there simple objects that may make interaction between people from different cultures smoother?

This point may be better illustrated with a story. I once visited an English-speaking Roman Catholic congregation hosting one mass in Spanish on Sunday afternoons. The numbers of people attending that service sky-rocketed initially but started declining almost as fast because there was tension between the English speakers and the Spanish speakers. The Spanish speakers did not feel welcomed as they saw the English speakers stare at them with disdain. The conflict revolved around the cleanliness of the bathroom.

After I asked a few questions to the American-born director of faith formation, the source of the conflict emerged: Spanish speakers were leaving dirty toilet paper on the floor, so the Anglo community felt disgusted by the situation and those who caused it—righteously so. I explained to the woman that sewage in many Latin American countries cannot manage flushing toilet paper, so Latin Americans—for the most part—do not flush the toilet paper and use canisters instead.

Recommendations

- Show guest congregations the same degree of hospitality you offer your own congregation. Give them full access to equipment, musical instruments, and any other resources you may have available (hymnals, Bibles, and liturgical resources).
- Do research about the space set-up used in your neighbor's culture. Remove imagery, colors, and other objects that may be offensive to them. If, because of internal politics of your congregation the removal of certain objects is impossible, create educational resources—like a plaque or flyer—explaining why it is hurtful and why it is still there.
- Show appreciation for gifts received from people from other cultures. Display them with pride. Many times these gifts come with great financial sacrifice from the communities giving them or have been created with their own hands. Treat them the same way you would treat the stained glass given by the wealthiest family in your congregation.

How?

Intention and impact can be two very different things. We may have the right intentions, but we may end up doing more harm than good. This often happens when we make assumptions and do not take the time to talk to the people we want to reach out to.

When you ask people what they want and what they need, you will be surprised learning that even small steps make a big difference for many of us. I remember that the dean of students of the seminary I attended called me to his office the week before graduation and did not let me leave until he

correctly pronounced every syllable of my eleven-syllable full name. On graduation day, my mother was in tears when she heard my name. It was the first time it had been pronounced correctly since I had moved to the United States.

In listening to a variety of perspectives we may find simple solutions for problems that may affect different communities. After incorporating icons representative of each action in our bulletin (prayer hands, musical notes, bread and wine, and even an offering plate) at the request of the All Abilities Welcome workgroup of our church, we learned that non-English speakers, little children who didn't know how to read yet, and first-time visitors benefitted from the iconography included in the bulletin.

Recommendations

- Ask your neighbors: What do you want? What do you need? Listen to their recommendations and take them seriously. The needs and wants of a community can point us to the wants and needs of the greater community.
- Meet regularly with people in your congregation or the broader community from different cultural backgrounds. Ask for their input, and when possible, include them in your congregation's leadership. Lift up their voices in conversations, especially when they are met with resistance. Follow their lead.
- Try to pronounce difficult names correctly. Someone's name is an essential element of their identity. Be eager to ask to be corrected until you get it right.
- Be open to criticism. This is hard work that relies on trial and error. Because each community is unique, not every suggestion will succeed. Be humble to admit your mistakes whenever the impact is not what you intended.
- Be prepared to be surprised. Whenever we open the gates of accessibility to one group, we are opening them to other groups.

Why?

This is the most important question of them all: Why are we addressing racism in worship?

There are important sociological and cultural reasons to do this work: the United States will be a country of minorities in just a few decades. At the same time, "Americans belonging to a church are in the minority for the first time since Gallup started polling church membership nearly a century ago, according to their research released on March 29."[3] The future of the church depends on its ability to welcome and embrace the growing diversity of this country. Our pews cannot afford to be homogeneous anymore. Every other area of our life as a society seems to be adapting—willingly or unwillingly—to these changes, and the church seems to be the last one to embrace diversity.

This increasingly diverse landscape also means we must be prepared theologically to deal with the challenges it presents. Xenophobic rhetoric and hate crimes have become more prominent in recent years, often justified by theological claims. Our ability to articulate and embody a theology of diversity will shape how our communities respond to the changes in the demographic landscape and equip them for the challenges ahead.

But more importantly, we are doing this work because diversity is the essence of the triune God: three distinct persons with one essence, love. We worship the One who encompasses diversity in Godself. Diversity is more than just a trend, it is at the center of the Divine's identity.

The people of God have always struggled with diversity, and if there is an overarching narrative in the biblical witness, embracing "the other" seems to be a consistent one. Every time, God makes room for one more: the women, the enslaved people, the eunuchs, the children, the Samaritans, the Gentiles. Even Jesus grew through engaging a difficult conversation with a Syrophoenician woman, widening the circle of salvation to others not originally included.

The beauty of Pentecost is not that the early Christians spoke in tongues, but that they spoke the languages of the neighboring peoples, so that "amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?'" (Acts 2:7–8). And just as occurred on Pentecost, not everyone will welcome this idea. Some will be angry, some may sneer and think you are drunk, but once the fire of the Holy Spirit comes, it is hard to stop it.

Conclusion

Researcher Brené Brown, in her book *Braving the Wilderness*, tells us that belonging is an innate desire of all human beings. All of us want a place to belong, and what is the church but the place where we belong?

Many of us have been forced to put aside our traditions, ignore our colors, hum our songs in the silence of our hearts, and water down ourselves in order to fit into the American church, in order to find a place to belong. But according to Brown, "true belonging doesn't require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are."[4]

Whatever we have experienced in the American church is not "true belonging," since "belonging is being accepted for you. Fitting in is being accepted for being like everyone else. If I get to be me, I belong. If I have to be like you, I fit in."[5] We have been "fitting in," not finding a home. And I would argue that as long as there is a "normal" to adjust to, as long as we cannot come wholly as we are, no one truly belongs. So our task is holy as we make cracks in the norms and expand the circle as we try to live into the hope of that day when we, a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, stand before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in our hands and with all the angels standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and we all fall on our faces before the throne and worship God.[6]

Theologian Paul Tillich, in his sermon "You Are Accepted," summarizes what occurs when we truly belong:

> Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed.[7]

May we work incessantly to experience that grace, to find that transformation.

Notes

1. Melva Lowry, "I am Kwanzaa," Kwanzaa service, Decatur, Georgia, December 14, 2015.
2. Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 16.
3. Elias Miller, "For the First Time, Fewer Than Half of Americans Are Members of a Church," Boston University News Service, April 25, 2021, https://bunewsservice.com/for-the-first-time-ever-fewer-than-half-of-americans-are-members-of-a-church/.
4. Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness* (New York: Random House, 2019), 32.
5. Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*, p. 160.
6. This is a paraphrasis of Revelation 7:9–11.
7. Paul Tillich, "You Are Accepted," in *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 120.

"Lift Every Voice and Sing": Forming Congregations for Justice

Tony McNeill

Oak Grove African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Erwin, North Carolina, is not only the place I call my home church, it is the impetus of my spiritual and musical formation. Oak Grove is the place that allowed this seven-year-old kid, whose feet could not touch the pedals, to play the opening and closing hymns for Sunday school. Eventually, the church made provisions for me to become a paid musician accompanying, directing, and assisting with various choirs.

I will never forget one Sunday when my Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Beatrice (pronounced "Be-AT-rice") Williams, pulled me aside in the hallway as we were heading to the sanctuary after class. As not to have anyone know what she was up to, she bent down and whispered loud enough for me to hear the assignment she had in mind for the Black History Month program. Mrs. Beatrice took a copy of the church hymnal out of her pocketbook and opened it to a specific song. As she pulled back the folded corners of the pages, I remember seeing the title, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," printed at the top of the page on the left. "I expect for you to know how to play this for the Black History program," she said in a hushed and hurried voice that made me think it was our secret. She put the hymnal securely in my hands and gave me two quick squeezes. That was her unspoken permission for me to take the hymnal home and to keep this agreement as our secret.

At the end of my next piano lesson, I pulled the hymnal out of my book bag and showed the music to Mrs. Rhue, my piano teacher, whose first name was also Beatrice (pronounced "BE-a-trice"). She leaned back, arms folded, and grinned with a mixed sense of pride and suspicion and asked, "Son, what do you know about this song?" I explained that I was expected to play this song for the upcoming Black History program at Oak Grove. "My, my! Is that right?" Mrs. Rhue said. I asked her to help me learn to play it. For the next three weeks, at the conclusion of my piano lessons, Mrs. Rhue and I would spend an additional twenty to thirty minutes working on fingerings, rhythm, and musicianship. Mrs. Rhue not only taught me how to play the hymn as it was published on the page, but she also taught me how to play in a way that would encourage passionate congregational singing of the text. My introduction to this iconic text and tune happened through two Black women and my church. Little did I know at the time that my ability to play "Lift Every Voice and Sing" had a purpose beyond the Sunday school Black History program at Oak Grove Church.

The responsibility Mrs. Beatrice Williams placed on me to learn this song was an important marker in my musical development as a future church musician and music educator. My ability to play the National Negro Anthem (also referred to as the National Negro Hymn) equipped me to be a cultural bearer of the story and tune for my community. During middle school and high school, I was frequently hired (for the compensation of five or ten dollars) by family reunions, citywide and countywide events, and even other churches to play "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Sometimes people sang the first stanza only; at other times, they sang all three. What Mrs. Rhue taught me during the extended piano lessons was not just to provide accompaniment to support corporate singing, but to be a trusted steward of a cultural artifact that defines, memorializes, unites, challenges, and encourages the lives of those who declare it in song.

Dr. Tony McNeill currently serves as director of choral activities and chairman of the Department of Music at Clinton College in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

Throughout high school and college, I continued to play the hymn setting of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" for various choirs and events. As a sophomore in college playing piano for the gospel choir, I encountered the text of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" prepared as a lyric sheet, divorced from its assigned notes and rhythms. Although the precision of the key signature, chords, and rhythm were deeply buried in the muscles and marrow of my fingers from grade school, the visual presentation of the lyrics on the page, justified to the left margin, forced me to see and internally hear the song anew. It looked like a poem instead of a song. The organization of each verse stacked above the previous one permitted me to engage the text for the first time as a complete story, not just syllables and words paired with piano accompaniment. The interdependence of the metaphors, text painting, imagery, and contrasting harmonic moods seemed purposeful and clear.

"Lift Every Voice and Sing," written by James Weldon Johnson, was originally performed in 1900 by the children at Edwin McMasters Stanton (Elementary) School in Jacksonville, Florida. The song shifted from being a poetic text written in 1899 to lyrics set to music by James's brother, J. Rosamond Johnson. The Stanton School requested James, who served on the faculty at the time, to speak at an assembly honoring the birthday of President Abraham Lincoln. In the acclaimed book *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem* by Princeton University professor Imani Perry, the author quotes James Weldon Johnson saying:

> I was put down for an address, which I began preparing, but I wanted to do something else also. My thoughts began buzzing around a central idea of writing a poem about Lincoln but I couldn't net them. So, I gave up the project as beyond me. . . . My central idea, however, took on another form. I talked over with my brother the thought I had in mind and we planned to write a song to be sung as a part of the exercises.[1]

A chorus of five hundred students from the Stanton School performed the song at the celebration honoring Lincoln's birth. They dedicated their performance to Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute. Perry says the magnitude of this artistic effort by the Johnson brothers proved to be "much bigger than an ode to any one leader or icon." She describes the hymn as "a lament and encomium to the story and struggle of black people."[2] The song is a masterful, artistic rendering of the lives of Black folks in America, converging at the intersections of invitation, participation, reflection, and anticipation. It was a story placed in the hearts of impressionable adolescents that took root and grew in the often stony ground of twentieth-century America. Those adolescents who grew into adults would teach this song and its lessons to the children in their homes, communities, churches, and schools. In speaking of the impact of the anthem, James Weldon Johnson says:

> Shortly afterwards my brother and I moved away from Jacksonville to New York, and the song passed out of our minds. . . . But the school children of Jacksonville kept singing it; they went off to other schools and sang it; they became teachers and taught it to other children. Within twenty years it was being sung all over the South and in some other parts of the country. . . . The lines of the song repay me in an elation, almost of exquisite anguish, whenever I hear them sung by Negro children.[3]

While individuals were inspired to share the song, institutions also found a place for it in their own customs. Growing and developing Black organizations (civic, religious, social, and educational) sang "Lift Every Voice and Sing" and incorporated it in worship, graduations, conferences, protests, conventions, and other events. These organizations programmed the song for congregational or solo performance to pay homage to ancestors who died in the struggle for liberation, to instill community pride, and to affirm commitments in the pursuit of equality and justice. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) later adopted the song as the official National Negro Anthem in 1919, thereby cementing its position within the culture.

For 121 years, "Lift Every Voice and Sing" has served as a cultural marker symbolizing the struggle, victory, and hope of African American inclusion and prosperity in this country. The song played a pivotal role in shaping the identity of Black civic

and community organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs (NCAW) and the Atlanta-based women's organization once known as the African American Chautauqua Circle. The song certainly speaks to the political, social, and liberative aspirations of Black people, but it also serves as a soundtrack to reflect the experience and mission of organizations founded to address these concerns.

Part of the brilliance of this poem-turned-anthem is the formative power of the text to mold hearts and minds. It is difficult to ignore how contagious this text and tune have been over the past 121 years.

Part of the brilliance of this poem-turned-anthem is the formative power of the text to mold hearts and minds. It is difficult to ignore how contagious this text and tune have been over the past 121 years. Habitual singing of the song was part of the cultural and spiritual catechism of Black children. The song served as a tool of education and preparation for what it means to be Black in America. It was a musical vehicle to expose Black history, Black life in the present, and the hope of a Black future. "It was a means of socializing Black children. It gave them a way of understanding the world and finding self-worth despite its meanness [in the world]. It also could provide a pathway toward forging identity."[4] It is in the song's affect to foster personal and communal identity that makes it so necessary for us to sing as justice-seeking people.

South Carolina Representative Jim Clyburn initiated a bill in January 2021 to make "Lift Every Voice and Sing" the national hymn for the United States based on the hymn's ability to foster unity and shared understanding of what it means to be American. In an article written for National Public Radio, Ryan Benk quotes a story reported in *USA Today*:

> To make it a national hymn, I think, would be an act of bringing the country together. It would say to people, "You aren't singing a separate national anthem, you are singing the country's national hymn," said Clyburn, the highest-ranking Black American in Congress. The gesture itself would be an act of healing. Everybody can identify with that song.[5]

Clyburn's efforts underscore his belief, and mine as well, that there are universal elements in the song that resonate to all who give pause to consider its meaning. More simply put, everyone can find themselves in the narrative of this anthem.

Over the past five years, there has been a resurgence of interest by mainstream artists from various genres in re-discovering the potency of the song. Artists such as Beyonce, Kirk Franklin, Kurt Carr and the Kurt Carr Singers, Alicia Keys, and Coriology have included arrangements of the anthem during live performances and virtual/prerecorded performances, and featured it as a stand-alone track on their albums. Additionally, the National Football League announced it would include a live or prerecorded performance of the Black National Anthem prior to "The Star-Spangled Banner" during the first game of each season. The motivation for these modern-day recordings and intentional performances has been in response to the overwhelming need to address white supremacy, police brutality, racism, transphobia, and inequality. These renditions give voice and create awareness concerning the senseless deaths and mistreatment of Black and Brown men, women, children, and transwomen. The music also pricks our collective conscience to action. Songs like "Lift Every Voice and Sing" underscore the need to advocate and protest for those outside of our personal privilege. This is the work of justice.

With the current reconnection to and inclusion of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" in the larger cultural arena, churches have a significant opportunity to foster a more frequent use of the song beyond the month of February (Black History Month) and the annual city-wide ecumenical services we often depend on for permission to engage the song.

With the current reconnection to and inclusion of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" in the larger cultural arena, churches have a significant opportunity to foster a more frequent use of the song beyond the month of February (Black History Month) and the annual city-wide ecumenical services we often

depend on for permission to engage the song. How might churches reimagine the function of this historic anthem (hymn) for corporate worship? What ongoing possibilities exist for engaging this text in creative ways, outside of worship, that will inform and strengthen its function *in worship*? What musical and nonmusical considerations might musicians and clergy include as a part of their planning and leading? I would like to offer some practical ideas for reflection.

Corporate Worship

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" not only enriches worship during predictable days and seasons in the arc of our liturgical and civic calendars, but the anthem also provides musical and theological imagery for incorporating elements of justice, hope, and unity during other markers such as Advent ("Sing a song full of the *hope* that the present has brought us") and Epiphany ("where the white *gleam* of our *bright star* is cast" and "Thou who has by thy might, led us into the light"). The cross-fertilization of past (First Coming), present (the anticipation of today), and future (Second Coming) are critical dimensions of Advent. These dimensions of time are tightly woven throughout the fabric of this anthem. The first half of the first stanza is both an invitation and command to "Lift ev'ry voice and sing [now!]. . . . [Now] Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies. . . ." The second half of the same stanza invites us into a participation of a "[present] faith that the dark *past* has taught us." That song continues to evolve or completely changes into a song of "the hope that the *present* has brought us." The first stanza ends with the eschatological charge for us to "march on till victory is won." Coupled with liturgy that complements, foreshadows, or responds to the metaphors in the text, the hymn would be an effective tool to highlight the deeper theological meanings of Advent and Epiphany through the lens of justice.

For the civic calendar, I strongly encourage music directors to consider using the song in conjunction with or in the place of the national anthem for patriotic holiday observances such as Memorial Day, Veterans Day, or July 4. I am not suggesting this to say one is greater or better than the other. I do offer this hymn as a means of singing a story that acknowledges the collective grief, hope, pain, and joy of the people of this country, especially those of marginalized populations.

In addition to considering using the hymn on special days and seasons, it may also be helpful to think about how the hymn may function across the general arc of worship.

In addition to considering using the hymn on special days and seasons, it may also be helpful to think about how the hymn may function across the general arc of worship. Stanza one could possibly serve as an introit or call to worship. The words are positioned in the here and now and are laced with communal invitation, participation, and a joyful mandate to be active: lift, sing, ring, rejoice, resound, face, and march. The late Robert E. Webber reminded us that "worship is a verb."[6] The actions and embodiment of worship are as diverse as the people doing them. Actions do speak louder than words. We need appropriate action words that point us toward justice.

Stanza two could function as sung confession. I can imagine hearing this stanza sung, in short or larger phrase groupings, interspersed with spoken words of communal confession and lament of things past and present. Perhaps a recapitulation of the second half of the first stanza ("Sing a song . . .") could serve as a response to the confession or function as an affirmation "of faith that the dark past has taught us," while pointing us toward the "hope that the present has brought us."

Stanza three is prayer. The focus turns from horizontal celebration and lament to vertical description and reflection, ending with petition. The text is poignant in naming who God is and what God has done. It is out of the descriptive power and protection of God the writer offers four distinct prayer petitions: (1) "Keep us forever in the path [of justice and freedom], we pray;" (2) "Lest [Prevent] our feet [from] stray[ing] from the places, our God, where we met Thee;" (3) "lest, our hearts drunk with the wine [messiness] of the world, we forget thee;" and (4) a deep desire to remain "true," or just, to God and "native land." Although the original "native land" reference points to Mother Africa, I would like to submit the possibility of honoring the original intent as well as embracing a broader view of "native land" that might include

our immediate communities and national locales—and places beyond—that align with our particular ancestral heritage. The third stanza is an excellent demonstration of the power of sung prayer.

During the months of January and February, when this hymn is sung frequently by congregations, it may be effective to formally teach and sing the hymn across a series of weeks, culminating on a Sunday or another day of worship when everyone demonstrates a mastery of the words and tune (from memory or with text). A teaching series could start in mid to late January and end mid to late February. I have done a teaching series on this hymn at several of the churches where I served. A series could look like this:

Prepare (1–2 weeks prior to series launch)	1. Announce the series. 2. Communicate the text and words (bulletin, church newsletter, website, and social media platforms). Encourage listening by including links of congregational performances that map to your hymnal. 3. Share a brief historical background on the lyricist and composer for the upcoming weeks. 4. Have a choir member or congregant reflect on what each verse means (short, written and/or video). Share the reflection in church communication channels. Prepare the song in advance (1 to 2 weeks) with choir/singers assisting with leading worship. Expose the deeper theological, historical, and formative significance via the song and the series. Encourage memorization for those selected to lead each week; others may be inspired to do the same.
First Sunday	1. Re-state the learning series' purpose. 2. Introduce the tune and first stanza. 3. Introduce the song with only the accompanist/musicians and then add the choir/singers to sing the first stanza in unison while the congregation follows the text. 4. Repeat the stanza in unison with choir/prepared singer and congregation.
Second Sunday	1. Re-introduce the series' significance. Sing the second stanza where choir/singers sing in unison. 2. Have the choir/singers and congregation sing the second stanza in unison. 3. Have the accompanist play an extended interlude. 4. Then have everyone sing the first and second stanzas. The choir sings parts on the second stanza while the congregation sings in unison.
Third Sunday	1. Re-introduce the series' significance. 2. Have the accompanist/musicians play the third stanza once. 3. Then invite the choir and congregation to sing the third stanza in unison or have choir/singers sing alone in unison. 4. Have the congregation join in unison and repeat the stanza. 5. Return to the first stanza followed by second and third stanzas. The congregation sings all stanzas in unison while the choir sings parts (second and third stanzas).
Fourth Sunday	1. Sing all three stanzas either as the opening hymn or song; or select stanzas to support the service across the worship experience (see examples below). 2. First stanza serves as the opening hymn (everyone sings unison). 3. Second stanza serves as the call to confession (choir in parts, congregation in unison). 4. Third stanza (harmony or unison) serves as corporate prayer (rubato style). 5. Sing all three stanzas together as the closing hymn for worship.

The ultimate goal of the teaching series is to affirm the value and worth of the song by using the corporate learning of the song during worship as a form of worship. Another goal should be to make "Lift Every Voice and Sing" a part of the congregational repertoire of every justice-seeking community.

The ultimate goal of the teaching series is to affirm the value and worth of the song by using the corporate learning of the song during worship as a form of worship. Another goal should be to make "Lift Every Voice and Sing" a part of the congregational repertoire of every justice-seeking community. In other words, it should be within the body of music the congregation is able to sing with accuracy, confidence, and heart in the presence or absence of rehearsed singers.

For Formation

It is ironic how this imaginative text, paired with a tune far from melodic mediocrity, was accessible enough to teach to elementary-aged children. I am not sure how long it took Mr. James Weldon Johnson to teach this musical tribute to his students, but it signals to me possibilities for the area of Christian education and formation for all ages. How would the Christian education of children and the discipleship of adults be impacted if "Lift Every Voice and Sing" was an ongoing part of the principles, songs, lessons, and conversations we hold as critical components of establishing Christian identity? What if Sunday school teachers, like Mrs. Beatrice Williams, asked children and youth to learn to play, recite, and sing the hymn and assist in teaching the hymn to the congregation?

For adults, I suggest engaging them in what I call a paraphrasal analysis of the text. Individuals paraphrase each verse or phrase of the hymn in their own words and discuss those responses in community (small group), phrase by phrase. At the end of each stanza, a broader discussion of that stanza occurs. At the end of all three stanzas an even bigger discussion emerges. I have known churches and Bible study groups to do a series of reflections and studies on the song texts as an entry point to the interdependence of worship and justice.

For Performance

Programming the hymn for Sunday (Sabbath) worship and other corporate gatherings could be enhanced in several ways. Consider having the congregation sing with a prepared children's choir (or a few children) leading from the front of the worship space. This not only brings together persons across the age spectrum, but it honors the memory of the elementary children who first sang the anthem in 1900. Children should have frequent experiences of singing freedom and justice songs like "Lift Every Voice and Sing" not only among themselves, but as members of the cosmic body of Christ. May I also suggest conductors face the congregation as you lead them in singing. Use hospitable gestures, such as a wide open-armed embrace for the downbeat of each stanza and major phrase, as a visible reminder of welcome and participation for all. It is common for conductors to lead the first two stanzas in the spirit of a heroic anthem or march. Sometimes fermatas are employed at the words "rise," "beat," "might," and/or at the end of the first section of the hymn ("sea," "sighed," and "pray"). In almost every hymnal I have encountered, there is a fermata toward the end of each stanza at "us," "slaughtered," and "Thee." This dramatic pause places significant emphasis on the intensity and passion of the text that follows. After an (extended) interlude, it is common practice to sing the third stanza as a rubato, free-flowing prayer, similar to the style of Gregorian chant. Here, clear leadership from the conductor is critical. The singing usually regains a sense of tempo at "Lest our feet . . ." and shifts to a dramatic and punctuated ritardando on or before the word "drunk" to the word "thee." From this moment to the end of the piece, the conductor and/or musicians usually guide the congregation triumphantly to the end.

The congregation, like any other performing ensemble of the church, deserves time to study, rehearse, and reflect about the texts they sing, how they sing, and why they sing. Through careful collaborative planning, the ongoing integration of justice songs like "Lift Every Voice and Sing" in worship and discipleship practices can help shape congregants into being the change agents the world needs. Congregations that are serious about the work of establishing communities into places of harmony, shared power, and justice have a responsibility for shaping worship and ministries that reflect this commitment.

It should never be an issue for a congregation to feel unqualified to sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" based on its demographic. James Weldon Johnson stated in a response to a critique about the anthem, "It is fully as patriotic [as other recognized hymns and anthems], among possibilities are that it may grow in general use among white as well as colored Americans."[7] This hymn offers necessary words we need to regularly place on the lips of our congregation. John Witvliet states, "What goes into our soul shapes who we are."[8] The key to congregations experiencing the beauty, history, and possibility of the National Negro Anthem lies in our being vulnerable enough to see it as a text and tune capable of transforming minds and hearts beyond the conventional ways we have (mis) used the song in the past. I advocate for more frequent use of the anthem in worship, coupled with hospitable leadership and education. The story in the song is a soul-shaping force that calls the singer to remembrance and action. When we allow justice songs of this caliber to find their way into the marrow of our spiritual bones, they help us be what we sing.

Notes

1. Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 6.
2. Ibid., 7.
3. Julian Bond and Sondra Kathryn Wilson, ed., *Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Celebration of the Negro National Anthem; 100 Years, 100 Voices* (New York: Random House, 2000).
4. Perry, *May We Forever Stand*, 84.
5. Ryan Benk, "Rep. James Clyburn Proposes to Make 'Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing' The National Hymn," January 22, 2021, www.npr.org, https://www.npr.org/2021/01/22/959704849/rep-james-clyburn-proposes-to-make-lift-evry-voice-and-sing-the-national-hymn/.
6. Robert E. Webber, *Worship Is a Verb: Celebrating God's Mighty Deeds of Salvation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004).
7. Perry, *May We Forever Stand*, 37.
8. John Witvliet, "Soul Food for the People of God," in *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 231.

Stretching Out: Hymn Interpretation in the Black Church

Carlton David Johnson

By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there we hung up our harps.
For there our captors asked us for songs,
and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
How could we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?

—Psalm 137:1–4

We brought our gifts and mingled them with yours: a gift of story and song—soft, stirring melody in an ill-harmonized and unmelodious land. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood. Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation—we fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not Justice, Mercy, and Truth.

—W. E. B. DuBois, The Souls of Black Folk

I imagine that as they lay in wait, the Babylonians ridiculed and even demeaned the unique sound of the soon-to-be captive Israelites. They depreciated all that made the Israelites fully human; to do so was how they were able to treat them so savagely.

Later, as the captives labored and longed for the beauty and freedom of their motherland, they remembered their native melodies and conjured them to comfort themselves and the kin among them under the blazing Babylonian sun.

It is highly unlikely that the Babylonians truly appreciated the original and sacred songs from the Israelites' music canon. I imagine that the songs these slaveholders tauntingly requested were "Israelitized" Babylonian songs, hymns that these brilliant and beautiful people had rearranged applying their native melodies.

Perhaps both Babylonian and Euro-American slaveholders hoped by forcing the enslaved Israelites and Africans to sing often during daylight, and by listening in on their secret sacred gatherings, they could diminish the haunting they felt. These sorrow songs disrupted their slumber in the midnight hour. The need to dislodge the grip of these melodies was a desperate one. In *The Burden of Black Religion*, Curtis Evans shared one woman's particular experience:

> Although deeply offended by the worship practices of Blacks, she was surprised by her own reaction. She sensed an "invisible power" that seemed to hold her in its grasp as they were gathered in this church where they were nearly suffocating from the heat and wild excitement. "The excitement was working upon us and sent the blood surging in wild torrents to the brain, that reeled in darkened terror under the shock." A few moments more, she related, even she would have "shrieked in unison with the crowd."[1]

Understanding is attainable. The tunnel that leads to the light is a dark one; those who would dare follow the voice of God must relinquish their stronghold on the assumption that the path they once travelled was the only one. To truly see people and receive

Carlton David Johnson is a minister of the Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and coordinator for Vital Congregations for the Presbyterian Mission Agency in Louisville, Kentucky.

their expressions, one must learn to listen attentively to stories that do not match their own. One must be willing to hear old songs with reborn ears. When those who are prepared for proclamation are ready, the liberating sound of freedom rings clearer than any church bell.

I recall the eleventh toll of a church bell on a particular freezing January morning nearly a decade ago. That day I would preach for the first time as a pulpit supply. It would be the first time I would preach to a non-African American congregation.

As I approached the church doorstep, I reflected over my journey. In addition to a successful career in music ministry, I had attained over two decades of corporate leadership. A series of nagging biblical questions led me to seminary, to ordination as a Baptist minister, and then to candidacy for ordination in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). This day would be like my first corporate internship, I thought. More deeply I imagined how the many elements of my journey would come together that morning.

I was born and formed in the Black church, in a Baptist congregation. At the age of five, I sang my first solo. By high school, I was a choir director. Over the next forty-five years, I would be a leader in music ministry around the country.

The musicality of the Black church had been a constant in my life. Even in the Presbyterian church where I served at the time, an all-Black congregation, preaching began and ended musically. By definition, a good sermon opened and closed with some form of musicality. If you were not a skilled "closer," if you could not "whoop," you would do well to know how to sing a good hymn. I pondered how I would close that day.

Nervously, I peered down at the order of worship to be sure that the sermon text and title I submitted were correct. To my surprise, one of my favorite hymns, "A Charge to Keep I Have," leaped from the page. I texted friends in glee. My wife gripped my hand with equal giddiness.

In the church of my upbringing, "A Charge to Keep I Have" is not just any hymn, it is ***the*** hymn.

In the church of my upbringing, "A Charge to Keep I Have" is not just any hymn, it is *the* hymn. When led by a seasoned hymn leader, this hymn had (and still has) the unique ability to "dump the house." My father, the late Deacon David Johnson, had been such a hymn leader. Suddenly, my burdens were lifted. I felt the hand of my father and other ancestors on my shoulder.

I gathered a hymnal only to be formal. I knew this song in my heart. My father taught me how to call out the first line with power over forty years ago. Not a month went by before I would hear or lead this soul-stirring hymn. I know I was not scheduled to lead this hymn, but instinctively, I exhaled and filled my lungs to call out the first verse. The pianist played the introductory chords.

Wait . . . what???

The chords and rhythm were totally unfamiliar to the hymn as I knew it. In fact, hearing a piano or any instrument at all was unfamiliar to "A Charge to Keep I Have" as I knew it. It literally took my breath away. As the pianist continued to play, members of the congregation began to sing the tune from their hymnals. By the second verse, congregants were on their feet beaming with joy.

This was the same song that, for forty years, I had relied on for the strength to go on. This was the same lament that had brought tears for what had been lost in the fight for righteousness; wasn't it? I peered up and down from my hymnal; the lyrics were the exact same. What had happened?

That day will stay with me forever. The congregation had sung "A Charge to Keep I Have" *as it was originally written and composed* by Charles Wesley and Lowell Mason over 260 years ago. It was the first time I ever heard it sung in this way.

It was different, but I liked it. I was not accustomed to hearing the original scores played along with the hymns nor the voices accompanying the original scores in that way. I was familiar with hymn books. Our congregation had them. Yet they acted primarily as binders for the hymn's lyrics. Our musicians did not play the original scores, in most cases. It was definitely not a testimony to their capabilities. If anything, the limited number of hymns that were allowed instrumental accompaniment required committal to memory a unique canon of music that is not recorded anywhere.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois posited that Black music could not truly be notated or transcribed. The *soul* of the music cannot be measured or contained by the standard signs used to symbolize sounds. Its *essence*, a mixture of transcribed cultural memory, prevents it from being noted down accurately.

The lyrics themselves are like poetry. The meter of a hymn is the pattern of syllables and stresses. This is different from the meter of the music, signified by the time signature at the beginning of the staff. It is originally metered as 6.6.8.6, or "short metered." Other meter forms include the long and common meters. Yet I'd grown up hearing "A Charge to Keep I Have" in the under-documented "old meter" form.

Old metering a hymn slows the cadence significantly, almost to that of a dirge. Through swells and emphases of particular words, the lament, the sincere pleas for help, the pain and truth of the present-day drama and the ancestral saga of the Black experience in America can be heard. Desperate cries live in and between each word. Jubilant celebrations live between each line. Hope emerges from each verse. In *The Spirituals and the Blues*, Dr. James H. Cone called these songs

> the essence of black religion, that is, the experience of trying to be free in the midst of a powerful lot of tribulation. They are songs about black souls, stretching out into the outskirts of God's eternity and affirming that divine reality which lets you know that you are a human being. White folk thought the slaves were contented, waiting for the next world. But in reality they were "stretching out" on God's Word, affirming a new-found experience that could not be destroyed by the masters.[2]

The old meter version of these songs is uniquely soul stirring. When done well, the movement of the spirit is palpable. In *The Burden of Black Religion*, Gayraud S. Wilmore Jr. is quoted as describing soulfulness as a "rich artistic and emotional freedom that had its roots in the African heritage of communalism (though reformed and reshaped by the ghettos of America, he was careful to add)." This soul quality was "opposite to the style of life formed by the structured, unfeeling, scientific rationality of white Western civilization."[3]

The old meter form originated after the Great Awakening of the early eighteenth century. Thereafter, enslaved African people were "allowed" to participate in worship services. It is noteworthy that the invitation to join in worship had nothing to do with the welfare of the enslaved. Slave owners were taught by the church to imagine these enslaved people as "bodiless souls."[4] Though it was acceptable to treat them as chattel, it was a part of their Christian duty to make fit their souls for heaven.

Remarkably, there were some who would not believe that even the soul of an African could make it to the same heaven as that of a white person. Therefore, churches built in the nineteenth century were built with balconies. These balconies not only kept the enslaved Africans as far away from whites as possible, they provided reconciliation of the best possible destiny for the enslaved—time in "Nigger Heaven" on Sundays with their owners.

From these segregated spaces, and in hush harbors and other secret worship services, the art of hymn lining was born. Enslaved Africans were not allowed to learn to read. The rumor alone of an enslaved African having learned to read could be cause for unfathomable torture and often death. Hence, an identified leader would commit the words of a hymn to memory. When gathered, the leader, or "exhorter," would line out or chant the lyrics. Immediately after calling out a few words or a sentence of the hymn, the assembled congregation would sing the line responsively. The exhorter would then call out the next line. The cycle continued until the song's completion.

The beauty in hymn lining is that particularly seasoned and/or talented exhorters may add personal notes and testimonial phrases to the called-out lines. Their emphasis on a word or phrase is shared in melody by the responding congregation. In this melisma, both the exhorter and the congregation take liberties each time and in each place the hymn is sung.

For example, I was trained to line out "A Charge to Keep I Have" so that when the fourth verse is called out, the first phrase is repeated at least three times, each time adding an increasing excess of "bluesy grit":

> *O may it all,*
> *OOO may it all,*
> *OOOOOOO may it all my powers engage*
> *To DO my Master's will!*

Though an outward repetition, this plea is the most earnest expression of "deep calling unto deep." I have observed a distinct difference in how the Black congregations I worship with are impacted by this particular verse. Rather than gleefully responding to a bouncy cadence (as when sung in the traditional

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short meter), the Black congregations bond in lament. Though tears well in the eyes of many, the righteous determination in their sway expresses a collective focus, their powers engaged, to complete their journey of life in spite of oppression that is equally determined to kill them. I have witnessed an expression of determination in this verse that is not of rote. It is sincere sharing of the depth of the struggle to survive.

Though the hymn writers' lyrics do not suggest it, in traditional Black congregations, after the final verses, the congregation hums or "moans" one or two lines of the tune. My uncles all took this time to remind the congregation that "the devil don't understand you when you moan." It was a reminder that in the darkest days of African American history, our foreparents would often blend messages of escape into the moaning, because it confused the "enemy."

W. E. B. Du Bois observed in *The Souls of Black Folk* that the hymns of the Black church were the most original and beautiful expression of human life and longing yet born on American soil. Plaintive rhythmic melodies, with touching minor cadences, were adapted, changed, and intensified by the tragic soul-life of the enslaved until, under the stress of law and whip, they became the one true expression of a people's sorrow, despair, and hope.

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah," found in both the *Presbyterian Hymnal* (281) and *Glory to God* (65), is likewise traditionally translated differently in the churches of my community. First and foremost, the earnest plea that is the first line of the song, for guidance through this barren land, connects us musically and spiritually to the Exodus story. In *The Talking Book*, Allen Dwight Callahan notes,

> Possibly more than any other biblical narrative, Exodus was the biblical argument that God opposed the institution of slavery and that God would return a catastrophic judgement against America as was true for Egypt. In it, we find our own ongoing aspirations for liberation, freedom and equality.[5]

Whether errantly or purposefully, many exhorters change the word "pilgrim" to "children" when lining this hymn. Hence, the congregation responds in collective solicitation to God to do for us what was done for the children of Israel. The exhorter lines outs the second verse, sweetly admitting, "I am weak, Lord, but Thou art mighty." Responsively, the church community confesses the need for the strength and protection of their heavenly and all-powerful parent against heartless landlords, bosses, and judges. In so doing, they conjure God's unconquerability for the journey ahead with the awareness that God will hide and hold them in the hollowed cradle of "thou powerful hand."

When lining the words "Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more," it is normal for the exhorter to repeat the phrase "bread of heaven" several times. In the traditional singing of the hymn, this verse is a request for the Holy Spirit to descend. In the predominantly African American churches of my upbringing, the congregation connects with a real need for God to supply food and other resources.[6]

The Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, recorded one of the more popular versions of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" (*Glory to God*, 465, *Presbyterian Hymnal*, 403). Franklin's is a soulful rendition of the traditional country-folk score. Her gospel choir is accompanied by piano. When sung in mainline white church congregations that I have visited, the delightful hymn may also be accompanied by a magnificent pipe organ.

As stated earlier, lined hymns follow a limited number of tunes and rhythms. Where the previously discussed hymns are sung to a similar beat, the cadence used for the lined hymn version of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" is that of the chant of a work crew. Often shackled, or at least restricted across hundreds of yards and sometimes miles, these crews used a rhythmic 4/4 foot stomp, or hammer swing, to keep their collective timing. When reproduced in African American worship services, work crew foot tapping is replicated as the hymn is sung without musical accompaniment.

Between foot stomps, I've watched faces. The relief that seems to wash over each face is beautiful. Among the lyrics of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" is one of the few times we will hear of disenfranchised people speaking of their "privilege." The song reassures us of one privilege of which we can be sure. We have barrier-free and *equal* access to take all of our burdens, all of our needs, to God in prayer.

A beloved church member came to me after a service several years ago, cheeks still wet with tears. She explained that her tears were of joy and relief that she felt in hearing the third verse of her favorite hymn, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." On the eve of her son's murder "trials," she heard she should never be discouraged, because we can take it to the Lord in prayer. For a millisecond, I wanted to correct what "trials" meant in the hymn's lyrics. Instead, I chose to join her in hope.

The swelling crescendo of the first half of each verse of the old metered version of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" is a literal walk to the throne of grace to receive well deserved rest, reparations, and restoration.

The swelling crescendo of the first half of each verse of the old metered version of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" is a literal walk to the throne of grace to receive well deserved rest, reparations, and restoration. The gentle decrescendo of the second half allows the fearful grandmother to carry good news back down to her wayward granddaughter. It supplies the grief-stricken husband with good news to carry home to his wife who lies dying due to a system that would deny her proper healthcare. The congregation at large descends to share the message of hope with a community blanketed by nihilism.

Occasionally, a song as originally scored simply does not "do enough" lyrically or musically. One such song is "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" (*Glory to God*, 825). Originally composed by formerly enslaved Wallis Willis, the song connects freedom across the Jordan River (some say the Ohio River) to Elijah's flight to heaven in 2 Kings 2:11.

The version of the hymn that was popularized by the Fisk Jubilee singers and other traveling college choirs in the early twentieth century is not the way it was shared in the churches of my upbringing. Neither was it meant to be. These Black choirs chiefly sang for white audiences to raise money for their schools.

In traditional African American churches, the song was converted to "Low Down Chariot, Let Me Ride." The lyrics of the new song make a more impassioned plea for the lowering of God's transportation to heaven, to glory, to freedom. For the chorus, the single line, "Low down chariot (let me ride)" is repeated four times. With whatever liberty the song leader might take, the ensuing choruses include the singer's plea to see their mother or father again: "I want to see my mother (let me ride)." The final verse is always the ultimate request to be free at last, to be as one with the great liberator: "I want to see King Jesus (let me ride)."

During the week preceding Easter, I met with three Presbyterian pastor colleagues; the four of us were raised in traditional African American congregations. In passing, I shared the research and writing I was doing and did a quick survey of their "top three" favorite hymns. Within seconds, we listed over twenty songs that were performed differently in those congregations, an anthology all its own. Though I resigned myself to not being able to cover all of our conversation in this one disquisition, there are just a few more songs that I would be remiss not to share. After all, everyone named them in their top three.

When sung in traditional African American worship services, the tempo of "Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed" (*Presbyterian Hymnal*, 78) is doubled. In addition, the chorus from "At the Cross, At the Cross, Where I First Saw the Light" is added, resulting in a much more celebratory tune.

"What a Fellowship, What a Joy Divine" (*Glory to God*, 837) also features a quicker tempo. What is most impressive is how the hymn is repurposed in all of our congregations for "fellowshipping in" new members. Traditionally, this fellowship time is celebrated during the passing of the peace or just before benediction. (We debated briefly about whose congregation held "laaaaastiiiiing aararrrrrmmms" longest at the end of the song.)

"I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" (*Glory to God*, 775) is one of the most often rearranged hymns. Though this hymn seems to have originated with African Americans, the score in the hymnal is not how it is traditionally delivered. As fascinated as I

am by rhythmic variations, I must first make note of the changes in the lyrics when this hymn is sung in traditional Black churches. In addition to the request for Jesus to walk with me, we supplement a request for him to also "talk" with me. Following the biblical instruction for specificity in prayer, we continue with changes to the first phrase for *specifically when* we want Jesus to walk with us. "In my trouble, I want Jesus to walk with me" and "When I'm dying, I want Jesus to talk with me."

These changes often reflect the contexts of the congregations who are singing the hymns. Beyond a consistent desire for the daily, peaceful presence of Jesus, "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" was an earnest plea for protection during Civil Rights demonstrations and marches of the 1960s. This same request was sung by African Americans who were unjustly attacked while walking the streets of the Jim Crow South. And in other parts of the country. And still today.

Our country is experiencing a full-on ecology of grief. We are walking through the very valley of the shadow of death. We are opposed on one side by a wall of police brutality and injustice and on the other side by an unprecedented virus. The relentlessness of these pandemics will make the recovery of our economy and government even more difficult for our newly elected administration. In this time where connection with the highest power of all is being experienced in arenas beyond the pews of our Sunday morning gatherings, Lizz Wright renders a jazz version of "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" that all can appreciate. With deeply soulful and almost sultry grooves, Wright gives us a new song of lament for our deeply troubled times.

I will close by declaring that "I'm So Glad That Trouble Don't Last Always!" Those hope-filled words titled my mother's favorite hymn. I share most of the preceding notes with sweet recollections of my childhood, the songs of natal tradition, and the history of my people. There were many paragraphs I wrote, then closed my laptop and cried like a baby. But none of these great melodies were written to compare or suggest that either version is better than the other. Like the Scriptures themselves, song lyrics must be translated to minister to people according to their time and circumstance. My greatest dream is that someday, somehow, we will learn to appreciate each other and sing every song of every tradition at once in a cacophony that will please the ear and heart of the One who created us with variety in sounds, in gifts, and in beautiful human bodies.

Notes

1. Curtis J. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 71.
2. James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 29–30.
3. Evans, *The Burden of Black Religion*, 269.
4. Riggins R. Earl Jr., *Dark Symbols, Obscure Signs: God, Self and Community in the Slave Mind* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 5.
5. Dwight Allen Callahan, *The Talking Book* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 83.
6. In 2016, Pew Research found that the average household income of the top three predominantly Black denominations ranks lowest among all surveyed. Over 70 percent of these mostly single parent households struggle for "bread" from day to day with a gross annual income of less than $50,000. See David Masci, "Fact Tank: How Income Varies Among U.S. Religious Groups," Pew Research Center, October 11, 2016, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/11/how-income-varies-among-u-s-religious-groups/.

I Delight in You
Lisle Gwynn Garrity

In this moment [of Jesus' baptism], God-in-flesh joins alongside those he will heal, beckon, teach, challenge, and comfort. Simultaneously, God-in-Spirit meets Christ at the water's edge, at the threshold of his ministry. Before Jesus faces the pain, betrayal, and challenges of what will come, before he does anything to prove himself, God grants him unconditional belovedness as his essence. From this, all his subsequent teachings and actions flow.

The Work of Our Hands: Helping Each Other to See

Kelly Latimore

Kelly Latimore is an artist and iconographer whose work can be seen at kellylatimoreicons.com.

Mother of God: Protectress of the Oppressed

I started painting icons in 2011 while I was a member of a small monastic farming community called the Common Friars. Our collective work was about being more connected: to ourselves, each other, our surrounding community, and the land. This manifested itself as a place called the Good Earth Farm, where we held weekly services and meals and grew produce for our community and local food pantries. Paul, my friend and fellow farmer, often posed the question, "As we are doing this work, how do we become people who, in Jesus' words, 'consider the lilies of the field'?" This became the focus of my first attempt at an icon entitled ***Christ: Consider the Lilies.***

Christ: Consider the Lilies

It wasn't a great icon; my lines were shaky, and Jesus almost looks surprised that there are lilies in his hands. However, to my own surprise, my community embraced the image and placed the icon in our house chapel. They embraced the image because it was a part of our common experience and a symbol for how we wanted to look at the world together. That simple act has always been a reminder of how art can be a placeholder for our thought, prayer, and most importantly, our action in our communities of faith.

In the early 1950s a small church that sat on the banks of the Ohio River in Kentucky asked local artist and landscape painter Harlan Hubbard to paint a mural of the Jordan River above their baptismal. However, Harlan surprised them and instead painted their own Ohio River. I've often felt that Harlan was trying to tell that small congregation, "Are you looking for a holy river? The Ohio River is your holy river. Are you looking to be

Mama

La presentación de Cristo en el templo

Refugees: la sagrada familia

the closest you possibly can be to Jesus? Go walk around your neighborhood and you'll find him." Harlan was trying to help that congregation to see the sacredness in their own backyard.

The tradition of iconography within the art of the church is rich with beautiful images; I certainly want to take a deep dive into the tradition but also carry it into the present. What representations, metaphors, and symbols are among us here and now that can teach us about who we are, who our neighbors are, and who God is?

This question has been at the heart of the artwork I hope to create. The icons *Mother of God: Protectress of the Oppressed, La presentación de Cristo en el templo*, and *Refugees: la sagrada familia* were attempts to look at the sacredness in the many individuals and families at the U.S. southern border. The Scriptures make it clear that Mary, Joseph, and young Jesus became refugees when they had to flee from their home to escape Herod's killing of the holy innocents. Depicting the holy family as modern Latinx refugees fleeing their own home and crossing the desert at night is an image that we recognize in America. *Presentation* is a modern take on baby Jesus being presented to Anna and Simeon in the temple. *Mother of God: Protectress of the Oppressed* shows a mother and child behind a chain-link fence and covered with an emergency blanket like the many people who've been placed in cages at the border. The Holy Family is among us here and now within the images, stories, and experiences of these people.

In a regular day most of us are inundated with images through television, news, advertisements, and social media. Art in our communities can help focus our attention. When you pay attention to one thing, you resist paying attention to something else. With icons, the church is saying, "These are important images. This is what we are choosing to see."

It is this communal aspect of iconography that I love the most. When a community commissions an icon, I get to enter into the work of creating an image that it wants to put before itself. A saint who lived a life of love and compassion and fought against injustice inspires the community to do the same.

The icon *Mama* was created as a response to the tragic death of George Floyd. A grieving Mary holds the body of Jesus after the crucifixion. It's a familiar pietà image—except that both figures are Black, and Jesus resembles the late George Floyd, who called out for his mother under a police officer's knee. Many voices from my community of St. Louis went into the creation of the icon. It was a means of mourning but also a call to action. What was our community going to do to make sure this doesn't keep happening? In the first draft Mary was looking down at the Christ figure. However, my partner, Evie, suggested Mary's eyes fix on the viewer, as if asking, "What do you see? Who bears God's image?" When other members of our community saw the subtle change, they affirmed it was the right choice.

My hope is that these icons do what all art can potentially do, which is to create more dialogue. By transcending our biases, listening and having inner silence about our convictions, our inherited traditions, and our favorite ideas, we can become open to the patterns of work, knowledge, and experience we may not have seen in the other or buried in ourselves. The other may have something to teach us about the world we live in and who our neighbors are. This is the real work of being human and of art. Being more present. It is an ongoing journey of spirituality, craft, and considering lilies.

Passion, Pedagogy, and Power: Using the Arts to Teach and Proclaim Justice in Our Churches

Alonzo Johnson

After Trayvon Martin was murdered (which in this current time of the COVID-19 pandemic seems light years away), I was sitting in the auditorium of the centuries-old urban church I pastored with a group of fifteen to twenty predominately Black middle and high school students. A palpable mixture of grief, fear, and anger gripped the room. I remember the horror, the hurt, and the heaviness as we tried to make sense out of all that was happening. Even though the killing happened in Florida, for us it seemed as if it happened right around the corner from where we were in Philadelphia. The murder of a Black youth put us emotionally in closer proximity to the situation.

Jamilah, an incredibly bright and energetic middle schooler who was already antsy and frustrated with the brooding mix of energies, said, "Being Black, it is like our lives mean nothing in this country; it is like they think that we are all criminals!" When she said this, I felt the tension in the room grow, followed by an uncomfortable silence. Then with resilient enthusiasm Jamilah, almost replying to herself, said, "We are here, though! What are we going to do about it?"

It is important to point out that Jamilah and this incredible group of middle and high schoolers were part of our church's multidisciplinary creative arts ministry called Children of Thunder. Jamilah was one of our young and incredible dancers in the program, and her challenge made all of us, youth leaders and youth performers alike, begin to brainstorm about a creative way to make a statement against racist terror in our country. This brainstorming led to our design of a performance that would take on the issues of racism and violence as well as affirm the importance of education, faith, and family. The performance, called *So Glad I'm Here*, taken from the title of a song by *a capella* group Sweet Honey in the Rock, lifted up the blessing of our relationships with God, our families, our friends, and our community. It became a defiant expression of hope and resistance in the face of trauma and horror. We wrote, designed, practiced, choreographed; and when that was done, we invited all in our community to come to our sanctuary and our little church theater to explore the importance of what it means to do the work of loving and addressing the issues of systemic racism and its deleterious effects on young Black bodies. The performance helped make space for folks in attendance to have authentic conversations about race.

Unfortunately, nine years later, racist violence and terror of this type has not relented and has been a painful reminder of America's long history of racial violence. With these issues compounded by a pandemic, we still are left with trauma in the violent murders of eight people at a spa in Atlanta (six of Asian descent); young Daunte Wright in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota; thirteen-year-old Chicago teenager Adam Toledo shot in an alleyway in Chicago's Little Village, a predominately Latinx neighborhood on the city's west side; and Ma'Khia Bryant, a sixteen-year-old African American girl shot and killed by police in Columbus, Ohio—which ironically happened not too long after the guilty verdict passed down to former police officer Derek Chauvin, who for nine-and-a-half minutes in 2020 knelt on the neck of and killed George Floyd, a Black man who was suspected of passing a counterfeit twenty dollar bill in a local market.

Alonzo Johnson is coordinator for the Presbyterian Committee on the Self-Development of People of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

In these turbulent times, when the images of racist violence continue to flood all aspects of our media, I am reminded once again of the words of Jamilah, who prophetically and presciently challenges us by asking us, "What are we going to do about this?" To modify the question and challenge Jamilah raises, I ask, "What stokes our passion to act?"

Jamilah uses her creative God-given spirit to dance and uses her art to teach, foster dialogue, challenge assumptions, and engage those who are (and who are not) willing to acknowledge and address the harmful ways systemic racism destroys individuals and communities. Jamilah recognizes that bringing her art and passion together means that she has a voice. Of course, having said this, we must understand that the arts have always been a powerful medium in the struggle against racism, violence, war, oppression, and tyranny. I think particularly of examples such as Picasso's powerful antiwar work *Guernica*, the freedom songs that led and strengthened marchers in the Civil Rights movement, Mexican muralists, the photography of Diane Arbus, "banned" books like Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* or George Orwell's *1984*, the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and of course all of the social justice-related arts we see in our cities and globally—drawing, sculpture, painting, mural, film, literature, theater, spoken word, poetry, and dance. We see examples of this in artist Amy Sherald's painting of Breonna Taylor, a Black EMT worker slain at the hands of Louisville police, which made the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine, as well as George Floyd's painted image that made it on the Separation Wall on the northern end of Bethlehem in the West Bank. The arts can be utilized in ways that are powerful; they can influence, evoke, strengthen, and deeply move us in profound ways to both feel and to act. Art can also profoundly deepen our connection to our faith so that we may be able to better grasp justice as an aspect of passionate spirituality.

Passion and the Arts

Jesus had passion; this is evident in his desire that the people in his day would experience proleptic hope, salvation, unity, reconciliation, and justice—all within the kingdom of God. Jesus' divine love and desire for people to meet God, be changed, and be made whole in the process is at the very core of incarnation. In Jesus Christ we see a passion to love and transform that is so strong, so powerful that it inevitably leads to the way of the cross. When I think about the powerful intersection of passion and the arts, I think about the words of theologian Mark Lewis Taylor, who powerfully defines the way of the cross as a "mode of dramatic action that challenges the terrorizing, spectacular theatrics of imperial power."[1] In line with Taylor's thinking, I maintain that performing arts can stoke the passion, spirit, and energy of young people and adults in presenting a counter-message to the racism and xenophobia that divide us and dehumanize people of color.

Those who work with young people can probably attest that they are passionate about music. For many generations, teenagers have had entire cultural lifestyles built around music. Of course, for the Black, urban young people whom I have been blessed to work with, hip hop is theirs. The Black teens who began to show up in our church hallways and in worship consider hip hop music a way of life.

In recent years, it seems as that emphasis on music and performing arts has gained greater attention in the culture of mainstream media. Dance shows, social media platforms with artistic content, talent shows, contemporary theater (such as *Hamilton: An American Musical*), music videos, music streaming platforms, and dance-themed video games are indicative of the popularity and pervasiveness of the performing arts in mainstream culture. With this being the case, one of the most important things we can do in the church is to think about creative ways to make space for our young people and the musical culture that they bring with them, even when we are at odds about the content and delivery of the message. As I say this, I remind our readers that in 2018, hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar won the distinguished Pulitzer Prize in Music for his album titled *DAMN.*, which among many things indicates that hip hop is gaining recognition as a powerful musical and cultural art form in American society.

In the creative arts work I've done with young people in the church, much of this passion to make awareness and to change things was integral to our young people's use of the arts to address issues of racism. An important part of dismantling racism is being courageous enough to address it. As young artists, we found that the arts can be a powerfully effective tool in creating awareness in antiracism work—especially in worship. I hope the following example will illuminate this.

During one of our confirmation services that included baptism, we thought that it would be important for the church to understand both the deep theology of welcome and radical hospitality central to the sacrament of baptism in the Reformed tradition. In light of the cases of Aiyana Jones, Tamir Rice, and Rekia Boyd, we also wanted to challenge the messages of exclusion and dehumanization that were prevalent in the media about Black youth, specifically Black young women. We also wanted to be clear that baptism as a sign of God's welcome means that God delights in the lives of our Black youths and that these extrajudicial killings were an unjust affront to God. During the confirmation, just before the rite of baptism, three of our Black, young, women dancers performed an intricate dance lifting up baptism in the presence of the triune God. They began at the back of the sanctuary and moved flawlessly and breathlessly down its three aisles. Adorned in flowing, ethereal costumes of blue and white, the dancers moved gracefully in choreographed movements symbolizing the Trinity and the presence of God moving among us and around us. Importantly, the dancers danced around our confirmands, symbolizing that God recognizes our Black youths as beautifully and wonderfully made. Before I read about the "waters of justice" in the spoken liturgy and began to go into the symbolism of water in biblical history, the dancers' movements also symbolized both the life-giving waters of creation and the waters of justice and righteousness "that roll down . . . like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).

This powerful display of dance in liturgical play created some controversy that led to much-needed conversation about race and depictions of God in the church, but the piece was intended to communicate several other things as well. First, we wanted to create awareness that the Black youths attending, joining, and performing in the church's worship space (and others like them in the community) are not only welcomed by God, but are also preciously made in God's image. Second, we sought to communicate that God's presence is profoundly active in the church and around its young people. Third, we meant to show that baptism means we as a community of disciples are responsible for taking care of *all* of God's children. This type of liturgical play visually emphasizes the "bond of unity in Jesus Christ" where "barriers of race, status, and gender are overcome"—descriptions of the theology of baptism in the *Book of Order* (W-3.0402). It also functions as a powerful visual reminder that in baptism God calls us as a church to make space for our young people and to be advocates for justice on their behalf.

In her book *Dancing with God*, womanist theologian Karen Baker-Fletcher profoundly explains the power of dance and creativity and their ability to provide strength. Drawing from historical analysis and African ancestral practices, Baker-Fletcher is a critical voice here because she connects dance—the embodiment of spiritual expression—to identity, which is essential in a context where strife, division, nihilism, apathy, and lack of purpose are prevalent. She highlights important intersections of spirituality and creativity by using analogies of dance and movement to explain Trinitarian relationships. Her understanding that dance can also be a powerful pedagogical tool inspired us to shape the piece so that it became a catalyst for young people to be affirmed in seeing the *imago Dei* in themselves. The piece also enabled an interracial congregation still struggling with race to see the *imago Dei* in the Black children who inhabit the spaces within our church, whether it be in our creative arts youth group, our Scouts programs, or our before- and after-school program.

Baker-Fletcher's work inspired me to integrate kinetic creative art forms in teaching the gospel to both youths and adults. As she explains, "God's Word and utterance are not like human speech or writing, requiring mouth, tongue, teeth, hands, and fingers. The divine Word is a living power. It is a movement or action."[2] This is important in communicating that the church and the Spirit of God are not static. Simply put, the arts can be a powerful teaching tool in dismantling racism, especially in worship.

The Children of Thunder Project: The Arts as a Pedagogical Tool for Justice

As mentioned, our project took place around the time of both the killing of Trayvon Martin and the massacre at Sandy Hook. The project came into existence because of the pain and determination of the young people who were an integral part. These young people expressed fear and anger that racism in societal systems such as the media, schools, the courts, and in some cases the church have determined that their lives have no value. They understood this because it is an integral part of their existence and awareness. They understood

The young people in question were also concerned about what the church had to say about how the racism, criminalization, and adultification they experience made them feel nihilistic. These urban, Black young people were tired of racist stereotyping that labeled them both "dangerous" and "criminals" and sought the church in hopes that their voices could be heard and that they would be loved.

this from the dynamics of systemic racism that criminalizes and labels them, and a mass media that also commodifies, exploits, and profits from them.

The young people in question were also concerned about what the church had to say about how the racism, criminalization, and adultification they experience made them feel nihilistic. These urban, Black young people were tired of racist stereotyping that labeled them both "dangerous" and "criminals" and sought the church in hopes that their voices could be heard and that they would be loved. The church became the place where this group of young people developed a powerful voice of self-determination, antiracism, and justice and used their talent and their learning to spread a message of change and hope through the church and in the community.

The Children of Thunder Project consisted of African American youth ages eleven through seventeen and included a veritable mix of disciplines, including dance (West African, Latin, and hip hop), percussion, choral music, poetry, visual arts, and production. The project also included the exploration of Black spirituals, freedom songs, church hymns, and contemporary music. We also used current video and social media technologies to advertise, document, and study performances. Many of the performances were original, youth-generated, and addressed a range of topics salient to the lives and struggles of the young, Black urban performers. Performances grew out of biblical and theological themes, exploring theological and doctrinal issues of the Christian tradition such as communion, covenant, baptism, incarnation, salvation, and Trinity. Our young artists were taught to use their art to grow, teach, and preach the message of a gospel couched in liberation, hope, and unity for all people.

Performances followed the church's liturgical year; topical performances coinciding with Black History Month and Women's History Month coincided with the school year and the summer months. Every fifth Sunday (Youth Sunday in worship) the young artists participated in worship through liturgical reading, dance, and performance and were integrated regularly in other Sunday worship services. Our sacred spaces became our practice and performance venues—the church auditorium, classroom spaces, and the sanctuary. We also performed at other sites; presbytery worship events, schools, rallies, other churches (and their worship services), and community centers all created ample opportunities for our young people to use their talents and voices to influence people, make relationships, and spread their message of hope. With the help of our music director, the project was also multigenerational, incorporating adult instructors in music, visual art, and dance and educators from the church and the community to help with logistics, counseling, teaching, planning, mentoring, and production. This is where fictive-kin relationships, both multigenerational and interracial, were formed. There was also a faith formation dimension built into this project. Here, youth and adult participants met together for regular learning and dialogue sessions in a contemporary context about biblical, theological, and social issues through stories, themes, motifs, and the exploration of cultural styles. In other words, through the arts, the young people learned, learned, and learned again.

Buttressing this notion of art as a pedagogical tool for social justice, the work of Brazilian liberation artist and activist Augusto Boal was influential in helping frame how the performing arts can function as a viable delivery system for the messages of resistance, hope, meaning, and redress for Black young people speaking out against racism and oppression. Because these issues are often uneasy and difficult to address conversationally, theater provides a mask—a way to use symbol to help expose and tackle these difficult issues, especially those concerning race. Boal's work *Theater of the*

Oppressed was instrumental in helping construct the pedagogical and socio-political framework for the project design. His model of the creative uses of conflict and tragedy and how they are expressed in performance helped me better understand how these very real aspects of existence—especially those of nihilistic youth and pessimistic church adults—can be utilized as entry points for expression and creativity.

Informed by Boal's understanding of art as resistance, both the young people and church adults collaboratively learned more about art as a medium for conflict resolution, antiracism, reconciliation, relationship building, and justice. Utilizing the arts in this way helped bring uncomfortable issues of racism and xenophobia to the surface for all to see and hear. Boal's ideas about theater and its relationship to oppression helped me take into consideration the power of passion and its ability to help us think more about how to align the passion of youth with the passion of justice. Passion channeled in this way celebrates healing, meaning, hope, and the spirit.

Also important was our ability to align Christ's suffering with the suffering of Black bodies. From slavery to present-day politics, Black bodies have been politicized.

Also important was our ability to align Christ's suffering with the suffering of Black bodies. From slavery to present-day politics, Black bodies have been politicized. This politicization includes objectification, invisibility, demonization, dehumanization, and criminalization. In addressing these issues, Boal's ideas helped frame the use of artistic expression through our voices and bodies to seek what is right and "good" politically, and ultimately to celebrate artistic expression as an aspect of passionate spirituality and human freedom. Because we understand that Jesus had passion and used street theater to point individuals to God, the same can happen in our churches. Dance and movement can happen in worship and point individuals to the God of justice. Boal's understanding of passion reminds us that it is intimately connected with purpose—a key ingredient needed in the work of creativity and art. It is here that the project asked these questions: How do we use our bodies, our talents, our sanctuary, our worship, and the passion and spirit within all of these things to proclaim justice in our communities? How do our bodies and the creativity they produce change hearts and minds?

"We Are Here; What Are We Going to Do?"

Although I have described a particular way of using the arts among Black, urban young people, this kind of work is by no means limited to the model I provide here. I hope this article generates ideas about ways that you can utilize bodies and the arts to do some substantial work in justice. There are so many different possibilities for being creative. Maybe your church does not have a large group of young people, or have any young people at all. This does not limit the ways that we can be creative; there are other ways that our churches can utilize the arts to teach and proclaim justice in and outside our worship spaces. One of the first things we can do is asset mapping. This means that instead of operating out of scarcity, we can take an inventory to discover the artistic gifts among members of the congregation. How many of us are visual artists, quilt makers, performing artists, writers, woodworkers, poets, sculptors, and/or teachers of any of these disciplines? We can also explore how we can partner with artists in our congregations and communities to find new ways to teach advocacy and imagine creative worship practices that will call attention to systemic racism and injustice and encourage church members to dismantle racism. This also means that we must be serious and intentional in creating space for artists in our mission and in our budgets.

During a pandemic, when it is difficult for us to have the freedom to meet in person, we must also ask: What lessons can we learn from virtual worship? How do we encourage and support our musicians and artisans to use their arts to bring fullness, praise, hope, and beauty to our virtual services? Here we can also inquire about how we can be creative with both virtual and physical spaces and how they can be opened for utilizing the arts as ways of teaching, advocacy, antiracism, and racial healing. In saying this, I am reminded of these words in the *Book of Order*: "[Worship] is also countercultural—asserting the scandal of the gospel and anticipating God's

reign of righteousness, justice, and peace. Finally, faithful worship should be an intercultural event—fostering mutuality, dialogue, and equality among all people" (W-1.0304).

As part of my involvement in the Kentucky chapter of the Poor People's Campaign, I witnessed a powerful artistic display at a gathering for advocacy for economic rights at the state capitol building. Upon my arrival, I saw several enormous puppets, each ten to fifteen feet tall, all modeled after local Kentucky social justice icons. These puppets were breathtaking. They were colorful, lifelike, and tall enough to reach a second-floor window—and certainly to catch the attention of our lawmakers inside the building, reminding them that people outside were depending on them to make decisions on legislation based on justice and equity to benefit the poor. These larger-than-life-sized puppets were lifted up and given life by the puppeteer to be risen above us all, so that we too could be reminded of those who fought for justice and fairness before us. One of the puppets was a likeness of the incredible, late civil rights leader Anne Braden.[3] Using puppets is an effective, creative, and powerful way to draw attention to the issues of justice. One of my mentors has also made and used puppets to teach justice, antiracism, and advocacy to school-age children. As a child of Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, I often reflect how these puppet-based creative programs shaped me and my understanding of civility, community, hospitality, and empathy. I truly believe those programs helped form in me an early sense of advocacy.

I harken back to our young prophet Jamilah and continue to echo her challenge to us: "We are here; what are we going to do?" Our churches can become places where passion and the arts meet, where we use our talents and bodies to proclaim justice in our worship, and use the spaces in our churches to lift up racial and social justice. How does (or can) our passion for justice, peace, and healing speak through our artistic expressions in worship and in other areas of the church's life and ministry?

Notes

1. Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 109.
2. Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 959–960, Kindle.
3. If you are not familiar with her story, you can learn about it at http://louisville.edu/braden/about/who-was-anne-braden.

Relent
Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Relenting is not a passive act; it is the surrender we come to when we bear all our pain—openly, honestly, angrily—before the One who can take it all.

Dismantling Racism in Worship and Preaching through Exorcizing White Supremacy?

Lis Valle

How can we dismantle racism in worship and preaching? The matter is extremely complicated because culture, race, and ethnicity are intertwined with the origins, historical developments, and practices of reformed, and more specifically, presbyterian worship and preaching.[1] If christian, reformed, presbyterian, and ecumenical worship and preaching were a building, the foundation of the building would be european culture. From the time when reformed churches were born in europe, centuries of repeating gestures have passed, making us believe that preaching is to stand behind a pulpit and talk to a congregation.[2] That is one way to interpret our received tradition. Another interpretation of the received tradition is that there are many ways of preaching and that the most common one practiced in the united states of america and around the world, thanks to colonial expansions, is to stand behind a pulpit and talk to a congregation.[3]

As a fourth-generation presbyterian and an ordained minister (teaching elder) in the presbyterian church (u.s.a.) who grew up in puerto rico, I have received more than one tradition. One of them is the practice of using dramatic arts as a valid way to preach. I have seen ministers preach in such way in many churches in puerto rico, in many different denominations, and in nondenominational congregations. However, when I moved to the continental united states of america, many siblings from church, seminary, and academy have found my practice to be "creative." I could explain why I disagree with that statement, and why some of us think that theater, music, poetry, comedy, and oratory are all equally valid forms of preaching. I could try to explain why I think that imposing greco-roman oratory as the only valid way of preaching on bodies that are not white is racist. I could say in different ways the same things that we know about how we are not racists and how we are actively fighting against racism in worship and preaching, using our words and exhorting listeners to not be racist. I could try to explain the difference between cultivating nonracist individuals and actively dismantling racist systems. I could explain why combining burlesque dance with symbolic action (a practice that I now call burlesque-esque) is expanding one of my received traditions and why I think that it indeed shows continuity with the ways in which some prophets, such as Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel, preached through their bodies as God commanded them. Engaging such questions, however, would be for me to take on a responsibility that is not mine, to answer questions that emerge from a dominant narrative rather than from a minoritized existence.[4] Instead, I want to privilege my lived experience as a minoritized person born and raised in one of the few still colonized countries in the world and living in the diaspora, in the belly of the empire that has my country captive, and witnessing to racist narratives and practices at once similar and different than my own. In what follows, I share what my body taught me about white supremacy when I used burlesque-esque to attempt "An Exorcism of White Supremacy."

A Failed Attempt to Exorcise White Supremacy from Preaching

I created the burlesque-esque piece "An Exorcism of White Supremacy" with the intention of symbolically removing white supremacy from myself. I wanted to exorcise myself from white preaching but I failed.

Lis Valle is assistant professor of homiletics at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois.

The burlesque-esque was originally designed to be presented in a Sunday school classroom, live and in front of a small audience. It featured a woman removing a white coat, whipping it, wrapping it, placing it at the foot of a cross, and then putting on a neck covering made out of hand shapes of many skin-color shades.[5] When the woman removed the white coat, a bodysuit in the color of her flesh was revealed. The bodysuit had silhouettes of brown hands covering her genitals and her buttocks. Covering one of her breasts was a black-eyed Susan and covering the other breast was a brown Taíno sun.

The main inspiration for the piece came from Ched Myers's book *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*.[6] Applying his method to interpret Mark 3:23–27, "An Exorcism of White Supremacy" has the strong man bound in order to plunder his house. The white coat represents white supremacy as the strong man covering the woman's body. The woman wants to get rid of it. She takes it off, she binds it, and she punishes it. Then, she gives it to the cross. Out of a treasure chest she pulls new garments to clothe herself, a neck covering that she then wears as a collar, and a strip of colorful fabric that she puts over her shoulders. She shares strips of fabric with the audience and she dances with the giant scissors that cut the chains that were binding her ankles at the beginning of the performance.

While authorial intent was to exorcize white supremacy, this author discovered some truths about white supremacy that she did not intend. These truths became evident through performing the burlesque-esque and paying close attention to her body during the repeated performance of the piece. The preacher-actress experienced in her body the exhaustion that comes from the repetition, the inadequacy of whipping white supremacy, the need for community to liberate oneself from white supremacy, and the lasting presence of white supremacy.

The preacher-actress felt exhausted after the very first performance of "An Exorcism of White Supremacy." Acting and dancing are activities that per se require intense bodily engagement that can be exhausting. In addition, when the actress was whipping the bound coat, the words of a song in spanish that was playing in the background were telling the story of Taínos and west africans who suffered bodily the burden of the spanish conquest of the americas. Their bodies carried the weight of iron shackles in prisons for enslaved persons, their skins were marked with burning hot iron to identify them as property, and whips opened their backs.[7] The physical effort of the bodily movement in conjunction with the painful memory of great-grandparents (spanish conquistadores) abusing the other great-grandparents (Taínos and persons brought from west african countries to be enslaved) is a burdensome combination that the performance made evident. It is a burden that is always there, in our memories, causing emotional distress for the generational trauma.[8] These stories shaped us and haunt us.[9] We repeat these stories whether we are conscious of it or not. We repeat the same stories with different actors when political and economic systems built by and for euro-americans operate smoothly thanks to the stolen or underpaid labor of people of color.[10]

One performance was enough to feel tired, but repeating the performance every fifteen minutes over a two-hour period incremented exhaustion significantly. Eventually, the body starts shaking, the muscles feel pins and needles that are not there, and eventually one wonders if the body parts are even there. The pain is unbearable and the brain seems to ignore that body part. To exorcise, or even contain white supremacy is exhausting work that we have to do over and over again. Similarly, black, indigenous, and other people of color in this country face racist language and discrimination on a daily basis and have to decide every day, some days several times, if they will ignore it or confront it.[11] It is a daily practice of remembering one's own dignity and deciding if putting effort into stopping the machinery of white supremacy is worth it or even possible at this very moment.

Exorcising white supremacy cannot be done by only inverting the abusive relationship either. The task of whipping the white coat promoted exhaustion on the one doing the whipping (in this case, the preacher-actress), and it did not get rid of the thing that was being whipped (in this case, the white coat representing white supremacy). The means were inadequate for the goal. When reading in Myers's book about binding the strong man as a metaphor for exorcising political powers, and then designing the burlesque-esque piece, the proposal seemed very reasonable and adequate, even effective. Enacting the proposal, however, proved that the preacher-actress used the wrong method for the right goal, which resulted in the impossibility of expulsing the evil spirit.[12] She contained it. She

gave it to the Divine Power. Nonetheless, she could not get rid of it.

Exorcising white supremacy cannot be done individually. The preacher-actress was handcuffed at the beginning of the presentation. When she removed the white stockings that were covering her legs, she found the key to open her handcuffs, but she could not use it to free herself. She had to give the key to someone else so that person would open the handcuffs and she could be free. Furthermore, whipping white supremacy did not make it disappear. The preacher-actress then opted to take the bundle that the coat had become, representing the strong man of white supremacy now tied up, and place it at the foot of a cross. Perhaps divine intervention would accomplish the exorcism that human effort could not, the action of placing the bound coat at the foot of the cross being an act of trust that liberated the preacher-actress to engage in other activities.

Free to do other things, the preacher-actress chose to look for other garments that were inside a treasure chest. She found a covering that featured ivory, brown, and golden yellow hands for the back of her neck. These hands stood in for the white hands of spanish, the black hands of west africans, and the Taíno hands that the song in the background was now praising because all of them worked to build a country. The neck covering served as a symbol of these three races coming together and offering their labor. The preacher-actress also found strips of fabric that she used as liturgical stoles. She placed one on herself and one on one person from the audience. She distributed the rest of the stoles and with only gestures invited people to keep ordaining one another for the work of liberation, and people did so.

The intended message of the need for community was heightened by performance. To think about these symbolic objects and actions is one thing, to experience it in your body is another altogether. You feel the power of those handcuffs. You get anxious and sometimes desperate when the person using the key is taking too long to get you out of the handcuffs or does not seem to make the key work. You worry that the act of receiving help for your own liberation will take all the space and time available and you will not be able to communicate anything else. You wonder if the person receiving the strip of fabric knows the actual weight of the commitment. You know or hope that the audience understands that we all have the key to exorcising white supremacy. Yet, you wonder if they get the fact that it takes more than a collection of nonracist individuals. It takes a team of interwoven, interrelated people who coordinate efforts to get rid of white supremacy at its very foundation. Furthermore, you realize that putting all those hands side by side of equal size and at the same level is not the truth of what happened. The burden of the labor that built the country was not and is still not equal. The proposal of embracing all races as valuable and equal falls short from doing the work, from accomplishing the goal. The work needs to be done in community, and the preacher-actress does not really know how.

The attempt to exorcise white supremacy failed. The lasting presence of white supremacy was evident in the space when the performance ended. While her body was back to being beige and brown, the communion table that served as her bed when the piece started was still covered in white, and the white coat was still there, under the cross. She failed to exorcise white supremacy. She attempted expulsion of the evil spirit that white supremacy is, but it was still around, it was still part of her, and it was still covering the table.

A Postmortem Reflection: What Would It Take for the Piece to Succeed?

What my body taught me about white supremacy through the failures of "An Exorcism of White Supremacy" holds wisdom beneficial for dismantling racism in worship and preaching. The exhaustion that comes from the repetition of enactments of anger and daily survival invites co-creation of affirming spaces. The inadequacy of whipping white supremacy emphasizes the need for affirming spaces and invites us to embrace uncertainty. The need for community to liberate oneself from white supremacy invites risky community building. The lasting presence of white supremacy invites us to find new ways for all of us to deal with white supremacy.

If repetition of survival and retributive actions causes exhaustion from the one in need of liberation, we need to create in worship and preaching a world that is intentionally built for many races and not built for euro-descendants with the expectation that everyone else will find their way around. In worship and preaching, privileging european or euro-american race, ethnicity, and culture is the creation of a world that is exhausting for blacks, indigenous, and other

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people of color. No wonder african americans had to found their own churches where they could privilege their own race, ethnicity, and culture![13] Worship and preaching may create a world for all of us where black, indigenous, and other people of color will not have to work so hard for their own liberation every single worship service and sermon. We already have good proposals on how to help parishioners who are here in worship imagine equality out there in the world.[14] What the failure of "An Exorcism of White Supremacy" contributes to expand our thinking is that worship and preaching in themselves need to be spaces where blacks, indigenous, and other people of color may be themselves and not the diversity of white folks.[15] The failure of the performance invites us to co-create, rather than talk about, foundations and structures for christian worship and preaching, a space where every people and nation are welcome with their cultures and ethnicities, without being an addition to european and euro-american cultures, ethnicities, and racial paradigms. Such a space would enflesh the value of co-creation of affirming spaces.

The challenge of creating a world in worship and preaching that does not burden black, indigenous, and other people of color is twofold. First, it requires for us to stop imposing a single way of worshiping and preaching because such imposition constitutes forced cultural assimilation. This is hard work because we have come to believe that the dominant way of worshiping and preaching is the right way; we have conflated one particular manner with the definition, and in so doing we have made it sacred. The conflation of christianity and european culture is so strong since the protestant reformation that we can feel sacrilegious in re-membering middle-eastern and african ways or in admitting new ways of worship and preaching.[16] Some congregations have embraced multicultural ways of worship and may feel they have overcome the first challenge by creating inclusive worship and preaching. Nonetheless, there is a risk that these multicultural approaches are bypassing the need to address racial injustice, adding the "other" cultures as diversity to the white dominant narrative, and/or exoticizing people from "other" races.[17] This is precisely the second challenge: creating an antiracist world in worship and preaching requires us to abstain from orientalizing, from exoticizing the practices of other groups that we racialize through our gaze.[18]

If binding and whipping white supremacy proved to be insufficient tools to exorcise white supremacy out of the preacher-actress, then we need to develop other, perhaps new strategies. In celebrating and embracing reversal we may end up repeating old inadequate behaviors.[19] Here, I propose embracing uncertainty together. Some assumptions of dominant narratives include that only the experts can critically analyze worship and preaching, and that once the expert finds a problem, the expert will also offer the solution. Embracing uncertainty opens space for the community to figure out many solutions together. Trial and error, conversation, and rehearsal of possibilities may all be appropriate processes through which the whole community may come together to examine how our current worship and preaching practices bind and whip parishioners during worship and preaching. After self-examination, the whole community may also find solutions, not as a collection of individuals but as a team, as a system of interrelated systems, all as one body, united for a purpose, accepting multiple explanations, multiple strategies, and multiple solutions. Embracing uncertainty can be scary because we like certainty. Certainty gives us a sense of control, security, and stability. Certainty makes us feel safe.

If exorcising white supremacy cannot be accomplished alone, we need community to effectuate it. That we need community to liberate ourselves from white supremacy may be well-known to minoritized groups that hold on to one another to survive. By contrast, dominant narratives proclaim and encourage individualism, and most of us subscribe to it. The failure of "An Exorcism

of White Supremacy" points to a need to build community in scary ways. It points towards trusting strangers. It requires risk. It also implies staying in the discomfort that may arise from trying to trust strangers or from watching them do things differently. In addition, the embodied knowledge that erupted from the performance of "An Exorcism of White Supremacy" points to *doing* rather than *telling*. One may need to give up trying to understand or to be understood. Instead, we lean into trusting that the *doing* will be efficacious according to Divine action, not according to human mastery.

If exorcising white supremacy fails because whiteness remains even after binding and whipping, then the white presence in the room needs to be different.

If exorcising white supremacy fails because whiteness remains even after binding and whipping, then the white presence in the room needs to be different. The lasting presence of white fabric in the space of the performance may be construed as an invitation for white parishioners to take less space in the presence of people of color when worshiping together. The performance accomplished binding, showing that it is doable to take less space rather than covering everything. The performance accomplished what was possible given the chosen strategy of tying up. In order to exorcise, to really accomplish expulsion or departure of the evil spirit of the strong man, a different strategy is needed. Burning the coat comes to mind, but that would be turning upside down the violence just as whipping the coat was doing. Taking all white fabrics outside of the space of the performance would do it, but where would it go? Are we just sending our problems away to affect others and pretend that it does not exist anymore when in reality it just moved out of our sight and into another place?

Conclusion

I have explained that while I attempted to exorcise white preaching from myself, my body revealed to me some bold and difficult-to-accept truths about white supremacy. I learned from my body that to exorcise white supremacy is to accept a task that will be exhausting, that making white supremacy smaller is possible, that raging against white supremacy might be counter-productive, and that to really get rid of white supremacy, a different strategy, still unknown to me, is needed. I also learned that the exorcism of white supremacy can only be accomplished in community, and that even if we succeed in getting rid of it, it may show up in other spaces. Based on what my embodied knowledge showed me, I proposed some values that could guide us in dismantling racism in worship and preaching, namely, co-creation of affirming spaces, uncertainty, risky community building, and finding new ways.

I hope these values may help us dismantle racism in worship and preaching. By now it should be clear that for me to be prescriptive as to what ought to happen in worship or preaching would constitute, from my point of view, an imitation of inadequate behavior, namely, an exercise in persuasion with the goal of imposition of my way as better than the others. What works in one church or one denomination or one place does not necessarily work in another church or denomination or place. Therefore, I invite you to come up with new models.

As a person, I would like to be able to worship and preach as I know best and enact my own authenticity, my own culture, and my own mixed races. As a member and minister of a christian, reformed, presbyterian, and ecumenical denomination, I invite my euro-american siblings to stop trying to understand what I communicate and do, to both abstain from forcing or expecting me to do it your way, and to allow me to do it your way or any other way. If you cannot understand, then trust that the same Divine Power that reveals to you in worship through abstract reason also reveals to you in worship through my emotional and fleshly performance. Together we can also trust that the Divine is revealed through all sorts of communications and places, not only through oratory from the pulpit. One last thing, please indulge me in stating a "crazy" idea. What if we abolish our own institution? It is too white. What if we dismantle our churches and all our members disperse joining the churches of black, indigenous, and other people of color constituting numerical minorities in said churches and practicing week in and week out the discomfort of learning in silence other ways of worship and preaching? Perhaps in a few centuries our great-grandchildren will stop being racist.

Notes

1. I do not capitalize the words christian, reformed, presbyterian, european, etc. to do what I will later propose—let dominant narratives take less space. While retaining upper case for terms that refer to those with less power such as Black, Puerto Rico, Spanish, Indigenous, and others is a very attractive and tempting option for a reversal, which is what we may need right now, I keep these words in lower case to rehearse another possible future. This possible future acknowledges the unjust systems that we have now and the value of reversal, as well as the risk for the colonized turning into colonizers and behaving in similar oppressive ways once we get to the top, as Franz Fannon and Paulo Freire have warned us in their work. This possible future demonstrates an idyllic state in which no group will be better than others, and all groups decide to exercise power with rather than power over. Rehearsal is needed for this possible future to become a reality.
2. For the history of reformed worship see for example, Lukas Vischer, ed., *Christian Worship in Reformed Churches Past and Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003).
3. See my article "Performing Cultural Memory Through Preaching," *Liturgy: Journal of the Liturgical Conference*, 35:3, 3–9; DOI: 10.1080/0458063X.2020.1796434.
4. About how oppressors call on their oppressed to educate them as a strategy to keep the oppressed occupied with the concerns of the oppressor that diverts the energies of the oppressed, see Audre Lorde, "The Master Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches,* The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 113.
5. For a more recent version of the piece, adapted for video, see "Un exorcismo de la supremacía blanca," January 31, 2021, accessed May 3, 2021, https://youtu.be/cFUx8FZyQHk.
6. Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).
7. Juan Antonio Corretjer and Roy Brown, "Oubao-Moin," track 12 on *Colección*, Discos Lara-Yarí, 1996, CD.
8. For an example of racialized trauma as generational trauma see Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press, 2017). For a different perspective on how traumatic memory is transferred from one generation to another see Diana Taylor, "Staging Traumatic Memory: Yuyachkani," in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 190–211.
9. I got this idea from reading Diana Taylor's adoption of Jacques Derrida's notion of hauntology and her development of the concepts "hauntology of performance" and "scenario." Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
10. Ta-Nehisi Coates argued, "Virtually every institution with some degree of history in America, be it public, be it private, has a history of extracting wealth and resources out of the African-American community." See "Ta-Nehisi Coates Revisits the Case for Reparations," *The New Yorker*, June 10, 2019, https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-new-yorker-interview/ta-nehisi-coates-revisits-the-case-for-reparations?utm_source=pocket-newtab (accessed June 13, 2019). A similar argument can be made about Latin American immigrants and other minoritized groups.
11. I am grateful for my friend Rev. Ruth-Aimee Belonni-Rosario Govens, who explained to me this fact of life clearer than any book I have ever read.
12. We need rehearsal. Rehearsing solutions as a way to test their effectiveness is one of the results that theater forum, one of the modalities of Theater of the Oppressed, offers. See in general, Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1985); and Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, trans. Adrian Jackson, 2nd ed (New York; London: Routledge, 2002).
13. For the history of african american churches in the united states of america, see for example, Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007).
14. See for example, Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Christian Preaching and Worship in Multicultural Contexts: A Practical Theological Approach* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017) and Kathy Black, *Culturally-Conscious Worship* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000).
15. The words of Carmen M. Nanko-Fernández come to mind, "We are not your diversity." Nanko-Fernández is professor of Hispanic Theology and Ministry at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois, and author of *Theologizing en Espanglish: Context, Community, and Ministry* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).
16. The origins and historical developments of christian tradition prior to the reformation include the middle east and africa. James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship*, Kindle edition (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008).
17. On how interracial worship does not address power imbalances, see Korie L. Edwards, *The Elusive*

Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Also, in *Christian Preaching and Worship in Multicultural Contexts*, Eunjoo M. Kim discusses five models of multicultural worship and analyzes which models lift up diverse cultures or erase them, which contribute to segregation or privilege the european american liturgical tradition.

18. See in general, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).
19. Franz Fannon, Paulo Freire, and Audre Lorde all warn of the possibility of the oppressed becoming, or at least behaving in the same ways of their oppressors.

Peace Without Your Walls
Lauren Wright Pittman

If true shalom were to be realized, there would be no need for walls or towers. Peace looks like open arms—open to the difficult work of welcoming peace, and open to receiving the boundless gifts of a truly peaceful world.

Spiritual Practices for Antiracism[1]

Carolyn B. Helsel

As we engage long-term in the process of working against racism, several spiritual practices can help us as clergy, church musicians, spiritual leaders, and lay people to support our work and to give us endurance for the long road ahead. These practices root us in our faith and remind us that our effort to bring others along is itself a work of faith, a form of evangelism. To nourish our faith in this process, the following spiritual practices can support us either as individuals working in our communities or as churches ministering to our congregants: engaging in compassionate conversations with others, tending to cries for justice through bearing witness, strengthening community through hospitality and dialogue, incorporating antiracism in our regular practices of worship and preaching, and allowing secular calendars to provide educational cues for learning the history of injustice.

Compassionate Conversations

Dr. David Campt is known as "The Dialogue Guy." That's the name of the company he founded to help businesses engage in difficult conversations. I met him at the 2018 White Privilege Conference where he was sharing his latest book, *The White Ally Toolkit Workbook*.[2] What I appreciated about his book was its simple acronym for naming the kinds of conversations white people need to be having with other white people: RACE. The RACE model stands for Reflect, Ask, Connect, and Expand. I have started to share this model with groups I speak to as a tool for helping them engage others in conversations about racism.

Dr. Campt is Black, and he talks about why he writes to white people: white people continue to have more access to other white people than Black people. It is much more likely for white people to have a group of friends that is predominantly white than it is for a Black person to have a mostly white group of friends. In an online video in which he talks about the RACE method, Dr. Campt explains that studies have shown that many white people view racism against whites as more of a problem than racism against Black people.[3] The study, conducted in 2017 by NPR, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, found that 55 percent of white Americans believe that discrimination against *white* people is a significant problem today. Campt wants to shift that figure, so that 55 percent of white Americans become more concerned with racial discrimination against persons of color than they are against white people. In order for that shift to occur, he says, white people need to have conversations with other white people.

But what kind of conversations, exactly? Campt distinguishes between what he calls the *prophetic voice* and *dialogic engagement*. Campt says many antiracist activists rely on the prophetic voice, which is characterized by confronting people directly with the hard truths of racism and how it hurts people of color. However, being prophetic can often backfire in conversations about racism, in which the white person at the receiving end of the conversation feels resentful and turned off by the approach. The goal of changing minds means that one-on-one conversations have to happen over time, and that the white ally who is convinced racism is a problem needs to take a different approach. Campt argues that this approach needs to be compassionate and empathic.

Compassionate conversations require the white ally to grant dignity to the white racism skeptic

Carolyn B. Helsel is associate professor in the Blair Monie Distinguished Chair of Homiletics at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Austin, Texas.

(the name he gives to people who doubt racism remains a significant problem for people of color). Campt draws from the work of Harvard scholar Donna Hicks, who writes about the definition of dignity with ten essentials: acceptance of identity, recognition, acknowledgement, inclusion, safety, fairness, independence, understanding, benefit of the doubt, accountability.[4] Extending dignity to the other person means they will be more receptive to whatever it is you have to share.

What exactly do you share with a racism skeptic? That begins with the first letter of Campt's RACE approach: *Reflect*. Before you talk with a racism skeptic, it is important for the white ally to reflect on their own story of transformation. How did I become aware of racism? When have I noticed that I harbor unconscious bias? Can I think of a time when that bias came to my attention?

Reflecting on your own story of coming to notice racism in your own life is a spiritual practice. It requires examining your life, acknowledging that you are not perfect, and being sensitive to your inner thoughts. It requires a degree of awareness to notice the moments when your instinct is to lock your car doors when you see a Black person go by or to put your hand on your wallet when a Black person gets on the elevator with you. Noticing these experiences may be painful, because they run counter to our image of ourselves as allies, or as people who are against racism. But reflecting on our own experiences of harboring racism is an important first step before we engage with a racism skeptic.

The next step in Campt's RACE model is *Ask*. When someone makes a comment that indicates their doubt that racism is a problem, you can ask them questions to try and understand why they believe the way they do. Try to get them to share a story or an experience that informs their beliefs on the topic.

Campt suggests that white allies move towards connection before challenge. The challenge is what flows from the connection.

The third step is *Connect*, in which you connect with their story through the prior reflection you have already engaged on your own. Campt suggests using "I half-agree with you" statements, or ways of indicating that at one point you may have had similar beliefs or assumptions. Campt suggests that white allies move towards connection before challenge. The challenge is what flows from the connection.

After connecting, the final step is *Expand*, which means you share the story of how you once held those same beliefs and how your opinion changed. This expansion happens through your ability to connect and identify with the other person, and then to share your own personal experience of realizing that racism was still a significant problem. Noticing what in your own life helped you to recognize racism helps you to then testify to your experience of learning with a racism skeptic.

I use the word "testify" intentionally. Sharing with someone else our personal story of realizing we were guilty of racism is a spiritual experience. We are testifying to the fact that we ourselves are guilty and still in need of grace. It means we are not on a soapbox telling other people how to live their lives because we are perfect. Instead, we are trying to become antiracist people all the time. Testifying to our mistakes enables us to stay humble.

At the same time, this kind of testimony is best used in a compassionate conversation with a racism skeptic, and not with a person of color. When white people confess how they have been racist to people of color, there is often the unspoken assumption that the person of color will be expected to absolve the white persons of their guilt. The person of color does not need you to tell them how you have been racist in the past; they just need you to talk to your white friends to try and keep them from acting on their racism.

Bearing Witness: Tending to the Cries of the Oppressed

Another spiritual practice important to continuing the work of disarming racism is the practice of *bearing witness*. The phrase "bearing witness" comes from the New Testament, when Jesus instructs his disciples to go and be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. Compassion and bearing witness are as old as the commandments of Jesus.

To bear witness means several things. First, it means *you are aware of the experiences of others*, and you have relationships close enough to witness the things that people of color experience that whites do not. To witness something, you must be there; and to be there, you have to be around people who are experiencing it. This means you need to consciously and intentionally cultivate

relationships with people different from yourself. If you live in a predominantly white neighborhood, it means intentionally making friends with the people near you who do not look like everyone else. Get to know someone from a different country or background. Spend time with the families who have biracial children or transracial adoptees. Listen and learn from their experiences.

So, bearing witness requires *proximity*, being close enough to people who have experiences that are different from your own because of the color of their skin. This does *not* mean go and tell someone, "You can be my Black friend!" However, it does mean opening your eyes to the people of color you already come across in your life and finding ways to build relationships with them. Work with intentionality to build relationships with people who are different, but not simply because they are Black, or Asian American, or Latina/Latino, but because you share other areas of common ground: concern for one's family and health, concerns about the environment or politics, ways of connecting around church or faith. Find ways to seek out our common humanity with others, while also being open to learning about others' experiences that are different from your own due to your being racialized differently.

The second thing bearing witness means is *you are bearing something*. When you learn about people's experiences involving racism or xenophobia, you are bearing their experiences with them. This doesn't mean you know exactly what they felt like when the episodes happened, but it means in that moment you are recognizing the pain the experiences caused them, and you are not dismissing the hurt and damage the experiences caused. To bear witness means to sincerely bear what a person is telling you, not to suggest how their experiences could be reinterpreted. You are receiving their truth as it is being told. You are honoring their sharing of these experiences with you.

Bearing also means you are feeling the impact on *you*. Pay attention to what feelings are being brought up in you. Intentionally bearing something means that we will feel its weight, and that can make us feel difficult feelings of our own. But to bear what has been shared, without becoming defensive or taking it personally, is to honor a moment of vulnerability and sharing.

Third, bearing witness means that *you do not keep these incidents to yourself*. When you see a Black friend being pulled over by the police for no apparent reason, you serve as a real witness to this event, and you protest the action you see as unjust. You witness by telling others that racism is still a problem we need to be addressing across our society. You witness by trying to make a difference in your sphere of influence. Witness the experiences of others and share what you have witnessed with other groups of white people to affirm that racism is real, and that by ignoring it we contribute to it.

What exactly are we bearing witness to, besides painful experiences of discrimination against people of color? We witness that society has changed and yet still needs to transform. We witness the grace and power of God moving through groups of people who have been oppressed for generations. We witness the movement of God's Spirit calling on new leaders and generations of people to take a stand on behalf of the most vulnerable. We witness the stirring of Christ's passion within us, calling us to become involved in some way. To all of these things, we are witnesses. To bear witness as a spiritual practice means to keep in mind these things while pursuing a life of justice. Taking time to thank God for the many ways we can bear witness even now encourages us as we continue in our work.

Hospitality: Strengthening Community through Dialogue

Another spiritual practice we can engage in is hospitality. Hospitality can refer to several different actions—from the more concrete deed of hosting someone in your home for a meal, to the more abstract act of welcoming another person into your heart. There is a rich spectrum of ways we can be hospitable toward one another.

Being hospitable to someone else may mean intentionally joining conversations with people you know to be on the other side of an issue. For instance, if you vote Republican, you may be practicing hospitality by having coffee with a friend who votes Democrat. Allowing space for the other person to share his or her thoughts is another form of hospitality.

Talking about race is complicated, whether you are having a conversation with people who are different from you in some obvious way or who share much in common with you. Our sense of racial identity or beliefs about racism can shift over time, and we may differ in our perspectives from even those with whom we grew up. People who are racialized similarly can have very different

experiences of race based on other factors of identity, such as economic status, educational experiences, and faith communities. Even people from the same family can have widely different experiences and views on race based on personal attributes.

For instance, Claude Steele and Shelby Steele are twin brothers, both academics who study race, with the same set of parents and upbringing, and yet they are on opposite ends of the political spectrum when it comes to conversations about race. Imagining these two brothers coming together to have a conversation about race would require some significant hospitality on the part of each brother, open to the possibility of receiving the other with grace. Conversations across differences of any kind can take place only because of a certain degree of hospitality.

Hosting dinners with people from different groups may be an excellent way to intentionally build community in your city. Churches can connect across racial lines and build bridges through shared meals. Individuals can offer hospitality to others, opening their homes to make way for deeper communion. Even during the pandemic, people can gather over Zoom to meet and discuss topics together, a way to learn about one another without ever leaving their home.

Churches have known for a long time that fellowship meals are powerful. Church potlucks may be as old as the first-century Christian communities, who shared meals whenever they gathered. Eventually, the early church recognized the shared meal of the Lord's Supper as a sacrament. Sharing a meal is not something new to Christians, but making an intentional effort to share a meal with people from a different community or perspective may be out of the ordinary. Christians need to build upon this familiar tradition of meal-sharing hospitality to establish relationships with people who may be unfamiliar to them. Your church may do something like this already. Look into ways your church can get involved in hosting gatherings of people from diverse backgrounds, either under its roof or in other parts of your city or area, or by Zoom if persons need to stay at home for health precautions.

Spiritual Practices of Worship and Preaching

This next set of practices may seem rather obvious: preaching and worship, the shared practices that the church engages in on a weekly basis. This is where, together, we make up the body of Christ. And in worship we learn to listen for God's voice, to confess our sins before God, and to commit ourselves to living responsively to the grace that God has shown us.

Because racism is not just part of our history but continues today in the marches of white nationalists and the more prevalent instances of discrimination and ongoing segregation, preachers and worship leaders need to name this sin in worship. Naming the problem of segregation and discrimination in our prayers of confession and intercession can keep us mindful of the continuing struggle. Having leaders in our church who represent different groups of people also sends a message to all present that we all are made in God's image, so any of us can lift our voices in service to the praise of God. A wide array of resources for worship recognizes the diversity of God's beautiful creation, drawing from nonwhite authors of hymns, praise songs, and prayers.

Preachers will discover a number of scriptural themes and texts that support and generate sermons on this topic, drawing from these texts ways to inform the congregation of the history of racism and the harmful ways Christianity has fueled it. From the earliest dysfunctional family in the Bible—Cain killing his brother Abel—we see the trajectory of humanity at war with itself. Noah's "curse" on his son Ham was used to justify slavery.[5] The story of Abraham, who took his slave Hagar to have a child and then abandoned her at the command of his wife, Sarah, is also a story about slavery.[6] Biblical scholars have made connections between this text and the ways enslaved African women were forced to be concubines to their white masters and left to die, their children never recognized as part of the master's family.

The Exodus narrative of God bringing the Israelites out of slavery is a story that connects with many people of African descent whose ancestors were enslaved in the United States.[7] The Psalms and the voices of the prophets call out for justice on behalf of the oppressed; these too call our attention to the oppressed who are among us today. These are just a few of the many passages in the Old Testament alone that can foster rich discussions and sermons that address the history and ongoing legacy of racism and remind us that our brothers and sisters continue to suffer. The New Testament is also a rich resource for such preaching, and early Christian literature shows African theologians

reflecting on difference from the beginning of the church's history.[8]

I teach my students a framework for preaching on race that includes the three processes of recognizing racism, recognizing ourselves within the story, and recognizing gratitude for the grace of God.[9] *Recognizing racism* involves opening our eyes to the ways the Scripture text informs our understanding of the subtle ways sin continues to operate in and around us, particularly through insidious and slippery expressions of racism. It also involves looking to commentaries from authors who write from the perspective of the marginalized, so we can filter our interpretation of Scripture through the experiences of the oppressed.

Recognizing ourselves within the story means that the preacher needs to help white Christians understand how racism impacts them, how they are connected to their brothers and sisters who continue to experience racism, and how their own spiritual growth is stunted through the system of racism. Recognizing ourselves includes understanding the difficult emotions that may be brought up for us as white people unaccustomed to talking about our whiteness.

Finally, *recognizing gratitude for the grace of God* means looking within the text for the signs of God's grace that remind us God is already at work in us, continuing to work for our redemption. Gratitude is the third of these three processes because it is gratitude for God's grace that motivates us to live and act differently, not the shame of our sin. I encourage my students as they preach on difficult issues such as racism to look for a way to end with gratitude as a sign of the promises of God.

Secular Holidays and the Liturgical Calendar

Worship leaders often follow the seasons of the liturgical calendar when planning worship, but some of the more "secular" holidays or ways of marking time can also be opportunities for talking about racism. In the summer, when many people go on vacation, the church can host discussions on the film *Driving While Black*, or the experiences of African Americans as they have tried to vacation across the country or have been pulled over by the police for no apparent reason.[10] When students return to school and some churches host "blessings of the backpacks" or school supply drives for underprivileged school children, the church can engage in studies about the history of segregated education in the United States and in their specific area.[11]

When October rolls around and kids begin dressing up for Halloween, the church can have honest discussions of who gets to be afraid for "fun" in America. While on Halloween kids dress up in spooky costumes, white people tend to ignore the ways fear has been intentionally inflicted upon Black and brown communities through the Ku Klux Klan and other modern expressions of white power. The church can study Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit" and the ways the United States government tried to stop her from singing it.[12] In November, church worship leaders can use the holiday of Thanksgiving to call attention to the ongoing struggles of Native Americans, linking the experiences of indigenous peoples to the larger history of racism and colonialism.

Throughout the months of the liturgical calendar, worship leaders in predominantly white churches can draw from prayers written by people of color, songs composed by people of color, and show art created by people of color. In this way, the church worships through the gifts of the whole body of Christ.

Churches continue to be segregated largely based on race. This is the result of the long history of racism. One of the ways our worship and preaching can engage in the work of antiracism is to name this segregation, and to confess our blindness to the experiences and needs of people of color in our midst. As we confess our racism and commit to antiracist practices in our churches and our communities, it may be that our churches will gradually see more and more people of color. If this happens, it is not necessarily a sign of our "wokeness" or our status as an antiracist church, but it is a good sign. As white church leaders continue to look to people of color as fellow leaders in worship and preaching, and as more white churches call people of color to pastor their churches, the conversations about antiracism must continue. Churches who make strides to combat racism cannot assume that they have "arrived." Honesty, compassion, and a commitment to truly being in fellowship with one another will help us continue on this journey together.

Antiracist Worship in Practice

What does antiracist worship look like in practice? At a conference about dismantling racism held at

Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina in 2016, three services of worship were held over three days. The worship services were patterned on the three days of Triduum: Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday. Prior to the event, a liturgical artist wrote lists of names on long hanging banners that surrounded the sanctuary where we worshiped. The names belonged to some of the many people of color whose lives have been lost because of hate and fear. Some of the names I recognized; many I did not. At the end of the Good Friday service, members of the worshiping body took down each banner and draped it onto the communion table. It was a powerful statement, seeing the names of the dead laid out on the place where we commemorate the sacrifice of Christ. We left the sanctuary in silence.

On the last day of the conference, we held an Easter service. As participants walked into the sanctuary, they saw those banners hanging high and brightly lit. In the sermon, the preacher proclaimed that in our dying, we die with Christ. And as Christ lives and is raised from the dead, we too shall rise. All those who have died as a result of injustice will not remain dead, but will be raised with Christ, held forever by the love of the God who created each one by name. We *can* address these painful realities in our worship and preaching—and we must, to remind us all of the God who has called us together to be one body.

Notes

1. Excerpted from Carolyn B. Helsel, *Anxious to Talk about It: Helping White People Talk Faithfully about Racism*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, May 2021).
2. David Campt, *The White Ally Toolkit Workbook: Using Active Listening, Empathy, and Personal Storytelling to Promote Racial Equity* (United States: I AM Publications, 2018).
3. Don Gonyea, "Majority of White Americans Say They Believe Whites Face Discrimination," NPR, October 24, 2017, www.npr.org/2017/10/24/559604836/majority-of-white-americans-think-theyre-discriminated-against/.
4. Donna Hicks, "The Ten Essential Elements of Dignity: What We Extend to Others and Would Like for Ourselves," Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue, accessed March 2, 2021, www.ikedacenter.org/thinkers-themes/thinkers/interviews/hicks/elements/.
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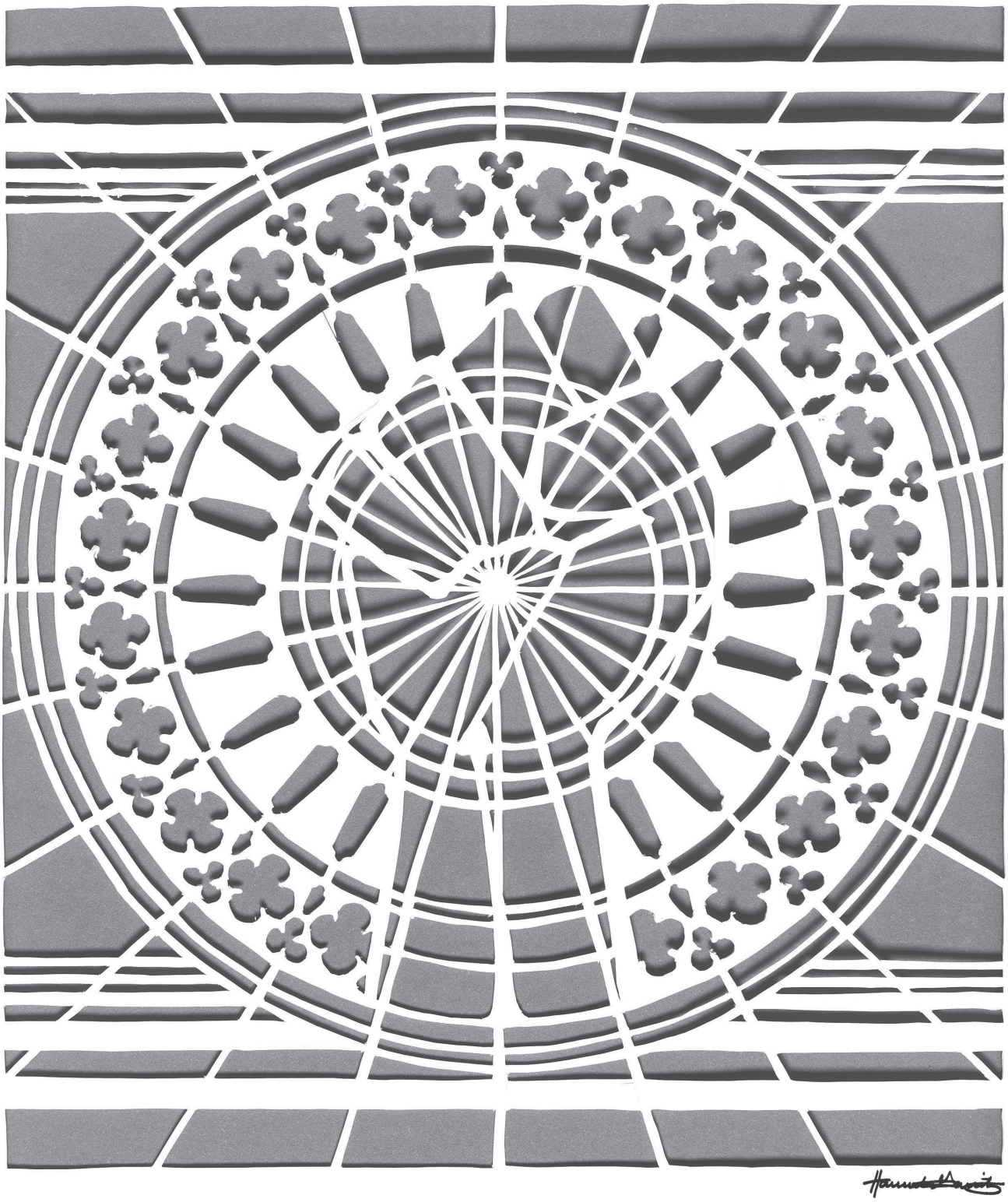
6. Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).
7. Eddie S. Glaude Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
8. Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
9. Carolyn B. Helsel, *Preaching about Racism: A Guide for Faith Leaders* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2018).
10. Film by Gretchen Sorin and Ric Burns, *Driving While Black: Race, Space, and Mobility in America*, PBS, originally aired October 13, 2020, accessed March 2, 2021, www.pbs.org/show/driving-while-black/.
11. In Austin, we can look at the 1928 Master Plan that intentionally segregated Black Austinites to the eastern side of the city. See https://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/City-Council/Houston/CM_OH_1928_Op-Ed.pdf/.
12. *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*, directed by Lee Daniels (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2021), available on Hulu.



Systemic
Hannah Garrity

In this paper lace, I explore physical structures that house and enable American society. The shape of the monument pedestals inspires the first ring of pattern surrounding the fist. The next ring portrays patterning that is seen regularly in church architecture. The quatrefoil represents the cross and the trefoil represents the Trinity. These rings symbolize the intricate way that white supremacy must be unwoven from daily operations.

Columns

On Liturgy: Words Matter—The Language of Liturgy

Erika Rembert Smith

One Sunday years ago during a memorial service, while standing at the font of a beloved congregation in which I served, I called the worshiping community to confess together our sins. After we prayed, I declared the good news of forgiveness that we have received through Jesus Christ. During the reception after the service, an older gentleman approached me and expressed his gratitude for hearing the words of forgiveness that I spoke. Having participated in systems that oppressed and caused harm to people who looked like me, this gentleman, who appeared to be in his eighties, shared the importance of hearing words of forgiveness from, and I quote, "a little black girl" who would have never been afforded the privilege of speaking such words in a predominately Caucasian congregation "back in the day." His referral to me as a "little black girl" was problematic to say the least, especially since I was in my thirties at the time. Yet, his response to the weight of the words that fell upon his ears spoke volumes about the transformative power of the Spirit at work through words in that moment.

Words matter. Words can build up or tear down, encourage or discourage, heal or hurt. Words are powerful. They shape our lives and often form our destiny. Words are important, and we do well to choose carefully the words that will be spoken and heard in worship. The words of liturgy connect us to God and one another and shape us as we are sent out for service into the world.

When we gather for worship, these gatherings become our sacred spaces where people of all ages speak words that welcome the presence of God. Through call and response, we are encouraged to offer praise to God and to focus on the One who has given so much to us. Our prayers of confession are humble admissions that we have sinned and fallen short of God's holy expectations of us. When we confess our sins, we hear words of grace that remind us of the wideness of God's mercy and fullness of God's love for us in Jesus Christ.

In worship, we utter words in prayer, asking the God of all creation to open our eyes that we might see, our ears that we might hear, our hearts that we might receive, our will that we might live into the will of God expressed through the proclaimed word. In prayer we intercede before a holy God on behalf of those created in the divine image of God as we lift their concerns and the concerns of the world around us.

Words, even the words of prayer, are important in worship. Our prayer words should not be limited and narrowly scoped. Our words to our Lord must be all-embracing and far-reaching. When we petition for monies to build buildings, we must also remember to petition for the resources to provide homes for the homeless and support for the downtrodden. Petitions raised for the ending of worship wars within our churches should also speak to the sin of racism and the problem this evil causes. In other words, our appeals to the God of heaven without thoughtfulness of all people convey a message that the plight of some are more important than the plight of others.

Prayer rings hollow when we only pray for ourselves and the people we can relate to. I recall being in a meeting as unrest was ignited in Ferguson, Missouri, when the decision was released that the officer who fatally shot Michael Brown would not be charged. During the prayers of the people, prayer requests were made for everything and everyone with no mention of Michael's family and the community in pain over the death of an

Erika Rembert Smith is pastor of Washington Shores Presbyterian Church in Orlando, Florida.

eighteen-year-old Black male whose life ended far too soon, until I stood and voiced the concern. People of color should not always be the ones to bring such concerns into the room. In our shared humanity, we all know what it means to lose someone we love; therefore, we do not have to be Black or brown or a person of color to understand grief and the need to carry in prayer the heartache of marginalized communities to a God who cares for those on the fringes, too. Silence on important matters speaks volumes.

People of faith, disciples of Christ are called to care about the conditions of all who are included in the family of God. When we only use words that express joy and praise without including lament and pain, we fail to acknowledge the reality of grief and loss in our lives. When we only use lofty, theological words, we neglect the practical aspects of our faith. When we only use words that are familiar to the dominant culture, we leave out entire populations and peoples created in the image of God.

At the table we welcome people from every tribe and tongue to the feast God prepares for all who love and trust the Lord. Through the grain of the field and the fruit of the earth, we remember the broken body of Christ, who died to heal the brokenness of the world. With thanksgiving, we express gratitude and seek the transforming power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to be the people of God in the world. In worship we affirm what we believe about who God is, about who we are and about what we are called and committed to do.

Whenever we choose words that declare that

> in sovereign love God created the world good
> and makes everyone equally in God's image
> male and female, of every race and people,
> to live as one community . . .

we chip away at the claims of racism that say some are more worthy than others.

Whenever we honestly confess that

> . . . we rebel against God;
> we hide from our Creator
> and admit that
>
> ignoring God's commandments,
> we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
> accept lies as truth,
> exploit neighbor and nature,
> and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care . . .

we knock down any notion that allows racism to live and breathe within us.

Whenever we are open and obedient to the Spirit who speaks to us in worship, we will find courage

> . . . to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
> to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
> to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
> and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.[1]

In so doing, we dismantle racism, one act at a time. Just as we are challenged to speak out and to act in ways that eradicate structural racism in the streets, we should also speak and act in the sacred spaces of worship as a witness to our faith and a commitment of our faithfulness.

Over time, liturgy may appear to be rote action; however, we should never underestimate the transformative power that is available in these moments. I am a witness to the power of words spoken and the movement of the Spirit at work through the liturgical practices of the church. At font and table, in the chancel and in the pew, the ears of the gathered community are opened and attuned to the voice of God through the voice of God's people. What we say has much to say about who God is, who we are, who is welcomed, and who is not.

Words matter. Words are important. Words are powerful. May we always be mindful of the words we speak in worship.

Note

1. Quotes are from "Brief Statement of Faith, *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Part I, Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 2016).

On Music: The Welcome Table?

Marlon Hurst

In a recent essay for the *Choral Journal*, Jason Dungee writes, "White people often expend significant energy listening to and learning from Black people about the Black experience living in a White supremacist society, but have not taken similar steps to interrogate their own experiences living in that same society."[1] As a church musician who was educated in and has worked in primarily white spaces, I was prompted by Jason Dungee's article to reflect upon my own upbringing, my training as a musician, and my career as a church musician through the lens of race. Who have been my teachers, mentors, and colleagues?

I was born in 1968 and grew up living in southeastern Kentucky. It wasn't until I reached graduate school at the University of Tennessee in 1990 that I encountered my first Black teacher, Dr. Marvelene Moore. To the best of my recollection, not only was she the first Black teacher who taught me in a class, she was the first Black teacher whom I had encountered on *any* faculty at *any level* of my education from elementary school through college. I then tallied the number of band directors, choral conductors, and mentors from whom I had received my musical education and training—16 white men. When I reflect upon my career as a church musician, I recount that I have worked alongside 17 pastors and associate pastors (10 men, 7 women) and 13 organists/pianists (7 men, 6 women)—all white. Altogether that is 46 music teachers, mentors, and professional colleagues—33 white men and 13 white women.

Widening the aperture slightly beyond my personal environment, I surveyed the websites of 8 churches (including the one that I serve), representing 5 mainline denominations located within about a mile of one another—all downtown, urban churches. Of the ministerial and programmatic leadership staff pictured on the websites, I viewed (what appears to be) 80 white people and 2 Black people—97.6 percent white, 2.4 percent Black, 0 percent other. (Compare this with the ethnic demographic breakdown of residents in the county in which these churches are located—71 percent white, 15 percent Black, 14 percent other.[2])

At this point, I must admit that until fairly recently I would have claimed that I have lived my life in environments that, by and large, were not *actively* racist (the product of a woefully insufficient definition of "racism," to be sure). But it is very clear that I was born, raised, and educated and have worked in thoroughly, if not exclusively, white spaces and within a *thoroughly* white culture.

What role might music have—specifically the music of the church—in beginning to tug at the threads of structural racism? African American spirituals have long been beloved by Christians of all races and ethnicities. One can hardly imagine Christmas without "Go Tell It on the Mountain" or Holy Week without "Were You There." A quick survey of the contents of hymnals such as *Lift Every Voice and Sing* and the *African American Heritage Hymnal* reveals a bounty of hymns that overlap with the hymns of my own childhood and youth as I was growing up attending an all-white Southern Baptist church. With all of this musical overlap between white and Black church traditions, why does 11:00 on Sunday morning remain "the most segregated hour in this nation"[3] fifty-eight years after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made the observation?

The African American spiritual "I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table" (*Glory to God*, 770)

Marlon Hurst is director of Music and Arts at First Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky.

envisions a world where we will "eat and drink with . . . Jesus" alongside "sisters, brothers" as "all the world will find a welcome" to "feast on milk and honey." This spiritual, which beautifully amplifies the eschatological themes that are often found in the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving preceding the sacrament, casts Jesus as the host of the feast and us as the guests. It resonates with the familiar invitation to the table spoken by the presider reminding us that "this is the Lord's table. Our Savior invites those who trust him to share the feast which he has prepared."[4]

But how consistent is our actual practice with the invitation to the table? While Jesus is, indeed, the host, it is my observation that those of us in positions of leadership all too readily appoint ourselves stewards. Most of the readers of this publication will recall that there was once a practice of "fencing the table," whereby only those who had been deemed worthy by church leadership were given a token that allowed them access to the table. While that practice has thankfully been long discarded in our denomination, it occurs to me that we still "fence the table," if in less obvious ways, when *we* act as the host—a gracious one who welcomes all, no doubt, but one who welcomes "the other" as a guest.

Surely this is not the case in every church in every place. But by the racial demographics of leadership in the mainline churches in the city where I live and work in 2021, it would appear that from the days of my education and career (thus far) not much has changed. I believe that until we begin to share leadership more widely beyond our own "kin and clan," loosen our grip on our role as the "gracious host," and take our seat at Jesus' table alongside our sisters and brothers of all races, there will not be much change. Singing more spirituals and global songs (although vitally important for many reasons beyond the scope of this column) alone will not bring about much change.

The question that I feel must be asked is "Do we want to be changed?" If we do, then what does that change look like, and how do we get there? I'm intrigued by Ibram X. Kendi's notion of racial solidarity: "openly identifying, supporting, and protecting integrated racial spaces."[5] His vision of "integrated racial spaces" prompts me to imagine a church whose leadership is more closely aligned with the racial makeup of the communities in which we serve, a church that is more closely related to its community, a church whose worship practices and experiences are enriched and enhanced by pastors and musicians who represent other cultures than Eurocentric ones.

I believe that spirituals such as "I'm Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table" have the power to help us find a vision for greater equity, but it will be up to us to decide whether we want to accept the invitation to Christ's table where *all* are truly welcomed. May it be so.

Notes

1. Jason Dungee, "A Pedagogy for Living: Applying Restorative, Anti-Racist Pedagogy in the Choral Classroom," *Choral Journal* 61, no. 4 (November 2020): 13.
2. https://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US21067-fayette-county-ky/.
3. "MLK at Western," https://wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/MLK.pdf.
4. *Book of Common Worship* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 68.
5. Ibram X. Kendi, *How To Be an Anti-Racist* (New York: One World, 2019), 180.

On Preaching

Stephen M. Fearing

The antiracist preacher can learn much from the philosophical practice of Kingian nonviolence. Nonviolence as a spiritual discipline is more than simply refraining from violent acts. Instead, it is the *active* pursuit of using nonviolent means to subvert the powers of oppression. Likewise, antiracist preachers must do more than simply implore congregations to refrain from racist behavior; they must use the sermon to invite a faithful response to the good news of the gospel by opposing racism in its many forms. As Ibram X. Kendi has taught us, there is no such thing as "not racist." We either commit to being racist or antiracist; there is no middle option. As Elie Wiesel famously asserted, neutrality helps the oppressor and never the oppressed.

I am a cisgender, white, heterosexual male serving a predominantly white, left-leaning congregation in Lexington, Kentucky. I'm called to lead this faith community from simply saying we are a progressive congregation to actually living into that moniker. This is no small task. It requires simultaneously unlearning my own racist inclinations while preaching weekly to a community who is doing the same work. I often remind the congregation that the Confession of Belhar describes unity as both a "gift and an obligation."[1] I believe that the pursuit of antiracism is no different; it is both a gift we receive and an obligation we accept as an inseparable part of our Christian discipleship.

A tool I've found helpful in my preaching of late is the book *The Sum of Us: How Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* by Heather McGhee.[2] She gives a thorough and thoughtful witness of how racist legislation in the United States hurts everyone. This should surprise none of us; our siblings of color have been preaching this truth to us for centuries. One of the chief metaphors McGhee uses throughout the book is the concept of "draining the swimming pool." In the 1960s, many southern municipalities—governed, of course, by white men—chose to drain their cherished public swimming pools rather than integrate them. McGhee encourages us to use this metaphor to uncover other ways that white supremacy has "drained the pool" for everyone.

Those who find themselves in the pulpit on a weekly basis, especially those who are preaching to predominantly white congregations, would do well to listen to McGhee's message: racist legislation damages all of creation. Her impeccable research gives concrete evidence that racist laws in this country negatively impact everyone's access to affordable healthcare and housing, exceptional education, and environmental sustainability. But if racism damages all of creation, then the inverse also is true; antiracism is the lifelong pursuit of *healing* all of creation.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of McGhee's book is that it gives numerous points of entry for the antiracist preacher in the sermon-writing process. Is the congregation you serve passionate about environmental justice? Then use the sermon to highlight the realities of environmental racism. Do you have many congregants who are educators? Then there is ample opportunity to talk about how racist legislation has drained resources from school systems. Do you have members who are first responders and healthcare workers? Then invite the congregation to explore the ways that racist legislation has made affordable healthcare inaccessible to more than 47 million United States residents ages eighteen to sixty-four in 2019.[3]

Stephen M. Fearing is pastor of Beaumont Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky.

It's also important for the antiracist preacher to use the event of the sermon to empower the congregation to respond faithfully. It is my observation that many congregations, including the one I serve, struggle with the concept that the church has a role to play in dismantling white supremacy. This perceived lack of agency, whether we realize it or not, only enables and emboldens the naturally reproducing cycles of racism in this country. To be clear, for predominantly white congregations to wash their hands of this responsibility is, in and of itself, an act of white supremacy.

Again, the philosophical practice of nonviolence can be a helpful tool in reclaiming the church's agency in the public discourse on racism. Nonviolent resistance teaches us that any oppressive power (be it a person, system, or ideology) is held up by "pillars of support."[4] For example, the Otpor movement that sought to depose the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević in the late 1990s understood that his power was held in place by the support of different pillars in society such as the military, the education system, the press, the arts, businesses, and banks. In order to bring his oppressive regime to an end, the members of the Otpor movement focused on toppling the different pillars by convincing the members of those pillars to stop supporting Milošević's administration.

What many of us in predominantly white mainline congregations have chosen to forget is that the church is one of those pillars of support! A pillar either supports something or it doesn't; there is no middle ground. And the good news is this: there is an overwhelming abundance of stories in Scripture where God demands God's people to remove their support from the powers of oppression and follow the nonviolent path (Exodus, Isaiah, and the Gospel of Mark come to mind).[5]

Finally, it is important that the antiracist preacher remind the congregation that the pursuit of antiracism is a joyful exercise—difficult and complex, of course, but nevertheless rooted in the joy and abundance that God intends for all of creation. Confessing our complicity in upholding racist systems is an inseparable part of the antiracist journey. But faithful confession leads to righteousness which in turn leads us to a more faithful embodiment of what Martin Luther King Jr. called "the Beloved Community."

Notes

1. The Confession of Belhar, 10.3, presbyterianmission.org/resource/belhar-confession/.
2. Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us* (New York: One World/Random House, 2021), https://heathermcghee.com/.
3. Amy Cha and Robin Cohen, "Reasons for Being Uninsured Among Adults Aged 18–64 in the United States, 2019," National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief, no. 382, September 2020, cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db382-H.pdf.
4. Srdja Popovic et al, "Pillars of Support," in *Canvas Core Curriculum: A Guide to Effective Nonviolence Struggle*, 2007, nonviolent-conflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Pillars-of-Support-PDF-English.pdf.
5. Ched Myer's commentary on Mark, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*, is a helpful companion when preaching antiracism.

On the Arts

Amy E. Gray

While I was teaching at Wesley Theological Seminary, my courses were designed for students who would later become pastors, eventually leading their own churches. The courses ranged from design for websites and other internal publications to creating imagery for worship. An important element of all the classes was to interrogate the students' embedded theology around images. I wanted them to understand that not everyone was going to see and interpret images in the same way. In particular, we talked about issues surrounding images of Christ within the church, and the implications for their congregants if the only images they saw represented one way of viewing the divine.

Since leaving Wesley, I have refocused my work away from large corporate worship settings and returned to my own private work. With this shift, combined with the arrival of COVID-19, my questions shifted away from the church as a whole to thinking deeply about individual devotion. In this new context, I found myself returning to the less familiar *Jesus of the People* by Janet McKenzie, the very well-known Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ*, and the recent AI-generated portrait of Jesus of Nazareth by Bas Uterwijk.

Uterwijk's portrait of Jesus was created in response to the *National Catholic Reporter's* call to artists to answer the question "What would Jesus Christ look like in the year 2000?" The competition received over fifteen hundred submissions. McKenzie used an African American woman as her model for an androgynous Christ that includes references to Native American culture and Eastern practice.[1] I clearly remember seeing an article about the painting in the local paper. At that time I had not been exposed to diverse representations of Christ, and I was intrigued by the image. Even more strongly, I remember the vitriol directed at this painting in the letters to the editor and opinion page. The controversy raged for months. Honestly, I was stunned by the reaction. I have often wondered about those who were so deeply angered by the painting. For a large portion of the responses, it is easy to assume racism as the cause. Lately, I have found myself returning to this image wondering if there is something else lurking behind the response that should be examined. Has the image of Jesus become an idol?

Warner Sallman's *Head of Christ* is arguably one of the most recognizable modern images of Jesus. Created in 1940, the image was accepted across a wide range of denominations and sects. There were widespread campaigns to get the image into as many public and private spaces as possible in the 1950s and 60s.[2] By the time I was growing up in the 1970s and 80s, it was *the* default image of Christ. I distinctly remember thinking, on the basis of my four-year-old logic, "That guy has never had sand between his toes. None of this is true!" Some of this is me, but some of it is a result of being a part of Generation X. We were growing up at a time when there were fewer children in the U.S. population. Churches like mine that previously had strong youth programs canceled programming because there were so few children. As a result, despite being in church regularly, I was not exposed to much of the image-heavy children's curricula of the previous generation. I was not introduced to the great works of the Renaissance until I was at art school, where the emphasis was on the works as "great art" and not the focus of spirituality or piety. As a result, I never integrated any particular image into my spiritual life. But the truth is that there are a lot of

Amy E. Gray is a visual artist and lifelong Presbyterian.

people out there who did internalize the Sallman painting as "what Jesus looked like," and for many this may be where the problem lies.

Recently there was a meme floating around on Facebook that compared "Colonizer Jesus" to "Historical Jesus." The image for "Colonizer Jesus" was from a Catholic prayer card (the meme was created by a Catholic source), but it could just as easily have been the Sallman Jesus. For "Historical Jesus," they used the AI-generated image of Jesus of Nazareth by Dutch photographer Bas Uterwijk.[3]

The image was created on a computer using a combination of photographs. The portrait is an amalgamation of photos of actual people from Nazareth and the surrounding area. (While there is certainly no arguing that the church as a whole has work to do with regard to sins done in the name of a "Colonizer Jesus," there is not enough space in this column to go deeply into the issues.) Like the McKenzie painting, the Uterwijk portrait is fascinating to me both in how it was created and what ideas it sends into the world. It gives me pause, however, because it is being held up as a candidate for "the one correct image." This takes away from the idea that we are all created in the divine image. As imperfect human beings, can we uphold one image as correct while still allowing for a diversity of images? I don't really know the answer to that.

As an artist, I believe that I cannot create an accurate image of God, one that will fully depict the truth. Even in creating artwork for previous issues of *Call to Worship*, I was very aware of the need for diverse representation in my images and explicitly chose abstract representation where I could. As a teacher and consultant for churches, I have made a point to emphasize the importance of showing multiple facets of God through the images that are displayed.

There will always be someone who needs to see a different face than the traditional. It is always a great pleasure to expose students to a multiplicity of images of Christ from around the world. The wondrous images from different cultures and different ethnicities each show a different facet of the divine. I find that contemplating various images of Christ does more to shape my understanding than any one image can, and I invite others to join me in doing the same.

Notes

1. https://www.janetmckenzie.com/joppage1.html.
2. https://pres-outlook.org/2020/06/how-jesus-became-white-and-why-its-time-to-cancel-that/.
3. https://www.basuterwijk.com/portfolio/C0000hFAng_Rwrws/G0000WVKM6MbiIAc.

Ideas

The Racial Awareness Festival: A Community Resource for Personal Reflections on Systemic Racism

Therese Taylor-Stinson and Glenn Zuber

Since 2016, the DC-based Racial Awareness Festival (RAF) has helped hundreds of people reflect on their personal experiences with race and racism with the goal of deepening dialogue and encouraging participants to take steps toward a more just society. Many people have said the festival helped them discover new vocations and changed their career trajectories. Therese Taylor-Stinson (former moderator of the National Capital Presbytery), with the help of Glenn Zuber (a Presbyterian minister), organized this unique event that annually draws three hundred people. While supported by the generous contributions of many Presbyterian groups and agencies, the annual RAF serves as a resource for the wider community as it brings together people from different races, religions, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The festival features face-to-face discussions on race, support groups, healing rituals, music, author talks, and art. The involvement of many nonprofit community groups and trained experts dedicated to combating racism helps expand the offerings at the festival. Over the years, the festival's sponsors have included the following organizations: National Capital Presbytery, Next Church, Black Presbyterians United, Interplay!, Howard University Divinity School, Black Mental Health Alliance, Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing, Spiritual Directors of Color, Coming to the Table (Montgomery County, Maryland), Interwoven Congregations, and Emotional Emancipation Circles.

Learning Moments in Organizing the Festival

In planning festival events, the various organizers attempt to arrive at a consensus regarding the best language to use to address the reality of racism in society. The occasional disagreements help illuminate the differing perspectives organizers bring to the table and provide opportunities for learning moments. One such learning moment came during discussions over the last festival's concluding Ritual of Lament. Because of COVID the festival had to take place online for the first time. The festival usually used the concluding segment of time for a group discussion where people could share their newly gained insights, but for this festival the organizers chose to have a time of collective lament, drawing participants' attention to the ongoing reality of racism's destructive presence in society.

One organizer suggested having the five main leaders of the festival go through the four steps of lamentation, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation on behalf of all the participants. He wanted these four steps to help participants visualize how God might be leading them toward some version of the beloved community. In a short rehearsal, this organizer asked other leaders how they defined lament, and then asked them to say in unison, "We lament." The same process happened with confession and forgiveness. The organizers talked about what confession and forgiveness meant. As originally planned, the two white organizers would say, "We confess," and then an African American woman organizer would say, "We forgive." But she objected during the rehearsal, saying that an expression of forgiveness would be meaningless and premature without concrete steps being discussed towards restoration. So, she changed the response. In the end, the two white organizers said, "We confess," and the African American woman said, "We hear your confession." This change in the dialogue emphasized the need for deepening racial awareness first before moving too quickly and superficially to discuss what forgiveness might mean practically. Through dialogues and cooperation, organizers and participants of the festival learn more about each other and the best language to use to discuss racism.

Therese Taylor-Stinson is a spiritual director and ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) living in Washington, DC. Glenn Zuber is pastor of Church of the Covenant in Arlington, Virginia.

Therese Taylor-Stinson on Transformational Experiences That Led Her to Start the RAF

The original inspiration for thinking about a presbytery event addressing racial awareness came while I attended the 2015 Spiritual Directors International Conference in Louisville, Kentucky. At the conference I participated in a workshop entitled "Changing the Race Dance" where, using movement and wordless expression, we released the anxiety and tension in our bodies that we had brought into the room. Then we sat down across from someone of a different race and took turns naming our experience of race. I started by saying, "I can remember when my mother first told me we couldn't go to a local amusement park because of the color of our skin." My partner then struggled to name her experience of race. As I shared very easily my experiences of race, I noticed my partner was finding it more difficult to name hers. During the conversation, the facilitators paused us briefly and encouraged us to go deeper, but my partner continued to have difficulty naming her experience. As the workshop ended, and as we gathered our belongings to leave, my partner looked at me and said, "I am a special ed teacher in a Midwest school. As you named your experience of race, I began to see mistakes I was making in my classroom of mostly African American students. I am going back to that class and try to do some things differently." That made the lightbulb come on for me: awareness = changed behavior!

Carl Jung once wrote, "Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is." One's shadow is not exclusively one's bad characteristics. It can also be denial of one's good characteristics—like the ability to love or forgive. Whatever characteristics we deny in ourselves, we project on "the other." The other can become victim to our projections or our admiration. For example, in some theological perspectives, Jesus is love and forgiveness—God—but then Jesus can become for some the scapegoat whose love and forgiveness excuses us from truly embracing, loving, and forgiving "the other."

We must move toward awakening to the shadow of racism and becoming more mindful about how we behave toward "the other." Racial Awareness and Mindfulness 2016: A Mini-Festival of the Arts, Awareness, and Healing in Washington, D.C., began a movement led by National Capital Presbytery and Next Church to gather those of good will to do the work necessary to become aware and mindful of our relationships and the systems and structures that unconsciously influence our behavior. Now, we have begun the work of changing that behavior.

Glenn Zuber on How He Joined the Effort

First, you need some background on how Therese and I originally met. Therese and I had worked together for several years coleading a 1,001 New Worshiping Community in downtown D.C. called Iona, D.C., an emerging, contemplative Christian community. We both appreciated the promise of contemplative prayer, the ritual power of communion, interracial dialogue, deepening friendships over meals, and helping the homeless and hungry. If we had not had similar interests and a shared experience with Iona, D.C., we probably would not have collaborated on creating the Racial Awareness Festival. In fact, several of the current leaders of the festival first met each other at Iona, D.C. events.

When I first heard Therese talk about her experience of attending an event where she witnessed heightened awareness bringing about changed behavior, I was impressed. As an educator, I realized that this approach had the potential to help people holistically address racial injustice in a way that our standard go-to methods of antiracism lectures simply cannot. I also appreciated Therese's interested in holding a series of events open to the community.

When Therese and the first supporters of her initiative committed themselves to creating an event that would reach the whole community, I knew exactly what we needed to try: an open festival. Festivals offer unique learning opportunities; they allow people to proceed at their own pace in discovering different and challenging perspectives. Most importantly, these learning opportunities raise awareness around issue while changing behavior and mindsets.

Using Therese's idea that we needed different kinds of dialogue as the core of the festival, we invited friends and leaders with their own networks to host one kind of dialogue to further the cause of raising racial awareness. As friends invited friends, our sponsors that first year came to include a P.T.A., a children's theater troupe, and a farmer's market. We were impressed when so many people turned out to

participate in plenary speeches, conversation, and racial caucuses as well as drumming circles, art, and dance. The festival was meeting an obvious need.

In the end, the festival became a catalyst that allowed the church to reach out to the community with the rare opportunity of addressing a pressing issue that no one else was addressing in an accessible manner. Three hundred people came out for the first festival, many more than we originally believed might be interested.

Therese Taylor-Stinson on the RAF during COVID and in the Future

There were obvious obstacles during the COVID pandemic in fostering the same kind of close interaction we originally hoped the festival could enable, but we found out that going online presented us with the opportunity to reach a national audience for the first time. Perhaps other presbyteries and cities will be able to host similar events in the future. We have found that events like the RAF help the church minister to society in practical ways.

Contours of Mary's Dream
Lauren Wright Pittman

I imagine Christ taking form in Mary's womb much like I imagine all of creation emerging at the Creator's voice. I collaged macro photography of patterns, textures, and colors from creation—such as sunsets, birds' feathers, fish scales, galaxies, leaves, planets, fur, water, etc.—and wove them into her hair. Jesus, the thread of creation, is being knit together in her womb. God's dream for all creation is materializing as cells divide in her body; all the while she sings of a dream, still unrealized.

Our God Who Art in Heaven

Our God who art in heaven, Hallow'd be thy matchless name.
Let your Kingdom reign in heaven, Dwell on earth, in us, the same.
Give us, Lord, this day for worship, Give us manna from on high.
Give us bread to serve your Kingdom, Lord, your name we glorify.

Lord, forgive us, free us, love us, Grant us wisdom to forgive.
Lead us not into temptation, Grant us grace so we can live.
Evil cannot stand against us, Your deliverance we need.
Bind us, Lord, to one another, We, your church, your love receive.

Thine the kingdom, thine the power, Thine the glory evermore.
Thine all majesty and honor, God, to you we praise, adore.
You are God, you reign forever, "Sovereign, Holy Lord!" we sing.
Our God who art in heaven, Lord, eternal king of kings.

Text: Antonio Maurice McNeill
Tune: NETTLETON

This paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer was written to be sung to the tune of NETTLETON (87 87D), which appeared in *John Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music* (1813). It is dedicated to the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Used with permission.

How Can We Cry for Justice?

I wrote this hymn after Mark Charles's plenary address at the Hymn Society conference in 2019, which outlined the deep and lasting harm of the doctrine of discovery. The hymn is an attempt towards a corporate confession for white Christianity's significant contributions to the racism pervading our world. While the text specifically deals with colonialism and xenophobia, it can also be of particular use when grappling with racially-based violence, police brutality, and suppression of rights.

—Slats Toole

How can we cry for justice
when our swords stained the ground
with blood that cries from lands we stole
but then claimed to have found?
These swords have morphed to guns and bombs
that we will not let go.
We don't deserve forgiveness, God;
have mercy even so.

How can we march for freedom
when our hands built the wall
that greets the stranger with a cage
instead of love for all?
We willfully ignore the tale
of Christ as refugee.
We don't deserve your kindness, God;
but Savior, hear our plea.

How can we seek God's kin-dom
when our words stoke the flame
that animates our acts of hate,
our systems, sins, and shame?
Our doctrines justify our need
to conquer, cage, and kill.
We don't deserve your mercy, God;
have mercy even still.

Meter: 7.6.8.6.8.6.8.6, but CMD tunes can work if "justice," "freedom," and "kin-dom" are sung over two notes.

Book Reviews

The Overshadowed Preacher: Mary, the Spirit, and the Labor of Proclamation

Jerusha Matsen Neal
(Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020)

Reviewed by Anne H. K. Apple

On a sunny day, my husband and I took care of a two-year-old friend while his preacher parents did church. We walked together to the neighborhood park and observed him encounter not only his but also our shadows. He did so with genuine curiosity, looking up at us. He moved with bold intention, exploring with great joy. When we began our day, we could not have predicted how it would unfold with our young friend. Yet, those moments with a two-year-old carried a sense of overshadowing—watching the conception of the joy of discovery, observing a dance of bearing something new, and naming with him the delivery of profound wonder. We witnessed the shaping of a young soul.

In her book *The Overshadowed Preacher*, Jerusha Matsen Neal invites a thorough critique of historical and contemporary preaching. Neal begins by describing and unpacking three historical and cultural metaphors for the act of preaching: rhetoric as the Word's persuasive handmaid, rhetoric as the Word made flesh, and rhetoric as a cultural mother tongue. She then describes how these metaphors have been used to exclude and marginalize human bodies and have failed to communicate the depth and beauty in the sacramental nature of preaching. These metaphors dismiss the indescribable yet textual truth of being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit. When preachers, and the church, have failed to recognize the presence of the status quo as the guiding narrative in preaching, our homiletical history is linked to ecclesial power and exclusion.

Neal invites the preacher to start with Christ's resurrected body, and in doing so to make room for the role of the preacher's body. Because we live in a time when certain bodies are unseen and undervalued, it is curious to imagine what could be born of rethinking preaching. Neal compels the preacher to delve into the truth of what it means that the risen Christ is present with us week in and week out and to consider how God's anointing is both a profound mystery and dangerous business.

Fully incarnational preaching requires the work of conceiving, bearing, and naming the Word, Jesus Christ. Neal invites preachers to tease out the shallow power of persuasion, populism, and prosperity and to consider what it means to embody the risen Word in preaching. She circles back around, time and again, to the testimony of a risen Christ. She draws on her own experience of teaching preaching in Fiji and surveys of her students and contemporary preachers. In the end, Neal invites today's preachers to be like Mary, the mother of Christ, in the preparation and delivery of God's Word.

As preachers to be overshadowed, like Mary, by the Spirit, we must be human and exceedingly vulnerable. We acknowledge and model in our preaching that Jesus, the risen Christ, is present *in absence*, is risen *and rising*. The Spirit's overshadowing presence in preaching stretches the skin of our called-out communities. And, the Spirit's overshadowing presence shapes us for service that shatters the status quo and leaves stretch marks as reminders of God's trustworthy and true solace, sustaining the faithful for God's mission. In her chapter on the Spirit-filled handmaid Neal says,

Anne H. K. Apple is a minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), living in Memphis, Tennessee.

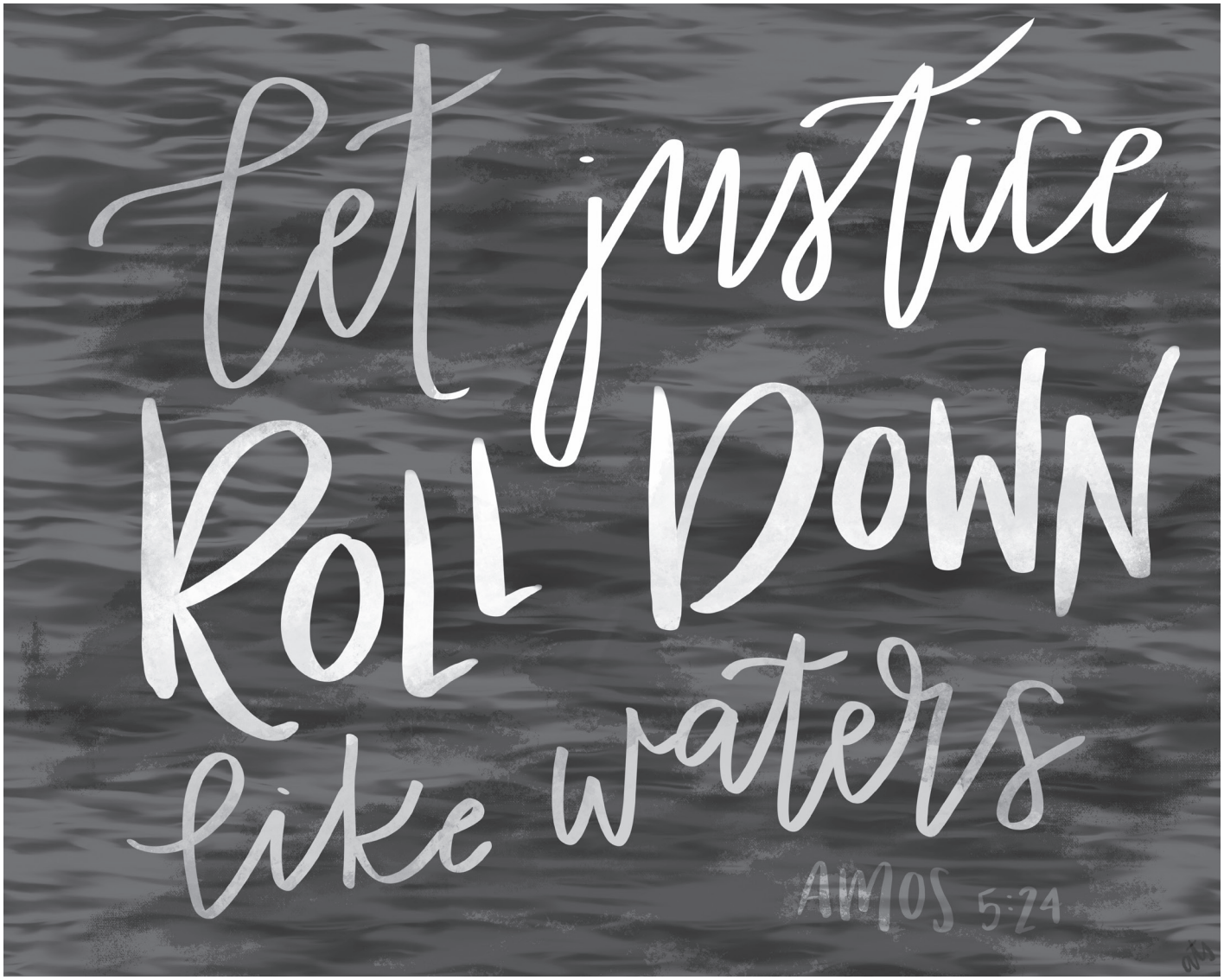
> If Luke is clear about anything with regard to God's agency in and through faithful human performances, it is that God is free. In the Gospel account, as in Acts, the surprise of God's announcement of good news is not orchestrated or expected. It is experienced as interruptive, discomfiting grace. Human responses to this good news look less like a road map and more like an embodied response to a living relationship (p. 96).

As preachers, like Mary we are called to so much and so little—overshadowed and exposed, called to be the womb-bearing Word, filling up and being emptied out. Maybe as a preacher you've stood in front of your bathroom mirror on a Sunday morning and pleaded in prayer, "Please, God, let one person be transformed in your love and mercy—just one. Please."

In reading *The Overshadowed Preacher*, bring your highlighter and be prepared to annotate and discover a new richness about the Spirit's role in preaching—to be overshadowed and invited deeply into Scripture. Having read this text, my intention is to be like that two-year-old who discovered on a walk something radically new that was always there. For a companion piece for *The Overshadowed Preacher*, do not miss Neal's *Blessed: Monologues for Mary*.[1]

Note

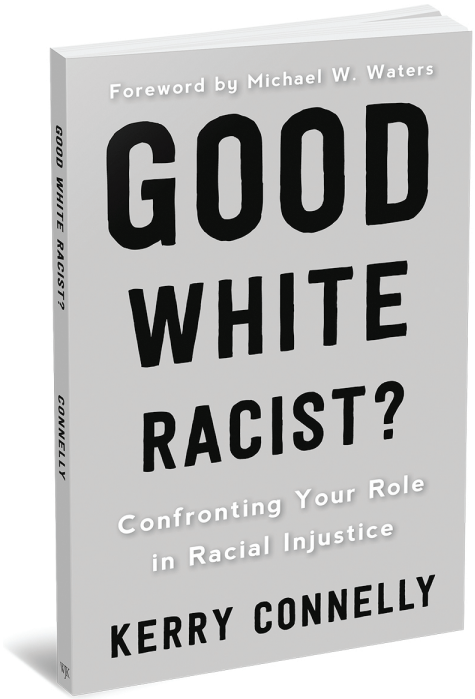
1 Jerusha Matsen Neal, *Blessed: Monologues for Mary*, Art for Faith's Sake (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).



Anna Strickland

"A no-nonsence call to action for all those willing to confront their complicity, *Good White Racist?* promises 'This is going to be hard, and you are going to be uncomfortable. but it will be worth it.'"

—FOREWORD REVIEWS



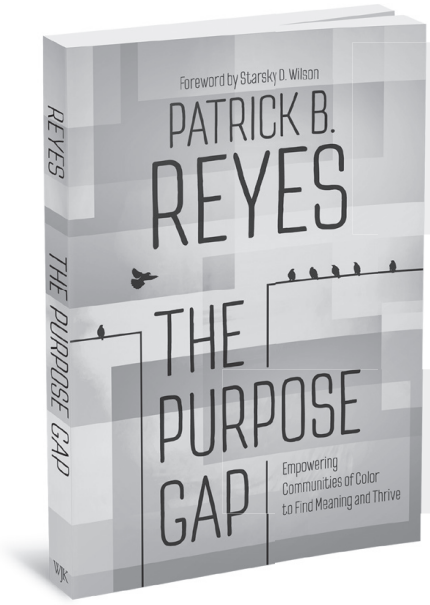
**\ good · white · racist ** *noun*

1. A well-intentioned person of European descent who is nonetheless complicit in a culture of systemic racism

2. A white person who would rather stay comfortable than do the work of antiracism

In *Good White Racist?*, Kerry Connelly exposes the ways white people participate in, benefit from, and unknowingly perpetuate racism—despite their best "good person" intentions. *Good White Racist?* unpacks the systems that maintain the status quo, keep white people comfortable and complicit, and perpetuate racism in the United States and elsewhere. Connelly shows us that even though it may not be our fault or choice to participate in a racist system, we all do, and it's our responsibility to do something about it.

Practical Guidance and Advice for Pastors, Organizational Leaders, and Educators!



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Far too much of the literature on leadership tells the story of heroic individuals creating their success by their own efforts. Such stories fail to recognize the structural obstacles to thriving faced by those in marginalized communities. If young people in these communities are to grow up to lives of purpose, others must help create the conditions to make that happen. *The Purpose Gap* offers both inspiration and practical guidance for how to do that. It offers advice on creating safe space for failure, nurturing networks that support young people of color, and professional guidance for how to implement these strategies in one's congregation, school, or community organization.

WJK Westminster John Knox Press
1.800.523.1631 • www.wjkbooks.com

Call to Worship

Volume 55.2
Dismantling Racism in Worship

PDS 21162-21-002
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