

# A Practical Theology for Racial Harmony

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Over the past decade or more, with the emergence of Promise Keepers, much has been said and written concerning the issue and need for racial harmony. Although not all of this material is of equal value, it is clear that the church has been awakened by an issue that has plagued her for decades.

## Definitions

It seems fitting to begin by defining some key terms. I prefer to use the term *racial harmony* over *racial diversity* or *racial reconciliation* because of what they convey. *Racial reconciliation*, while a useful term, assumes realities that were not necessarily so. It assumes that the pursuit of unity among Blacks and Whites, for example, is based on a prior relationship that was defined by unity but was fractured by various incidents and now needs to be restored. This, as I understand the history of America, is not the case. While peoples in other nations may have shared a unity among white and dark skinned people, in America these relationships have been fraught with tensions from the very beginning. This is not to suggest that some relationships did not transcend this tension, but such were not the norm. Thus, reconciliation is a useful term if one is talking about restoration, but it is not the ideal term in this case.

The term *racial diversity*, though more helpful than racial reconciliation, is also limited in its usefulness. Racial diversity speaks to visual representation, but does not reach the core of what the scriptures

call us to pursue in this area. Diversity is good, but we should never rest on the fact that we have different cultures or colors within our churches; we must seek after and pray for more. In fact, to speak of racial harmony as racial diversity undermines the biblical realities of unity. People in such situations begin to think that biblical unity is happening when in fact, it may be illusory. When I walk into a church it is a wonderful thing to see many peoples worshipping together. This is not the end goal, however. There is something deeper to which we are called; it must go beyond the visual to the heart. This is where racial harmony differs from racial reconciliation and racial diversity.

Some who see racial harmony in terms of racial diversity have argued that the world is doing better than the church. Dwight Perry, from whom I have learned much on this issue of racial relations within the church, stated,

Ironically, this is one area where the culture is doing better than the church.... Most white people are beginning to be aware of the huge number of inventions African Americans have given America, and Spanish is used in advertising billboards in many parts of the country. Consumer products are likely to carry a picture of a black family, or a Chinese person, or people of several races, and white people still buy them. But in the church, the fear of color still keeps most sermons, promotional materials and publications safely white, unless they're specifically intended to appeal to people of color.<sup>1</sup>

In many ways I concur with what Dr. Perry writes, but I am concerned that we do not use the criteria Perry speaks of as the measurement of how and why the world is doing better than the church. If simple diversity and promotional materials displaying various cultures is the goal, then perhaps he is correct, but that is not the goal. I would not be content with a church that held up pictures of different people groups and cultures as a show of commitment to racial harmony if, at the same time, the core of the matter—the heart—remains unaffected.

*Racial harmony* is the intermingling of all that is right, true, and biblical within various cultures for a fuller expression of the glory of God in the church and in the world. It has as its standard, the sharing of cultures for a fuller view of the beauty of God and thus is different than simple diversity. It has as its chief end and design, the glory of God, which makes it different from any secular institution. In this way, the church is not behind the world, but poised and positioned to demonstrate to the world the true intention of diversity, namely, harmony that is rooted in the person of Christ.

Racism, inside and outside the church, is alive and well. That is a strong statement to make in times when it would seem there are all kinds of advantages and opportunities for peoples of color, as well as few acts of violence against a person due to his color or culture. Part of the oddity with racism today is the varying ways in which people of different cultures (and even within the same culture) understand it. This is why we must work and labor hard to understand terms and phrases for more effective communication and, in this case of racism, seek to aide the Christian community in its fight against

it. We cannot argue against something we do not understand.

I agree with Thomas Sowell who stated that the original meaning of the term racism—discrimination on the basis of race—is perhaps lost. So many have used the term as the proverbial “race card,” and others have simply let the meaning go so as to avoid any discussion about it. It is easy to reject a meaning of a term when the meaning implicates you in the crime it defines. Some, who have the notion that racism consists simply of men in hooded sheets, crosses burning in yards, lynching, segregated neighborhoods, and so on, are quick to denounce any existence of racism since these things do not dominate society. But is this an adequate understanding of racism, even in the past? That is, was racism driven by these actions or were these actions precipitated by something else? The latter is the case.

The underlying notion of racism is the belief in the inferiority of others. This belief played, and continues to play, itself out in all manners of exclusion. I use the word *exclusion* intentionally. As D. A. Carson says, racism is all patterns of exclusion of others grounded in race or ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

Carson derives this definition from Miroslav Volf who chooses the word *exclusion* in an attempt to circumvent the tensions the term *racism* can conjure up.<sup>3</sup> Carson, helped by Volf, treats racism as an arm of exclusion and not the definition of it. Carson’s understanding is helpful because it eliminates the notion that racism is simply overt actions against others. This view highlights the fact that racism involves covert actions as well. Hence he calls it, “all patterns of exclusion.” But what is meant by exclusion? Volf dissects exclusion into three aspects: exclusion by assimilation, exclusion by domination,

and exclusion by abandonment.<sup>4</sup>

What is meant by *exclusion by assimilation* is that anyone of another culture or color is welcome to come into your life or church as long as they check what they are at the door. This is not openly stated in most institutions, but people who are different from the majority in many cases will feel such tension. This is, from my vantage point, a predominant feeling among peoples of color, mostly African Americans, who work or worship in a predominantly White setting. The reality is that structural issues make this an aspect of exclusion, whether a church knows it or not. There is, perhaps, no malice nor intentionality in such situations, but they are forms of exclusion, nonetheless.

Then there is *exclusion by domination*. This is an overt form of exclusion, driven by assumptions and prejudices against certain groups or individuals, that is exercised as if such assumptions and prejudices do not exist. For example, when people are levied the status of being inferior (inferiority being a culturally subjective reality) they are then excluded in many ways and in many sectors of society. One might survey the vast differences in the area of education between “majority” and “minority” cultures (educational facilities, materials, standards for teachers, academic requirements for students, and so on) and witness this form of exclusion in America.

There is the notion that we no longer live in the kind of society in which race can play a factor in determining position, status, employment, educational opportunities, and so forth, but such is not the case. These inequities do still exist. “White flight” is still a phenomenon and is the result of people saying, “I will not live in a neighborhood that is on its way down,

economically,” when actually they view it as a place into which many peoples of color are moving. The underlying precept of exclusion by domination is that certain people have their place and they must stay in it, and if they do not we will do whatever is necessary to keep them there by force or by flight.

By “force,” I am thinking of the use of politics as a tool for defining various peoples and groups, thereby maintaining a privileged status for some and an inferior status for others. By “flight” I mean the economic realities of “white flight,” namely that when a person moves from a neighborhood, so do their tax dollars thus creating certain economic problems. No doubt, this in no way removes responsibility from those who remain in such declining neighborhoods and communities, but it is a reality that needs to be acknowledged and reckoned with and which perpetuates exclusion by domination.

Finally there is *exclusion by abandonment*. This kind of exclusion simply involves recognition of a need and then turning the other way. How many churches are located in areas with urban poverty, lack of education for many peoples of color, and various social needs—and simply look the other way? How many of our congregations send money to churches across the world, while we intentionally blind ourselves to the needs of minority churches that are suffering financially in our own neighborhoods? At its essence, exclusion means placing a low value on things, people, or institutions. Thus, when we recognize the needs of minority churches in our neighborhoods but look the other way, we are placing little or no value on these congregations.

Where exclusion is grounded in race,

it is racism. The myth of exclusion is that Blacks cannot operate this way. However, we can, have, and do operate in such ways; the only difference being that we can do it overtly, and it is acceptable, whereas the opposite is the case for our White brothers and friends. On this basis, then, I conclude that all of humanity, regardless of color, history, and so forth, can be and can act in racist ways. Some African Americans would disagree, seeing racism as prejudice plus power. The problem with this definition is that it assumes that power is definable in every respect.

There are institutions that are wholly Black owned and operated that possess a great deal of power to exclude on the basis of race. This is true with many other peoples of color in America. This is not a denial of the fact that racism can be exerted by the powerful, but a redefinition of the term and concept of power.

How does all of this relate to racial harmony? At our church we have what we call “fresh initiatives.” Fresh initiative number three states,

Against the rising spirit of indifference, alienation and hostility in our land we will embrace the supremacy of God’s love to take new steps personally and corporately toward racial reconciliation,<sup>5</sup> expressed visibly in our community and in our church.

The call to racial harmony, as we see it, is the call to recognize two things: that such a pursuit is the consistent application of scripture; and that we must aid the church in fighting against the rising tides of discrimination and racism in the culture it has inherited from history. The overarching aim is not to be social, but biblical in dissecting the problem and struggles, and to offer principles that can guide the church as she makes a necessary

impact in this area of life.

## **Theological Reflection and Racial Harmony**

It would appear that one difficulty in addressing this issue is that we talk about it from a purely social standpoint and never get to the heart of biblical and theological reflection. If not that extreme, we go to another extreme in which the issue becomes of chief importance and what is lost is the overwhelming superiority of the glory of God in everything, of which racial harmony is a subset. Both extremes should be avoided. What I am eager to attempt in this article, at Bethlehem Baptist Church, and in my life is to make sense of this issue from a biblical perspective, framing it in a theological matrix from which it can be applied to various contexts.

I am Calvinistic by heart and persuasion and am convinced that the gospel shines no more beautifully than through this grid. Ever since I was awakened to the realities of the Reformed understanding of the scriptures, I have been fueled more than ever to talk and speak about the issue of racial harmony. What is inconceivable to me is that many who claim to embrace this theology would not see a pursuit of racial harmony as an implication of it. For a long time I sat in Reformed circles where much of the world was excluded. As an African American who loved these doctrines and longed for other African Americans to know and love them as well, I and others found ourselves in a kind of theological-cultural quandary. We were Black, yet we were initially seeing Reformed theology taught in predominantly all-White settings that displayed no intentions of reaching outside of themselves.<sup>6</sup> This parochialism troubled

me because I am convinced that when Reformed theology captures a heart, the result should be humility that counters both feelings of prideful superiority and self-deprecating inferiority in relation to other cultures. Several aspects of this theology lead me to this conclusion, namely, the precepts of Reformed theology, the practicalities of the cross of Christ, the primacy of the glory of God, and the principle of spiritual warfare. Let us now look at each of these in turn.

### *Precepts of Reformed Theology*

My aim at this point is not to discuss exhaustively the ramifications of Reformed theology for racial harmony, but only to highlight three fundamental aspects: the sovereignty of God, the nature of salvation, and the nature of sin.

#### *The Sovereignty of God*

At the heart of Reformed theology is the all-encompassing sovereignty of God. While many understand this doctrine as it relates to salvation, in reality it relates not merely to how one is saved, but to the whole matrix by which all of life is to be understood and lived. “God is in control” is the essence of the sovereignty of God. “In control of what?” some might ask. Everything! He is in control over who is Black, who is White, who is Asian, and so forth; in control over the boundaries of where cultures and peoples will reside (Acts 17:24); in control of cultures and the various ways they express praise and worship and honor to Him; and, yes, in control over who is saved. Racial prejudice of any kind or form is inconsistent with the reality that the diversity of cultures and races is the express intent and design of the sovereign Creator of all things. Practically speaking, the God who has made one

culture or color did not make a mistake when He made each one different from another culture or color. We must accept racial diversity as the plan of God.

#### *The Nature of Salvation*

In addition to the sovereignty of God, we now consider the issue of salvation. The scriptures teach that God saves man, not on the basis of merit, but on the basis of His grace and good pleasure. This truth undermines any idea of worth or merit from God on the basis of color or ethnicity. That God saves a man by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, precludes appealing to anything beyond mercy. The foundation of slavery in this country was the belief in the inferiority of Africans. It was not simply inferiority of education and culture, but inferiority as humans. Can any man say that another creature in the image of God is inherently inferior? How can a man who claims a theology of salvation that did not involve anything within himself and that was achieved by external realities, namely, God’s grace alone, suppose himself, due to culture or race, to be superior? The doctrine of election denies any sense of superiority, cultural or otherwise, that holds other human beings, regardless of where they are in life and what they believe, as inherently inferior.

#### *The Nature of Sin*

Another tenet of Reformed theology that militates against racial division is the doctrine of total depravity. This doctrine teaches that all people are born sinners and pursue everything that is contrary to a holy God. “All” in Romans 3:23 means all of every hue, shade, and culture. There is no exception to “all.” If this is understood, believed, embraced, and heart-felt,



there remains no room to see one another as anything less than what we are—sinners. In a series of seven teachings given on this topic at Bethlehem Baptist Church, John Piper states that a biblical understanding of sin is both the cause and the remedy of racial pride. It is the cause of racial pride because to believe that one is superior based on race is sin. There is not one culture that trumps another, so ethnocentrism is the result of sin, not enlightenment. Sin is also the remedy since when individuals understand the nature of depravity—that all lay bare before God and are equally sinful in Adam—they are relieved of notions of ignorance and pride and, by the grace of God, come to see the beauty of God in all cultures.

### *The Practicalities of the Cross of Christ*

When I think about the centrality of the cross on this issue, two biblical texts come to mind that demonstrate this succinctly. The first is the Tower of Babel incident in Genesis 11. Here you have the scattering of the nations, as a result of their attempts to make a name for themselves and, as it were, ascend to God. The result was God giving them the proverbial boot and, consequently, various nations and races emerged. What is significant about this *scattering* is where we see the nations *re-gathered*, namely, at Pentecost.

I will not go into details concerning this passage except to say that the nations that were scattered due to their sin are now gathered, but not because of social policies or political agendas. Central to their gathering is the message of the cross. Unity out of diversity comes through the cross and the practical implications of it to our daily living.

The second text is Ephesians 2. That

the cross is central to our unity within the church is readily seen when Paul writes,

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hand—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility (Eph 2:11-16).<sup>7</sup>

There is much within these verses deserving of explication, however let me state the principle that relates to our discussion. The cross of Christ was the means by which God would take the historical hostility between Jew and Gentile (which may have been manifold, i.e., religious, cultural, etc.) and abolish it, making what was two, one. While principally the hostility mentioned in the text is the law-covenant, it is possible to draw an indirect implication to anything that drives a wedge between the people of God, given our Lord’s reconciling work which has removed the barrier of sin and the law and constituted God’s elect from every tribe, people, and nation as the one people of God—the church. While such talk may be commonplace to many, it is a fact that needs desperately to be trumpeted because it demonstrates that the calls for racial harmony are calls for the logical, relational implication of

cross-bearing people. That is, the cosmic harmony, that of being made right with God, that the cross achieves for those who trust Christ by faith is the foundation for harmony within the church, including racial harmony.

The challenge before us as Christians is to keep our view of race relations in society and the church cross-centered. Let me propose three reasons why this is so. First, *people need to be compelled, not by persuasive speech, but by the Word of God and its implications*. In his book *A Dream Deferred*, Shelby Steele writes, “[O]ften people do not listen as much for the truth as for the necessity that will hold them accountable to the truth.”<sup>8</sup> While Steele writes from a secular perspective, there is truth in the statement that applies to our discussion. The dialogue about racial harmony must seek to be compelling, not simply on the basis of stating the facts of division and the need for unity, but by showing how and why the cross makes such harmony a non-negotiable for all who are Christians.

Very few would deny the call for unity in the Bible and the hypocrisy of division, yet in all the articulation and agreement many remain action-less. One of the reasons for this is that they do not feel compelled at the deepest level, the heart, by the Word of God—the very thing that will cut to the heart. We must talk about history and its present psychological remnants; we must discuss the realities of injustice and its varying social and political implications and be involved in the processes of change. Yet, in the end, we must not trust in these things alone, nor rely on them as necessities for change. We must, ultimately, compel others by the Word of God.

Second, *we must, with redeemed human-*

*ity, assume the ability to love beyond earthly measures*. This kind of thinking can only happen when we are cross-centered in our worldview. It is a vision of the cross, and the greatness of God expressed in it, that grants to all people the power to love and live in a way that transcends the evils done to them. In *The Content of our Character*,<sup>9</sup> Steele notes that the differing views of America of Malcom X and Martin Luther King Jr. rested not so much in their speech, though that was a part of it. Rather, according to Steele, the real difference was this—King assumed White innocence while Malcom X did not. King assumed that the Whites who were acting in evil ways possessed an ability to love beyond what they were demonstrating. While I disagree with King’s assessment of what man is able to achieve out of his own heart, the principle is very instructive.

When brothers and sisters within the church act in ways that are demeaning or say things that might betray hints of prejudice or racism we must, in view of the cross, assume their ability to love beyond what they are demonstrating. That is, we must have hope that the Christ who is within them, and the Holy Spirit who convicts and transforms them, is able to create within them an ability to love beyond earthly, sensual, and selfish measures. This fact, however, must be a governor of our own heart. As my brother prays for God to be working in me a heart and demeanor of godly love, he must also pray that God would be doing the same within himself. If you are offended by a brother, turn away from that offense in unresolved anger, and begin to discuss with others how wrong that person was to say or do such a thing to you, you demonstrate a heart that is akin to the one

that has offended you. If you would have men and women be changed in this area of racism and behave like people of the cross, you must model what you desire others to be.

A third reason why cross-centered thinking on racial harmony is necessary is because *the issues of justice and forgiveness are chiefly cross-issues*. What this implies is that the societal factors that we all experience in life are real and in some way shape our understanding of reality. Thus, racial harmony within the church cannot be devoid of addressing the experiences, for example, of African Americans in larger society. A church desiring that God would increase the number of Blacks within its congregation, for instance, must give thought and effort to addressing issues of social justice and injustice. Practically speaking, if they do not, they will have no credibility; appeals to attend church will be suspect because of the lack of addressing the “real” needs.

### ***The Primacy of the Glory of God***

In Ephesians 3:8-10, Paul states,

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

At the heart of Paul’s ministry was the sweet burden of declaring the mystery of God which, as stated earlier, was that God would make one people out of two. More than this, Paul says that he was given the grace to explain not simply the mystery but to “bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery.” This plan,

unfolded, was to demonstrate the manifold wisdom of God.

The word “manifold” is interesting and key to understanding the overwhelming design of the church of Jesus Christ. Chiefly, the phrase “manifold wisdom” is an expression of the varied ways in which God achieves His purpose of establishing the church. Practically speaking, none of us came to know the Lord in the same way, so the variety of testimonies of God’s saving grace demonstrates the varied wisdom of God. God’s wisdom is not varied in the sense of being disconnected, but in the sense of being manifested in differing ways for one ultimate design and purpose.

Manifold wisdom also conveys the idea of multi-colored. Peter O’Brien comments that the phrase was “poetic in origin, referring to an intricately embroidered pattern of ‘many-coloured cloaks’ or the manifold hues of ‘a garland of flowers’.... In our present context, however, this variegated wisdom has particular reference to God’s richly diverse ways of working which led to a multiracial, multi-cultural community being united as fellow-members in the body of Christ.”<sup>10</sup> The divine intent was for the church to be a re-created body of peoples from every nation displaying His wisdom and power before the host of principalities and powers. Yet, following the premise that all is penultimate and the glory of God is ultimate, there is a further sequence to the reasoning of Paul. The multicolored church is not the end of the mystery. Paul elaborates, “to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:21).

The glory of God has always had a visual element to it. One could point to the Ark of the Covenant as an example in



the Old Testament. In the New Testament the glory of God rests on the established and re-created people of God known as the church. Paul explains in Ephesians 1-3 the great design of God in salvation and ends his didactic praise by stating that the church was created for one purpose and one design—to be the place where the glory of God rested and was expressed throughout all the world. This is basic theology. Yet, what is profound here is the description of the church in verse 10, namely the multicolored church. The glory of God rests in the church that is reflective of His intended design. One might suggest that the church here represents the reality of the universal church. This is true, but if we only see the church in such static forms we deny the reality that every local church is to be a microcosm of the macro church. God's design and intentions for the universal church must be the pursued design and intentions of every local church.

The implication here is weighty and indicting. How much have we forfeited an intensified expression of God's glory simply by denying the pursuit of racial harmony? The glory of God rests on the multicolored church, and a significant apologetic to the neighborhoods in which we minister, and indeed to the surrounding secular, political factions which seek to legislate unity, is a church that demonstrates the true unity in Christ. What they miss, with their good intentions, is the heart-changing factor of the gospel. The world desperately needs for us to be what we are in Christ—one, in every conceivable way. Unfolded before us in Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians is this overarching reality of the church.

### *The Principle of Spiritual Warfare*

If racial harmony is an element central to the practical realities of the message of the cross and if the glory of God, in a fuller expression, rests on this harmony, then it stands to reason why such relational dynamics are seemingly impossible to reach. With so much at stake in the pursuit of racial harmony we should not be surprised that such tensions are the result of spiritual warfare. Whatever one believes about spiritual warfare, we all believe that Satan is at work opposing all that honors God and threatening his influence or power.

It is easy to see things such as racial slurs and accusations of racism as coming from the enemy of our souls. Yet, what about the inability to stay at the work, the hard work, of building such relationships? What about turning away from conversations on racial issues that involve and perhaps will provoke tensions and feelings of discomfort? What about the fear of speaking out on an issue that might result in isolation from a particular group? All of this, in seminal form, is a representation of Satan getting the victory in this area within the church. I have heard many things about racial harmony and what makes it difficult, but I had never heard of this dynamic of spiritual warfare. What has prompted me to see this is a concluding point Paul made in Ephesians.

Ephesians is a letter that has had a significant impact on my life. It was the book that revealed to me the doctrine of election and opened my eyes some thirteen years ago to the need to work and pray hard for unity within the church. Chapters 1-3 deal with God's salvation of his people, which includes the Gentiles; chapters 4-6 discuss the practical applications of that salvation for the church. Chapter 4 begins

with a call to work that is worthy of our Christian calling, and it summons us to strive to maintain the unity of the body established by Christ. The unity of the church is positional and practical. Positionally, we are unified in Christ (chapters 1-3); practically, we must fight to maintain unity (chapters 4-6). Recognizing this reality in the entire letter of Ephesians led me to observe something about chapter 6 that I had never noticed before.

In chapter 6, Paul calls us to warfare in light of the realities that he has unpacked in the previous chapters (especially 4-6). The practical maintenance of unity will involve warfare, since it is the positional and practical design and intention of God in Christ. The devil will be at work to undermine practically that which is positionally true about us and what God calls us practically to be. This is why racial tensions are what they are even in the church, and this is why you and I have a difficult time giving our lives for it. It is not simply a result of fear, though this may indeed be true of some, as much as it is a result of warfare. Since we have not recognized it as such, we have not been able to begin practically the process of fighting against it. What are we to fight against? Paul tells us of our three foes: the world, the flesh, and the devil.<sup>11</sup>

The *world* is representative of the systems and structures that perpetuate evil. The word does not refer to the inhabitants of the world, but the social, philosophical, and political systems that make up the fabric of society, which offer a vision of reality that opposes the ways and will of God. The opposition is not static, but it dynamically works on us to conform us to live out the ethics of this world. The hymn asks the question, "Is this world a friend of grace to help me on to God?" The

answer is obvious.

A second foe is the *flesh*. Flesh is representative of that sinful disposition that all possess at birth, because of the sin of Adam. It is the nature within that opposes God and promotes sinful desires and influences that must daily be battled. This is a significant foe because it shows us that our sin is not "outside" of us. That is, our sin is not from merely external promptings, rather it comes from within (I once heard a man say that the enemy is "in-a-me"). My struggles with race and my tensions surrounding it must first be dealt with in my own heart before I even think about considering another source to be the cause.

The last foe is the *devil*. This needs no detailed explanation. He is God's enemy and therefore our enemy; that order is important. Satan opposes us, not because there is inherent value in us, but he opposes those who seek the honor and glory of God in Christ. He opposes, in this context, those who seek to promote unity among the body of Christ and who seek to model love and forgiveness.

Much of what we read on this issue, Christian and otherwise, appears to have an inclination toward the social dimension. That is, Christians diagnose the problem of racial division in the church in the same way a secular person diagnoses it within the culture; namely, it is because of some institution, some law, some perpetual wrong that historically and presently has not been set right. I would agree that such things exist and are problematic, but they are merely symptoms of a deeper problem and, as I believe the scriptures show, elements of spiritual warfare. This is why the church must lead the charge in demonstrating what true unity is and how the outcome of such unity can influ-

ence society, not the other way around. The world cannot get to the core of the problem; we, with the truth, can.

How can we lead the charge in fighting this evil of racial division in the church and, by implication, in society? If the world, the flesh, and the devil are the means of opposition, we must strategically fight against them. In his book, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace*,<sup>12</sup> Harvie Conn insightfully contrasts these three foes with three graces: the body, the Spirit, and the Word.

The world is opposed by the grace of the body. The role of the local church is not only to be a conduit of the grace of God through the means of preaching and other means of grace, but in dispensing such graces, there should also exist the weekly sharpening that is a sure result when such things are done with biblical faithfulness. This is a significant problem within some seeker-driven churches where the aim is not to challenge, per se, as much as to place a premium on comfort and acceptance. This is not honoring to God and, thus, not helpful to people. If your fellowship allows you to persist in sin, this is not the kind of fellowship God designed. The kind of fellowship that God designed is best expressed in Hebrews 3:12-13:

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Racial division can be deceiving because we exist in a racially divided society, "a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities and social relationships."<sup>13</sup> When we worship in

settings where our cultural and prejudicial influences are not challenged in the preaching and in body life, we are on a slippery path to being deceived, unless someone has the heart and boldness to challenge our assumptions. One way of dismantling such notions is for European Americans to expose and dismiss European demagogues and for African Americans to expose and dismiss African American demagogues.<sup>14</sup> This does not mean that confrontation cannot and should not happen across cultural lines, but it is to reflect the reality that confrontation on racial issues produces tension and bitterness, which if delivered across cultural lines, is far more offensive. Hence, if we were to look at our engagement in this area in the form of concentric circles the first circle would be my own heart, the second would be my own culture, and third would be those of other cultures. If we desire for our church to be a reflection of the universal church, this kind of same-culture confrontation that Carson speaks about has to be a significant part of the process.

The flesh is opposed by the grace of the Holy Spirit. I am convinced that we are products, in some respects, of our culture. For example, in North America, when we enter the church from a Western, American mindset, it is no doubt true that our culture influences how we do what we do and the people we choose to be around. Indeed, it is an unusual person who can live in a particular culture and not be affected by its tugs and pulls. The point of being a Christian is not to act as though we are unaffected, but to know our weaknesses and then ask God, through the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit, to sanctify us so that we reflect the likeness of Christ in every way. Paul makes a stun-

ning point in Galatians 5:16:

But I say, walk in the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

Racial division is a product of living our fleshly desires, and Paul states that the Spirit of God is the means by which we are marked out more and more from the world to be a picture of Christ and a lover of the entire body of Christ. The flesh is against everything godly and, without life lived under the influence of the Holy Spirit, division will exist.

Finally, the devil is opposed by the grace of the Word. We need look no further than Matthew 4 and the temptation of Christ. In every temptation that Satan hurled at Christ, he was met with a word from the Word. If Christ dealt with temptation this way, we must also deal with every temptation to be bitter, prejudicial, and slanderous.

Psalms 1 is another passage that indicates this truth. It presents us with a beautiful picture of the blessed man. It is important to note that the blessed man is not fundamentally one who “walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers” (v. 1). In truth, these are merely reflections of something deeper; they are effects of another cause, namely that the blessed man’s “delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night” (v. 2). The man is blessed not because he avoided sin, but because his delight is first in the law of the Lord which moved him to avoid sin. Delighting in the Word of the Lord is the means by which sin is checked before it enters, and

the remnants of indwelling sin are constantly killed, because there is a greater joy and affection with which sin cannot compete. The way to fight the onslaughts of the enemy is continually to place daggers and arrows in our backpacks so that when he comes, he is met with the force of the Word and the fiery darts are extinguished.

### Points of Application

So what are we to make of all of this? How can such theology be fleshed out in the context of the local church and in individual lives and relationships? I am convinced that the following “power principles” or points of application will promote racial harmony in both our individual relationships as well as in the church.

### Love

Love is not simply the message, “Just love one another.” The dimensions of love in the scriptures far exceed the trite and often superficial meaning it is given in the world and even, sadly, within the church. The Bible speaks of love in loftier terms. Ephesians 5:1-2 says, “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

The word “imitator” is striking. It is the Greek word *mimētēs*, from which we get our English word “mimic.” Paul’s exhortation, indeed command, is that those who have been adopted into the family of God by grace through faith in the cross work of our elder brother, Christ, begin to bear resemblance to the family by demonstrating the essential and distinguishing mark—love. Thus, we, as both individuals and the church, are called to

mimic God by loving like Christ. The two are virtually synonymous; imitating God is to love like the God-man loved, giving himself for the good of his brothers for something far greater than his comfort and ease. Indeed, something greater than our good compelled our Lord Jesus Christ: the glory of the Father. In this important sense, God's saving designs for us in terms of redemption and restoration are never ultimate but only penultimate. What ultimately concerns our great God is the glorifying of his own name in our salvation.<sup>15</sup>

But with that said, what is compelling in these verses is the principle that, in God's work of salvation for us, unity necessitates death. Our unity with God, or our being made right with him, necessitated the death of Christ on our behalf because of our sin. The death of Christ for us was not rooted in our loveliness. Romans 5 tells us that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners and without any desire to please him. Why is this important to stress? Because, by implication, it teaches us that racial harmony will not happen where there is not first death—death to self. Paul's command to us is that we love in the same way, and, for example, we see this same emphasis in Christ's call for this kind of love in Luke 6:27, 32, 35:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.... If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.... But love your enemies...and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Our Lord calls us to love the unlovely because God does, and loving in such a way marks us as sons, imitators, of the

Most High. What is radical in this command of Christ is the counter-cultural element in it. Today, love means first being loved and then loving the other person. But our Lord says that the believer's standard for love is the opposite. In essence, then, in order for the love of Christ to be manifest truly, conflict must be present. One could rightly assert that you need unlovely people in order to demonstrate the love of Christ to the world. Jesus loved us while we were his enemies, and now he calls us to love, not when people first become our friends, but when others hurl devaluing remarks at us. In these situations, we must view them as opportunities given by God to demonstrate to the world the worth and value of the love of Christ poured out into our hearts by letting it overflow in kindness and love beyond human degree. If I did not believe this I would have given up long ago, as would others who have fought long battles the likes of which I will probably never face. For example, I am convinced that Martin Luther King Jr. understood this truth, and that is why, even in the heat of battle, he was resolutely non-violent. Not because non-violence was powerful in itself, but because it was a demonstration of being held by a power that transcended comfort, physical pain, slander, accusation, and retribution. Racial tension, then, should not simply be seen as a threat to the purity of the church, but should be embraced as a God-ordained opportunity to be God-like. Loving the unlovely and loving when it hurts—that is the message of the cross.

To love this way means to lay down your life for the sake of unity; it demands that we see the manifestation of the glory of God as the purpose of our being and recognize that loving our brothers and sisters from every culture is the true apolo-



getic of the reality of our personal faith in Christ (John 13:34-35; 1 John 3:11ff).

### ***Intentionality***

In this regard, I recall two incidents that occurred when I was playing golf in Florida a few years ago. The first incident was when I joined a group of three who were ready to begin their round. We exchanged a few pleasantries when we began, but it was not until somewhere around the thirteenth hole that my group decided to let me in on their conversation! Thirteen holes passed before anyone said anything to me, or I to them! However the second incident was different. Once again, I joined in with two men who were beginning a round, but this time, by the end of the first hole, any observer would have thought that we were the best of friends, though we had just met. What was the difference? These examples illustrate a truth that I learned over ten years ago from a book by Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein called *Breaking Down Walls*,<sup>16</sup> namely, that racial harmony involves “intentionality.” In the first example, the men I joined were all White; the second group was all African American. In the first incident it was not until someone took the initiative that bridges were made and conversation took place. Once again, this reminded me that cross-cultural relationships do not simply happen. To bring two different groups together, there needs to be intentionality.

Another way of thinking about this is to see intentionality as incarnational. The greatest example of evangelism is the incarnation of Christ. In the incarnation God walks among men, suffers as a man, feels the infirmities of a man, and is tempted as a man, yet without sin. It is precisely his coming to be like us and

among us that enables him to be, in the words of the writer to the Hebrews, a suitable savior (Heb 2:17-18). God could have stayed in heaven and simply loved us from a distance, but his design was to reconcile us to himself, which could not happen without sin being dealt with and man, the sinner, being put to death. God intentionally became man to save men. In an analogous way, you and I must do likewise if harmony is to happen. Thus, be intentional about whom you invite to dinner, with whom you play golf, and with whom you vacation. This is a must if racial harmony is to occur.

Furthermore, another way intentionality is demonstrated is by actively discussing the issues of race. It is simply a myth that we can develop deep relationships by avoiding issues that are deeply divisive. We cannot establish God-honoring cross-cultural relationships if we never address uncontested assumptions and prejudices. Part of being intentional is not only educating but also being educated. I frequently encourage some of my White friends to ask me questions about anything related to the Black community so that I can help them understand whether what they believe is accurate or a misconception. Consequently, as our church begins a Spanish-speaking ministry, I am asking our Latino members and regular attenders to help me understand their cultures so that I will not offend them or reveal my ignorance of their culture. Thus, at its heart, “intentionality” entails that we act and communicate with a purpose. It does not imply that we only talk about issues that are “safe,” supposing that safety is a means to growth. If relationships of depth are to be found, we must allow the hard questions to be asked which will encourage growth in

understanding another culture.

### *Going without Going*

As already stated, it is unwise to think that our culture, with all of its stereotypical statements about people and cultures, does not negatively influence us. For Christians it is even more dangerous to think that such views do not come into play in the kinds of churches we seek to establish and even the churches we choose to join. The oft-stated comment that the eleven o'clock hour on Sunday morning is probably the most segregated hour in America is true, but why? The reason, as one man has commented, is that it is only during this hour that we get to choose the kind of people whom we want to be with. While this may be an overly reductionistic reason, it is, nonetheless, telling and may betray more truth than most are willing to accept. For instance, D. A. Carson writes,

[I]t is not too surprising that many African Americans would prefer to worship in African American churches, even while they may feel that the point of exclusion is entirely or almost entirely on the European-American side.<sup>17</sup>

This desire to stay within one's culture is not necessarily an inherent evil when it involves the desire to be authentically who we are and to preserve a sense of identity, which is honoring to the God who made us who and what we are. This raises the tension stated in the phrase "going without going." How does one stay where he is (cultural identity) and also go to another culture (Christian cultural identity) and stay sane! Miroslav Volf paints the quandary this way,

What we should turn away *from* seems clear: it is captivity to our own culture, coupled so often

with blind righteousness. But what should we turn *to*? How should we live as Christian communities today faced with the 'new tribalism' that is fracturing our societies, separating peoples and culture groups, and fomenting vicious conflicts? What should be the relation of the churches to the cultures they inhabit? The answer lies, I propose, in cultivating the proper relation between distance from the culture and belonging to it.<sup>18</sup>

*Captivity* and *blindness* are significant terms. Captivity defines what is true of most people, since many tend to have an unhealthy and often uncritical view of their own culture. When, however, there can be no criticism of one's own culture, there is captivity to it. Everything is governed and driven through this cultural grid, whether such a grid has defects or not. Blindness is both the cause of captivity and the result of it. Blindness to the defects of one's culture creates a superior view of it, and captivity to it births blindness to seeing it as it is, warts and all. This makes the call to "go" even more difficult since going implies breaking all the ties, emotional and otherwise, that keep us there.

Volf demonstrates this principle in the life of Abram. In Genesis 12 God called Abram to leave his home and culture to go to a place he would show him. When we read this account of Abram, we tend to focus on the extraordinary faith it must have taken to go to a place whose location was not known. While this is an example of great faith, this singular focus may cause us to miss a very real and natural tension that undoubtedly existed—the fear of leaving what was familiar for the unfamiliar. It was a call to leave family, friends, and the comfortable confines of one's native culture for the sake of something greater than culture alone

could achieve—the glory of God. Volf comments,

If he is to be a blessing he cannot stay; he must depart, cutting the ties that so profoundly defined him. The only guarantee that the venture will not make him wither away like an uprooted plant was the Word of God, the naked promise of the divine 'I' that inserted itself into his life so relentlessly and uncomfortably.<sup>19</sup>

Being a blessing demanded departing. It demanded loosing the ties (cultural) that had once defined him so that he could understand and embrace the plan of the One who called him. Though uncertain as to destination, he was not uncertain as to the One who led him. He departed because of the Word and faithfulness of the One who called, and our leaving is no different than that. If we are to be a blessing to the world, we must leave who we are culturally, so as to better embrace what is right, good, and biblical in other cultures for a fuller expression and experience of the glory of God in the church and the world.

This is what a pursuit of racial harmony will cost. It will cost leaving even those around you, for the sake of the glory of God and the joy of all nations. It will involve a change of allegiance from the culture to which you have been born to the culture of God, which embraces every culture.

The courage to break his cultural and familial ties and to abandon the gods of his ancestors (Joshua 24:2) out of allegiance to a God of all families and cultures was the original Abrahamic revolution. . . . To be a child of Abraham and Sarah and to respond to the call of their God means to make an exodus, to start a voyage, become a stranger. . . . Christians can never be first of all Asians or Americans . . . and

then Christians. At the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures. A response to a call from that God entails a rearrangement of a whole network of allegiances. As the call of Jesus' first disciples illustrates, 'the nets' (economy) and 'the father' (family) must be left behind (Mark 1:16-20). . . . Since Abraham is our ancestor, our faith is at odds with place.<sup>20</sup>

What makes the pursuit of racial harmony akin to the call of Abram is that while we know who has called us and we have the biblical text that shows us the reality, we do not know what to expect along the racial harmony road. Yet, the call of Abram is the call to all who believe in the seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you willing to leave privilege for the sake of the unity of the church? Will you leave and risk the ridicule and mocking that will come from those of your own culture? Will you risk being called a sell-out because your passion and desire is for the glory of God? This may not be your lot if you make a radical decision to follow the biblical call to the nations; but if it is, will you leave?

### ***Forget and Remember***

Some years ago I developed this idea of forget and remember for my own personal means of how to make sense of the issues that still drive wedges between brothers and sisters in Christ. The realities of history and present evils still loom and create tension, expressed and unexpressed, and affect the nature of unity within the body. In this concept I call for Blacks to forget and Whites to remember. Blacks are challenged to forget history and its atrocities, while Whites are called to acknowledge the psychological effects of history on both Blacks and Whites and begin to act

for justice.

When I say that African Americans must forget, what I am referring to is the reality that we must forget our past and the horrible atrocities of slavery in the sense that these issues should not govern and dictate our present relationships. I am not suggesting that we turn a deaf ear to slurs or continual acts of racism or injustice. Rather we must view our relationships, not through the lens of history, but through the lens of grace and forgiveness. I hasten to add that *forgetting*, is not used here in its cognitive sense but, again, as a call to view racial realities through the grid of God-like grace.

I say “God-like” grace because this kind of forgetting is descriptive of God as it relates to our own sin. Psalm 103:10-12 says,

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

God, more than anyone else, has the right to deal with us according to our sin, since our sin is a direct offense against Him. But what causes us to stand in awe of Him is that He acts in just the opposite way. On the basis of the merit of Christ and our faith in Him, God does not deal with us according to our sin, but He does the unthinkable: He works to remove it from us! O the beauty of sovereign grace! How deserving we are, outside of Christ, of death and hell. Yet our God does not simply cover our sins; he blots them out. If the God of the universe, holy and impeccable, can forgive unworthy, rightly condemned sinners, what is an offense to me?

This is what I am after when I speak of forgetting. I am seeking in my own heart, and humbly exhorting my other Black brothers and sisters in Christ, to be like God, to forgive when offended. My children know that they are Black, and I teach them of their own history and tell them of the horrors of slavery, racism, and the continued acts of evil today. Yet, we do not stop there. I am aggressively trying to teach my children (and our church) the radical nature of forgiveness. Forgetting is forgiving the most radical of offenses for the sake of the glory of God and the triumph of the gospel in my life.

The execution of this radical forgiveness does not depend on an apology but is granted, by the grace and help of God, in the heart before a word of apology is spoken.

Some have responded by saying that forgiveness by its nature must be given in response to an apology, but this is not altogether right. An example of one granting such forgiveness without apology is Christ Himself, as He hung upon the cross (Luke 23:34), while we were sinners (Romans 5:8). Not only did such an expression of love and forgiveness occur before my “apology” for sin, but also, theologically, I am compelled to believe that such an act of radical love and forgiveness is the foundation of my apology.

When I call White believers to remember, I mean they must realize and embrace the reality that such history was real and its effects are being felt even today. When a Black person begins to discuss the present realities of racism which confront him, Whites can begin to feel uneasy and often dismiss these events as simple misunderstandings, or immediately try to associate it with other people who

experience similar things. Whether this is done intentionally or unintentionally, what Whites must understand is that this response is perceived as an attitude of indifference.

One of the fears that Whites must address if they are to “remember” is that of being found out. Many run from conversations about race or simply dismiss any notion of racism for fear of possibly finding some very real issues of racism in their own heart. This fear must be dealt with. The problem is not finding out you are a racist. In fact that may be a very good thing, if what follows is an intentionality in dealing with that sin. Even with the gospel, the bad news precedes the good news, and only those who by the grace of God respond in faith are considered wise.

The word *remember* is a covenantal term. It is used of God when He is said to have remembered Rachel (Gen 30:22) and Hannah (1 Sam 1:19). In each case it points to God acting on behalf of those remembered. It is in that sense that I make use of the term here. Like *forgetting*, *remembering* is not used cognitively in the sense of remembering facts, but connotes frequently the affection of the mind and the action which accompanies recollection.<sup>21</sup>

In the end, “remembering” entails that White believers must not bury their heads in the sand and pretend that racism, structurally and practically, does not exist. Racism, sadly, is still with us, and some suggest it will remain with us until White believers recognize the problem. Dwight Perry comments,

The call to changing the way we do things must be confronted head on by those who are part of the problem, white middle-class, conservative believers. For as long as blacks

and other minorities are the only ones confronting the issue, it will remain marginalized. Only when Caucasian spiritual leaders begin to exercise leadership in this area more than persons of color who live in the cycle of racism will this issue be seen as something that is legitimate. When it is not solely addressed by people of color but is aggressively addressed by those in the Caucasian evangelical setting, the issue of racism will be seen as more than just a black issue that bitter, unforgiving blacks, can’t seem to recover from, but as a legitimate issue that is hurting the church.<sup>22</sup>

The challenge to White believers is to wake up and recognize the reality of racism and then begin actively to engage in issues that promote justice and equality on behalf of all people.<sup>23</sup> Speculation and skepticism are born out of the lack of effort to demonstrate care and concern. Anyone not ready or willing to engage in such things says without a word that they are not interested in working at racial harmony. John’s words are instructive: “love not in word or in tongue but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

### Grace for the Race

John Piper, in his message found in this journal, states that what is needed for this cause is perseverance. Men and women with tough skin and souls are needed to stand against the world, culture, and even their own people and say the hard things. This is not gained by reading books or by understanding the issue; rather, God’s glory must compel us and His grace must sustain us. We are not adequate for such things, but the One who calls us to it will give us all grace for every good work.

Like many issues within the church this is not an easy one, but the power and grace of God is able to do beyond what we can even imagine. For some it will take a



mighty work of God to make changes, for others it will happen over coffee or some other social event. What concerns me is not how it happens, but, compelled by a glorious vision of the greatness and glory of God and recognizing the connection between the manifestation of His glory and the pursuit of racial harmony, I pray that it will happen. For the church in the decades to come, should the Lord tarry, I pray that my children will see a day when race does not matter as it does now. I pray for a better America because the church is better and more faithful to her calling. I pray that all believers will be a strong voice for the cause of the glory of God in racial harmony.

My voice is one of thousands who have labored for this aspect of unity longer than I have been alive, and to those men I am thankful for their legacy (John Perkins, Dwight Perry, Raleigh Washington, and Glen Kehrein to name a few). May God be pleased to raise up men and women who love and long to see His glory cherished among the nations.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Dwight Perry, *Building Unity In The Church Of The New Millennium* (Chicago: Moody, 2002), 42.

<sup>2</sup>D. A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 88.

<sup>3</sup>Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>5</sup>The writing of this initiative pre-dated my coming to Bethlehem, so “reconciliation” was the normal way of stating this at the time of its writing. “Racial harmony” is the phrase that we use as a staff as our intended goal.

<sup>6</sup>This led me, along with Anthony Carter and David Brown, to establish the Black Alliance for Reformed Theology (BART), a ministry that seeks to spread a passion for God through the theological grid of Calvinism within the African American church and community. For an assessment of our understanding of how Calvinism can shape the African American community, see Anthony Carter, *On Being Black and Reformed: A New Perspective on the African American Christian Experience* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003).

<sup>7</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version*.

<sup>8</sup>Shelby Steele, *A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 11.

<sup>9</sup>Shelby Steele, *The Content of our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991).

<sup>10</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (The Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 245.

<sup>11</sup>See *ibid.*, 157-64.

<sup>12</sup>Harvie Conn, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992).

<sup>13</sup>Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>14</sup>Carson, 94

<sup>15</sup>For a further development of this truth see John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), 33.

<sup>16</sup>Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls: A Model for Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife* (Chicago: Moody, 1993).

<sup>17</sup>Carson, 90.

<sup>18</sup>Volf, 37.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 38-42.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>21</sup>William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies* (McLean: MacDonald, 1993), 347.

<sup>22</sup>Perry, 35.

<sup>23</sup>The implication is that the issues of race should move us to work in concentric circles. That is, our chief aim and desire is for unity within the church, yet, the implications of this should reach the next circle, namely society. The immense poverty in America, some have argued, is a result of the church losing its sense of call for social justice. Though Christ said we would have the poor with us always, I am not sure he meant that we should simply let poverty run rampant. The same is true with issues of race. We must engage in the battle to fight injustice everywhere since, as Martin Luther King Jr. poignantly stated, "injustice somewhere is a threat to justice everywhere."