

CHRISTIAN PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL THEOLOGY:
AN EXAMPLE OF ACTING ON THE WORD
FOR IMMIGRATION REFORM

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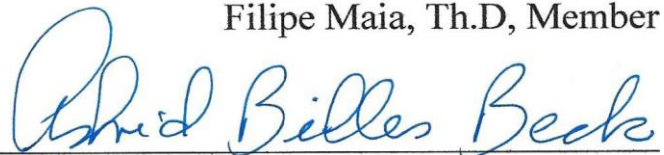
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In Loving Memory of my Mother,
Ruth Maxine Simerly Ledford,
Who nurtured my faith

For my Father,
Lynn Wood Ledford,
Who taught me to look at the big picture

For my Soulmate and Now Lawfully Wedded Wife,
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The greatest blessing of my life

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Abstract

The research explains reasons for Christian inaction toward social injustice and urges us to do more. An expanded model for praxis is provided through an underpinning of the Exodus story and Jesus's ministry. As a revolutionary, Jesus taught examples of freeing people from inferiority which marked them. His gynocentric genealogy paved the way for his ministry to outsiders. Current US immigration issues are linked to the history of enslaving African Americans. Our historical rationales are tied to current US immigration policy, methods of continued enslavement and sanctioned violence against people of color. With multiple social ills, where is the progressive Christian voice? A survey explored how the legal limits on religious institutions and individuals through the IRS 501(c)(3) rules and First Amendment rights are understood by Christians. Confusion is one possible rationale for inaction by Progressive Christians, but the Protestant ethos in American Civil Religion is another. This work clarifies how the First Amendment provides protection for public criticism of the government and the effects of its policies. Through expanded models of praxis, pinned to an exegesis of the Exodus and Emmaus stories, this work exhorts Progressive Christians to rethink their role and responsibility in mission as followers of Christ. An argument for the power of public liturgy is made. Protests about police brutality at NFL pregames and the ensuing public uproar show how evocative public prayer can spur debate and move institutions. There are multiple ways Progressive Christians can live out their faith more actively within the protections of the First Amendment and not jeopardize the 501(c)(3) status of their church body or other nonprofit entity. While some are comfortable with public theology, they can also be spurred into deeper action through public liturgy or political theology. Being an "inside-out" church, in the streets rather than in the pews, is key. Opportunities for public theology exist for multiple personality types and their respective skills including demonstrations, lobbying, local missions, offering sanctuary, and other public religious services. A real-life deportation protest through the Latina eyes of a persistent widow is presented.

INTRODUCTION

A Berlinesque¹ wall proposed between Mexico and Southwestern USA;² a travel ban imposed upon travelers from seven specific Islamic countries; workers, even those with valid work documents or who are US citizens, detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); parents arrested by ICE agents and taken away in front of their very own children; children in cages at the southwestern border. How did America get to this place and to this point in our society?

As the mythical Sankofa bird who flies looking backward, instructs us, if we do not understand where we have been, we will neither recognize, nor be able to negotiate a peaceful future. Where is America headed? And more to the point, how and where will this path end? Will it end? What is the nadir to which America falls in order to realize we must reform immigration policy, rend our hearts and mend our ways? If we continue on this collision course, *We the People* might as well plaster a sign at the base of the Statue of Liberty reading, “The Land of Hypocrisy.”

In the words of St. Paul, there is a better, more excellent way. As people of faith living in the US who support a more inclusive and compassionate social policy, we can publicly participate in the debate to create and amend laws for a more just society. Such a statement begs the question, “Are the First Amendment and the Christian Gospel symbiotic?” “Yes!” The First Amendment provides us protection to petition or criticize our government for the redress of grievances. As long as we are not intent on establishing

¹ Nothing seems sexier, albeit fleeting, than to throw money at a problem, wall it up, and think it resolved. The Berlin Wall, separating East and West Germany, symbolized the Cold War and stood from 1961-1990.

² Alexander Burns, Jonathan Martin, and Maggie Haberman, “A Bruised Trump Faces Uncertain 2020 Prospects. His Team Fears a Primary Fight.,” *The New York Times*, January 27, 2019, sec. U.S., accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/26/us/politics/trump-rnc-2020.html>.

a superior religion for the US, our public theology is rightly protected. All faith traditions are protected to engage in public theology.

My ministry within the Latin@³ communities in Detroit, Michigan, motivated this project. Biblical imperatives call us to work for social justice. The specific call for justice in this dissertation is for US immigration. The hardship and pain created by ceaselessly living in fear anchors the research. This project is borne of the eyewitness of unspeakable cruelty, especially for American-born children of undocumented immigrants. Many of their parents immigrated here as children themselves, having had no control over where they were raised. Yet, they usually became acculturated to American society. The USA is home to them, and rightly so. Their children, born in the USA, are Mexican-Americans, Honduran-Americans, Salvadoran-Americans, etc.

The scope of the project. This *call to arms of embrace*—rather than open-carry permits, arms via guns⁴—is a call to Christians specifically, and to all people of faith generally.⁵ It is a call to galvanize faithful voices to speak against injustice right in the middle of the public square. Hopefully, this dissertation will serve as an exhortation to

³ In Romance languages like Spanish, a masculine noun with either singular or plural ending, “-o/os,” can include the feminine endings, “-a/as” without specifically identifying a woman or women. The term, “Latin@,” is used in place of “Latino,” the masculine singular noun ending of “-o,” in order to include both women and men in the term. The feminine “a” can be seen in the center of the “@” symbol and is encircled by the “o.” Therefore, “Latin@/s” will be used throughout this work to be visually gender inclusive with both the “-a/as” and “-o/os” endings.

⁴ “Open Carry,” *Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence*, n.d., accessed February 20, 2019, <https://lawcenter.giffords.org/gun-laws/policy-areas/guns-in-public/open-carry/>. Five states (California, Florida, Illinois New York, and South Carolina), as well as the District of Columbia, generally prohibit people from openly carrying handguns in public places. Thirty-one states allow the open carrying of a handgun without any license or permit, although in some cases the gun must be unloaded. Fifteen states require some form of license or permit in order to openly carry a handgun.

⁵ While this dissertation has a decidedly Christian emphasis, any faith tradition can utilize the information and tools found here. The five major world religions: Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism, are all represented in the USA, and each tradition has a cognate to the Christian Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

participate effectively in the making of laws and public policies that benefit marginalized human beings.

But beyond the exigent short-term goal of immigration reform is the need for us to understand what God calls us to do as faithful disciples of Christ. We must understand where and how our Jewish and Christian stories developed through our sacred texts or we put our very discipleship in jeopardy, and we will become deaf to God's call to us, a call that never ceases.

This work explores how we, as faith communities and as individuals, can find ways to better respond to the gross injustices of our times. It offers a Christian approach to thought—and to action. What are we called to do as people of faith and as citizens/residents of this country? For Christians, the answers lie in the Hebrew and Greek Testaments as interpreted through our tradition, reason, and our personal and collective societal experiences.

This work has a Judeo-Christian emphasis, yet the First Amendment guarantees of free speech, exercise of religion, and right of assembly apply to pluralistic faith expressions, and their various social justice issues. We, as disciples of Christ, and as citizens of this country, have a right to speak out and a duty to end injustice and suffering. Part I looks at the biblical imperatives to advocate for those who suffer—those deemed to be outsiders. Part II looks at the indelible history and marks of slavery in the US and moves us to think critically about the moral imperative to meet injustice theologically and publicly. Part III looks at our constitutional rights to do so and offers ways to act as Christians and highlights the differences between understanding and action based on surveying contemporary Christians.

Understanding the importance of mission from a biblical perspective is essential. In direct connection to the biblical imperative to act, we must learn or re-learn how to see and to recognize the vast inequities between whites of privilege, people of color and poor whites. We must organize, and we must utilize the power of numbers, including those individuals who feel too feckless to make a difference alone.

The reasons for inaction point to a complex admixture of 21st Century life. Almost across the board, for those having white privilege, making a scene is distasteful; the fear of upsetting one's comfortable way of life is daunting. Many Christian Americans are baffled by the concept of "separation of church and state," and therefore they remain silent.

When we attend church, which part of us sits in the pew, our political part, or is it our pious part? Both parts are indelibly present. My argument throughout this work is that to believe we can split ourselves into distinct parts, depending on where we are, can no more be done than if Solomon had actually cut the baby in half (I Kings 3:24-28). The two mothers each would have received one-half of the lifeless child, a tragic non-solution. If we deaden a part of ourselves, our wholeness, as well as our self-actualization, is destroyed.

Since none of us can bifurcate our citizen-self from our pious-self, we must be vocal about injustice because it violates our deeply held beliefs. Such faith-based advocacy is vital both for our individual completeness, and as a means to create proper public venues for debate and discussion of the issues of our time. Adopting just laws must be accomplished through ecumenical and interfaith coalitions because America is a pluralist society. The various faiths must join together as a chorus of freedom singers.

We come to church or go to the voting booth with both faith and citizenship melded into our essence. Instead of wringing our hands over the impossible task of pigeon-holing our personhood, let us explore what we can and cannot do as faith members to work towards a more compassionate society while working within the First Amendment protections we hold dear.

What can we do within the bounds of the First Amendment? What can we *not* do? As people of faith, we must thoroughly understand the answers to these questions. Jesus calls us to go forth bringing the Good News to a hurting and dangerous world (Mt 28:16-20). In failing to do this, we fail Jesus and we fail ourselves as Jesus's living and loving disciples. We also fail our beloved country.

Americans also have very busy, very noisy lives. The average American is exposed to hundreds or thousands of images daily. Social media and smart phones flood our minds to the point that our own imaginations become inundated. We become desensitized to the subtle pounding away of our unique creative spirits. The noise compounds daily, and compassion, as a spiritual practice, is drowned out. Our prophetic imagination evaporates. Our eyes become scaled over, blinded to suffering and injustice.

Many Americans have become lethargic in staying informed on the issues, especially in the current political era of "fake news," where misinformation and untruths flow from the highest office in the land.⁶ Citizens have been selfish by failing to demand that the political representatives we elect do their duty to eradicate injustice. When we

⁶ Jim Rutenberg, "Media's Next Challenge: Overcoming the Threat of Fake News," *The New York Times*, December 22, 2017, sec. Business, accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/07/business/media/medias-next-challenge-overcoming-the-threat-of-fake-news.html>; Charles M. Blow, "Opinion | A Fake and a Fraud," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2018, sec. Opinion, accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/opinion/a-fake-and-a-fraud.html>.

fail to monitor their actions, politicians can become distracted by their own sense of self-importance. Voters must be vigilant in demanding that those on the margins are cared for and respected. Christ described such people as the “least of these,” (Mt 25:40).

Often, it seems impossible to know where to start.

The work required is interdisciplinary in nature. Various academic disciplines and narratives address the issues raised here: biblical exegesis, Christology, constitutional law, socioeconomics, American history, mixed media research, orthopraxy, practical theology, and the relationship of church and state/society.⁷ The meaning of public theology and its relationship to the First Amendment frame our rights as faithful people to insist on justice according to our traditions. Some aspects of Anglican sacramental and incarnational theology serve as starting points for discussion, as my tradition is informed by Holy Orders in the Anglican branch of the Christian vineyard. The opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith coalition-building are limitless.

A working definition of public theology serves to frame the question, “Are the First Amendment and public theology compatible?” The short answer is yes. There is not only one definition of public theology. Below is a definition provided by the Centre for Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago in New Zealand. Public theology functions to

promote debate on issues it sees as important but which may have escaped the 'public eye'. We believe that theology can shed fresh light on issues and can contribute in new and challenging ways to debate and policy formation.

⁷ Donileen R. Loseke, “The Study of Identity as Cultural, Institutional, Organizational, and Personal Narratives: Theoretical and Empirical Integrations,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (2007): 661–662.

Public Theology *isn't* about promoting the interests of 'the Church'; it's about drawing on the resources, insights and compassionate values of the Christian faith to contribute to the welfare of society.⁸

A friendly amendment adds that public theology by nature of its “publicness” requires distribution of theological ideas to as wide an audience as possible via television, cable, radio, documentaries, books, blogs and internet resources, because in many ways the issues of our time have “escaped the ‘public eye.’” We must also be clear that we do not seek to establish a superior religion. We want to call attention to the compassionate message of the gospel to love our neighbors by exercising our rights of free speech, free exercise of religion, and the right to assemble to petition the government for the redress of our grievances.

The biblical foundation of this dissertation is rooted primarily in two passages of scripture: in the OT call to Moses in Exodus (3:1-15), and in the NT Road to Emmaus account in Luke (Lk 24:15-35). These passages bend forward to us by calling us to work faithfully for a more just society in our own age and context. Exodus and Emmaus explore both how God calls us, and how we answer such fiery, burning calls. Each has a dimension of public theology and soteriology, both earthly and heavenly. The pericopes require that we recognize—rather than just see—suffering, that we intentionally process rather than muse, that we think critically rather than rationalize, and act urgently, effectively and compassionately, rather than deferring action to another day.

This dissertation presents arguments for progressive Christians to consistently consider the following: How do we interpret the sacred literature in our own time while remaining true to the biblical context? How do we speak truth to “principalities and

⁸ Centre for Theology and Public Issues, “What Is Public Theology?,” accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.otago.ac.nz/ctpi/what/>.

powers” as found in the Deutero-Pauline letters (Eph 3:10, 6:11-12, Co. 2:15)? The term “principality” was often understood as a type or class of evil spirit. It was also commonly paired with these terms: “power, authority, throne, world-rulers of this age, evil spiritual force in the heavens.”⁹ B. D. Smith offers a helpful explanation of these spirits in the first century Palestinian context.

The use of different terms probably indicates different ranks or types of evil spiritual beings. In Eph. 2:2, 6:11-12 Paul identifies one evil spiritual being to which these others seem to be subject: ‘the ruler of the power of the air’ or ‘the devil.’

In Pauline theology, Christ shall destroy every ‘principality, power, and authority’ at the end, when he hands over to God the kingdom (1 Cor 14:24). Nevertheless, in the present these evil spiritual beings are subject to Christ, for Christ has been seated at the hand of God in the heavenlies (Eph 1:20-21). Because of this, believers can resist the evil influences of these spiritual beings (Eph 6:10-17; cf 2:1-5). Colossians stresses the superiority of Christ over all spiritual beings (Col. 1:15-20; 2:10), and attributes the heresy rampant among the recipients of the letter to the influence of the ‘elemental principles of the world,’ a collective name for these evil spiritual beings (2:8). The cross of Christ was the means by which all evil spiritual beings were defeated and rendered ineffectual (Col 2:15).

The Pauline understanding of worldly leaders as possibly controlled by evil spirits is important even today. As Christians, we understand the evil influence of Satan, and that evil can show up anywhere especially when not resisted.

Part of the Baptismal Rite of the Episcopal Church includes vows by parents and godparents on behalf of infants and small children. The celebrant asks several questions including: “Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? [Answer] I renounce them.” “Do you renounce the evil powers of this

⁹ Barry D. Smith, “Principality,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Astrid B. Beck, and Allen C. Myers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 1084.

world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? [Answer] I renounce them.”¹⁰

Adult candidates for baptism are also asked several questions, including, “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? [Answer] I will, with God’s help.”¹¹

These vows are as relevant today as they were for the ancient church because evil abounds. It is present today in the form of racism, sexism, heterosexism, heteropatriarchy, classism, other-abledism and all of the classifications designed to exclude others. Given this reality, how do we respond to these evils? Foremost, we equip ourselves for ministry by understanding that God calls us to work for justice and mercy. The prime example for this is Moses, who challenged the principalities and powers of Pharaoh and succeeded. Jesus gave his life for justice and rose again.

The Call to Moses (Ex. 3:1-15)

In this passage, we learn that God has heard and observed the cry of the suffering Israelites in Egypt. In reciting the covenant God has with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob (Israel), Leah and Rachel, God determined it is time to act. Consequently, God has called Moses through the strangely burning bush, brilliant, yet unconsumed (kaiō). God ordained Moses, Aaron, and Miriam as official agents to lead the people to a land flowing with milk and honey. They challenged Pharaoh to his face in an explicit set of actions opposing the empire. In time, the army of mighty horse and rider was on its heels in retreat. The Israelite revolution started with a mysterious burning bush

¹⁰ Episcopal Church, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church: Together with the Psalter or Psalms of David According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York : [Greenwich, Conn.]: Church Hymnal Corp. ; Seabury Press, 1979), 302.

¹¹ Ibid., 304.

that ignited the hearts of a people to stand up for themselves. It was also a cautionary tale for oppressors—and bystanders—to heed the word of God. It still is today.

The Road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:15-35)

From the Lukan Gospel, we learn that Jesus, unrecognized, joins two of his followers on Easter Sunday as they walk to Emmaus in the waning hours of the afternoon. They are devastated by Jesus's ignominious crucifixion a few days earlier and Jesus, the stranger they encounter, teaches how he was destined to give his life for all as stated in the law of Moses and through all the Prophets. According to Jewish custom, they urge the stranger, Jesus, to eat with them, and suddenly they know him in that decisive moment of the breaking of the bread. They realized their hearts had been burning as Jesus, the foreigner, the unknown, was teaching them. Their hearts ignited and burned spiritually, but, like the bush, they were not consumed physically. Only the Spirit of God can burn without destroying!

Likewise, God hears the cry of the oppressed and calls us to action and radical hospitality in our own time, over and over again. These passages instruct people of faith about the critical nature of citizenship on this earth, our island home. Very simply, we must “see.” We must “think.” We must “act.” We must “reflect.” We must do this repeatedly: *see, think, act, reflect. Repeat.*

Part I – “We are Called to See and Recognize, and to Hear and Listen.” This command articulates our call to learn from others and to listen to those whose plight requires a counterclaim for life-preserving legal and social change. First, Torah frames the discussion. Torah means teaching.¹² Torah is about peace and communities organized

¹² Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 10.

to support the righteous life of the people. Israel was unique among all its neighboring nations in that its laws were incorporated within its faith in Yahweh. So, faith in God required serving its mandates, its laws. These are the *laws of faith versus the laws of kings*.

Now, as in antiquity, Jews learn the Shema, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart” (Dt 6:4-6). Jesus recites the Shema and the Golden Rule to underscore their import as the two greatest commandments (Mk 12:28-31). Throughout his teachings, Jesus seeks to connect the people to the Shema and the requirements of Torah as the foundation of Christianity. Torah is reinforced by the commandments and reiterated by the succession of Prophets.

Part II – “We are Called to Think and Process.” In our time, we do not officially have a theocratic government. However, the US has been governed by an overwhelmingly Protestant leadership, one that exploited people of color for centuries, using the Bible as justification, especially prior to the 1865 enactment of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

The federal constitution charges the Congress, and the 50 states by implication, to ensure “equal treatment under law;” these words are carved into the façade of the U.S. Supreme Court Building. American jurisprudence fails miserably at this civic responsibility. Our socioeconomic system exploits rather than protects the most vulnerable, the outsiders, and fails to guarantee equality and justice for all. Jesus Christ welcomes outsiders and relies on the Torah as precedent for care of the marginalized.

Because our constitution prohibits establishing a superior religion, we cannot rely solely on Torah or the Gospel as the only precedents for justice. We must engage with the laws and case opinions because they regulate secular behavior. Having said this, we must rely on our faith traditions, the essential core of our beliefs and practices from the Christian Gospel and the Hebrew Testament, to speak to injustice publicly and theologically. Ideally, public theological mission is done through coalitions of the world's faith and sacred traditions to inform more comprehensive ways to provide equal treatment of all under the law. This is the work of political theology.

While Americans like to think that the US has an effective separation of church and state, in fact, the US has been an overwhelmingly Protestant country since its inception. A hue and cry arose when JFK ran in the 1960 presidential election because he was a Roman Catholic.

*Many Protestants questioned whether Kennedy's Roman Catholic faith would allow him to make important national decisions as president independent of the church. Kennedy addressed those concerns before a skeptical audience of Protestant clergy.*¹³

. . . While the so-called religious issue is necessarily and properly the chief topic here tonight, I want to emphasize from the outset that we have far more critical issues to face in the 1960 election: the spread of Communist influence; . . . the humiliating treatment of our president and vice president by those who no longer respect our power; the hungry children I saw in West Virginia; the old people who cannot pay their doctor bills; the families forced to give up their farms; an America with too many slums, with too few schools, and too late to the moon and outer space. These are the real issues which should decide this campaign. And they are not religious issues — for war and hunger and ignorance and despair know no religious barriers.

¹³ John Fitzgerald Kennedy, "Transcript: JFK's Speech on His Religion" (Speech presented at the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Houston, Texas, September 12, 1960), accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16920600>. Transcript courtesy of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.

But because I am a Catholic, and no Catholic has ever been elected president, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured — perhaps deliberately, in some quarters less responsible than this. So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again not what kind of church I believe in — for that should be important only to me — but what kind of America I believe in.

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where *no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials; and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all . . .* (Italics mine)

Kennedy had to assure the electorate that he would not be dictated to by the Pope as the US leader. Despite his assurances, Protestant clergy and voters were wary of where JFK's loyalties would lie. Since the country's inception, elected political leaders have clearly reflected the engulfing Protestant influence on American lawmaking. Such a Protestant nation and leadership actively and hypocritically ratified the enslavement of Africans using biblical justification, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Chapter three includes an examination of when Jesus challenges the hypocrisy of the Jewish elders by healing a woman bent-over from a back condition for 18 years despite their objections because the healing occurred on the Sabbath. Further on in the same chapter, Jesus extols the virtues of a widow who not only is persistent but convinces a judge to grant her the justice due her despite her unequal bargaining power. She is not intimidated by judge's disregard for people and failure to fear God.

Part II provides an abbreviated history of governmentally and biblically sanctioned slavery, indentured servitude, and the post-Civil War fury through lynchings brazenly perpetrated against people of color. This history continues in our time through overt acts of disaffecting people of color and the poor from their “inalienable rights” and the Bill of Rights. While a noose is no longer the primary instrument of execution, lynchings, in a variety of forms, are still prevalent.

The faithful who support people marginalized by systemic classism, racism, and capitalism constantly find themselves on the defensive. However, the law provides us a space to frame our issues *proactively and publicly*. The Exodus and Emmaus passages engage Christians on the importance of public theological discourse and the challenge to empire, even in the very face of empire, as Moses, Jesus, and their followers demonstrate.

In chapter six, the story of Render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s is explored to compare and contrast the relationship between occupied Israel and Rome. The passage has often been misinterpreted as a justification for truncating our faith-based duties from our civic life. In this confrontation with Jewish leaders, Jesus clearly recognizes the dual responsibilities we all have to be lawful, and yet more importantly, to be faithful.

Part III – “We are Called to Act, Reflect and Repeat.” The last part offers methods for using our theology from Part I and our understanding of history, law, and economics as the basis for public theology by taking our knowledge to the next level.

The Constitution holds the Congress accountable for unequal treatment under the law, especially in terms of systemic injustice in the 50 states and USA territories. What

wisdom and compassion can the average congregation bestow in the political sphere? Our faith history and belief in a salvific God eminently qualifies us to raise our voices.

We are called to speak truth to the principalities and powers just as our Savior Jesus did. In chapter 7, Jesus raises the son of the Widow of Nain from the dead to restore her to relationship, *hesed*, not only with her son, but with her community. And while this story is not specifically about confronting powerful leaders about injustice, Jesus models how we, as his disciples, are called to restore others to wholeness, especially when the law by itself cannot fully restore *shalom*.

In chapter eight, a survey of some First Amendment case law is presented to underscore our constitutional protections for speaking publicly, even as critique of our government and its laws. This analysis visits some U.S. Supreme Court decisions rendered from roughly 1940 to present. It focuses on clauses of the First Amendment guarantees: the rights of free speech, exercise of religion, assembly, and the prohibition against establishing any one religion as supreme. The First Amendment has been intended as a shield against religious hegemony, not a sword for it to wield.

Note that case law regarding the right to a free press is not addressed within this project. The focus here is about what faith members can and cannot do under the First Amendment.

A discussion on the nature of the nonprofit tax-exempt status receives attention, because it confuses congregants. Many Christians incorrectly believe that the 501(c)(3) tax exempt status prohibits faith members and their institutions from policy discussions in public, from assembling to communicate their views and redress their grievances with the government at the federal, state, and local levels. We must participate in our democratic

process, *but* neither to control it, nor to establish a superior religion. This project does not promulgate the establishment of any religion as supreme. All voices of faith must be heard in the public square.

This discussion will shed light on how federal regulatory statutes govern nonprofits, especially in consideration of the current Trumpian gray area regarding the Johnson Amendment and nonprofit religious institutions.¹⁴ The purpose here is to synthesize these cases in order to better inform what religious organizations and houses of worship can and cannot do. This information will allow faith-based political activists to participate in the public debate legally, and to contribute to the exchange of ideas in debate. This public participation is key in arriving at the most just solutions as a pluralistic nation.

At the epicenter of this dissertation is American racism and our continued practice of extrajudicial execution of people of color. Its foundation comes from the pattern and practice of chattel slavery, beginning with African peoples, and then including Latin@s and First Nation peoples. The year 2019 marks the 400th anniversary of the first African slaves stepping onto “New World” soil at Jamestown in 1619.

Slavery was rationalized through twisted interpretations of the Bible. After the abolition of slavery in 1865, other modes of discrimination were fostered including:

¹⁴ Jeremy W. Peters, “The Johnson Amendment, Which Trump Vows to ‘Destroy,’ Explained,” *The New York Times*, December 22, 2017, sec. U.S., accessed January 30, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/us/politics/johnson-amendment-trump.html>. The Internal Revenue Code states the following: Rev. Rul. 2007-41, 2007-25 I.R.B. (June 18, 2007) Organizations that are exempt from income tax under section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code as organizations described in section 501(c)(3) may not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office. “Opinion | Trump Vowed to Destroy the Johnson Amendment. Thankfully, He Has Failed.,” *Washington Post*, accessed February 21, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/trump-vowed-to-destroy-the-johnson-amendment-thankfully-he-has-failed/2018/02/07/3cdbce4e-0b67-11e8-95a5-c396801049ef_story.html.

postbellum lynching, voter disenfranchisement, economic inequality, and disparate opportunity for education. These practices have become imbedded in the country's collective DNA. The unfolding American experiment in freedom of religion is really anything but freedom of religion. In actuality, "freedom of religion" is under the stealthy control of Evangelical Christians who have morphed religion into a *republic-an* civil religion. As progressive Christians, our mission must reframe Jesus's mission to love one another and must reestablish this message as foundational to our faith. We counter this civil religion by joining progressive Christian voices and our interfaith allies with a vocal and organized political theology, a combination of liberation and social gospel theologies.

The dissertation can be viewed through three variations of a *chiasmic* structure.¹⁵

In theology, a *chiasmus*

has two or more parallel elements at its 'top' and 'bottom.' This pattern may continue, moving in 'so to speak' from both ends, to the entirety of the text, so that the text appears to have a complex and parallel structure of, for example, A-B-C-D-E-D'-C'-B'-A'. This is sometimes referred to as a *concentric* arrangement of the text or *ring composition*. The chiasmic or concentric pattern often has one element in the center that has no parallel element; this pattern may be represented as A-B-C-B'-A', in which the C element is the focal point, center of gravity, and fulcrum of the text as a whole.¹⁶

The dissertation mirrors itself. When viewed as a *chiasmus*, it moves through the first half (chapters 1-4) about call, inclusion of strangers, advocacy, and our devastating history of slavery and racism. The center of gravity is chapter five; it is a memorial to four African American men, and a Latino teenager who have been lynched in varying

¹⁵ Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc, 2009), 92–94. The term *chiasmus* derives from the Greek letter, *chi*, written in English as an "X."

¹⁶ Ibid.

ways across the last three decades. We name these horrific acts for what they are-- extrajudicial killings of people of color that usually go unpunished, *especially when the police are involved*. Most importantly we name these men, as they teach us about the untranslatable cost our society pays, as the oppressed and the oppressors, when injustice runs amok. We do this for emphasis, and lest they have died in vain.

In the second half (chapters 6-9), the reflections of the first half take on new meaning as we take an in depth look at the controlling powers and motivations behind American civil religion. We learn about ourselves as a nation and what mentalities and economic ideologies control us. We differentiate between patriotism and nationalism and begin to understand that our nation-state and its civil religion, propounded by Evangelicalism, holds the US captive. These learnings energize us as we move away from and reject our ugly and un-Christian past/present of slavery and racism.

In chapter 7, we recognize how racism against people of African descent has been transplanted into all communities of color, we begin to process the immeasurable pain Latin@s have endured throughout the centuries-old relationship between the US and Mexico (primarily). Daily, our federal policies cause permanent psychological, emotional, spiritual, and even physical damage as post-traumatic stress disorder develops in a whole generation of American citizens, Latin@ youth. Their parents, one or both, have been deported and they suffer, and systemically, they become pariahs in their own country.

Jesus is described as a descendant of outsiders. Likewise, various factions of the Sanhedrin viewed Jesus as an outsider, not part of “institutional Israel,” and a peculiar man to his followers. He is like nothing they have ever known before. Although he was

viewed as living outside of Torah in many ways, he used that same law to call for justice and the end of the hypocritical distortion of Torah. We, too, can reject civic law that marginalizes people who have been classified as inferior across our nation's history. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we must demand that our laws must protect the most vulnerable of our number.

In chapter 9, we mirror the call of chapter 1 by finding creative ways for public, political demands for the transfiguration of social injustice into a community of *shalom*, of peace, *hesed*, of restored relationship, a nourishing place for all. Having moved through current lynching stories, we recognize our growing resistance to racism and classism. We process this information, first in our hearts, and then in our minds by intentionally thinking about and naming our social reality.

These reflections move us further and further away from the acceptability of contemporary entitlements to lynch; therefore, we contemplate how we must offer salvific acts while still living on earth. We must do this because we know that we are called to care for the marginalized.

We review the protective aspects of the First Amendment. We also take a hard look at the damage our silence causes by failing to demand justice. We consider why progressive Christians are not more publicly vocal as demonstrated by the survey data. And finally, we consider the creative ways we can resist evil and speak truth to our government leaders, who are more concerned about re-election than the plight of the people. Political theology also provides a means to challenge complacency in our fellow citizens—the voters who elect our congressional representatives.

The first two examples of the *chiasmus* are presented in traditional theological style with letters depicting each theme and letters with apostrophes denoting their “mirrors.” The chapter number relevant to each theme of the chiasmus is listed with that theme:

Part I

A-Our Call to Mission to the Suffering per our Sacred Texts (1)

B-Jesus, Outsider (2)

C-Jesus Public Theologian, Advocate (3)

Part II

D-Slavery, Lynching, Marking of People of Color (4)

E-Contemporary Lynching of People of Color (5)

D’-Civil Religion and Political Theology (6)

Part III

C’-Salvation on Earth (7)

B’-Becoming outsiders as Political theologians via the 1st Am. (8)

A’-Putting Call into Action (9)

Figure 1. An expanded *chiasmus* to show how the dissertation mirrors itself with chapter five as the fulcrum of the dissertation.

-OR-

Part I

A-CALL TO POLITICAL THEOLOGY (1)

B-INCLUSION THROUGH TORAH (2)

C-CALLING OUT HYPOCRISY (3)

Part II

D-HISTORICAL SLAVERY AND LYNCHING (4)

E-CONTEMPORARY LYNCHING/RACISM (5)

D'-CONTEMP. CIVIL RELIGION/NATION-STATE (6)

Part III

C'-CALLING OUT HYPOCRISY (7)

B'-INCLUSION AS EQUAL PROTECTION (8)

A'-CALL TO CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THEOLOGY (9)

Figure 2. An abbreviated *chiasmus* depicting the mirroring call, inclusion and advocacy that pivots on the need to end racism and lynching.

-OR-

Pt. I	Pt. II	Pt. III
God's Call to Mission	Slavery & Postbellum Lynching	Salvation on Earth
Jesus, Outside of the Law	Modern Lynching of People of Color	Christians outside Unjust laws, the 1 st Amendment & Survey
Jesus, Public Advocate	Civil Religion v. Political Theology	Putting Call Into Action

Figure 3. *American History X*.¹⁷ This chiasmus is offered of a depiction of the phrase, “American History X,” from the film of the same name. It is a cutting portrayal of overt American racism. Living a life marked by violence and racism, neo-Nazi Derek *Vinyard* (Edward Norton) finally goes to prison after killing two black youths who tried to steal his car. Upon his release, Derek vows to change his ways; he hopes to prevent his younger brother, Danny (Edward Furlong), who idolizes Derek, from following in his footsteps. As he struggles with his own deeply ingrained prejudices and watches their mother grow sicker, Derek wonders if his family can overcome a lifetime of hate.

¹⁷ Tony Kaye, *American History X*, Drama, 1998.

Part I: We are Called to See/Recognize and Hear/Listen

Chapter 1

**God Sees, then Recognizes Maltreatment,
Hears, then Listens to a People Cry Aloud,
Acts, then Saves Them**

Chapter 2

Jesus, Son of Outsiders

Chapter 3

**Jesus, Public Theologian, Advocate,
Radical Revolutionary, Healer,
Teacher, Preacher,
Savior**

Chapter 1

God Sees, then Recognizes Maltreatment, Hears, then Listens as a People Cry Aloud, Acts, then Saves Them

The glory of God is thus revealed in what is often called shalom justice.
Alexia Salvatierra¹⁸

What does it mean to see? Is it simply to notice and then move on? It is possible to *see* a homeless man panhandling at the ramp to the interstate. One notices his ragtag clothing perhaps, and his face covered by a straggly beard. Usually a homeless person is not smiling during his hour-to-hour survival. If one stops to give a bit of cash, has the man been seen by the giver? More so than when he is repeatedly passed by those who do not stop, or when he experiences the shouting of invective his way but, recognizing this man requires more than a short stop to offer a few bucks or a fast food sandwich before driving off. Has his plight been recognized, understood, internalized? Recognizing is stopping, conversing, and most importantly, listening to, and receiving another human being by way of understanding another person's context.

A military saying maintains that, in battle it becomes much more difficult to shoot an enemy soldier after spending 30 minutes with him. This common wisdom communicates how that enemy's veneer of contempt melts off to expose that undeniable flesh on bone after simple conversation. The enemy "it" becomes a person, manifested in the form of the radiance of eye color as the light flashes across, and the luminescence of a comprehending brain. A once fearful, pounding heart slows to an everyday tempo.

¹⁸ Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel, *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 16.

Common human denominators have now emerged from the monochrome, plasticized palette of gray-green soldiers into real-life people. Soon the two men find themselves discussing their commonalities: a sick child, an aging parent, the loss of work, the memory of sharing a joyous family meal.

The monotonous, grayscale snapshot of enemy soldiers, produced through the immersion in the alchemy-based fixer of *status quo* military-politics, suddenly, miraculously, turns to a full color Polaroid of two men. It has developed, and it is now a focused exchange of human experience, a portrait in humanity, two people simply *being* for a time. Unfortunately, the moment of understanding is ultimately lost in the bend of *chronos*.

The Legend of the World War I Christmas Eve cease-fire has captured imaginations all over the world. The story tells us parts of the Western Front observed a truce and British, French and German forces celebrated Christmas together complete with songs and Christmas trees; they played soccer, shared their food, and attended to their dead.

However, the cease-fire did not last long. Military leaders were furious over the truce. They feared soldiers would start questioning the war and refuse to fight. “General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien – commander of British 2nd Army Corps Expeditionary Force – issued strict warnings to his senior officers about preventing fraternisation [sic] with enemy soldiers.”¹⁹ The cease-fire eventually dissolved, “[b]ut only after, in a number of cases, a few days of wasting rounds of ammunition shooting at stars in the sky instead of

¹⁹ “What Really Happened in the Christmas Truce of 1914?,” *BBC Guides*, accessed February 21, 2019, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zxsfyrd>.

soldiers in the opposing army across the field.”²⁰ Ultimately, the soldiers reverted to jockeying for position, establishing strong-holds, leveraging power, blood-letting and destroying one another.

What happened between the two men with opposing views is that they have come to learn about the other’s context. Like the Sankofa bird, if we do not understand where *we and the other* come from, we will not be able to arrive at a peaceful existence between us. How interesting it is that even when two people have guns pointed at each other, learning context can empower them to refuse to fight further. This is a life lesson worth adopting, because in lacking understanding of another’s context, text, situation, and history, we fill in the blanks with our own context and understanding. Too often we vilify rather than edify.

Jesse Jackson famously said, “A text without a context is a pretext.” Without context, we co-opt a situation by pretextually inserting our opinions which are devoid of full comprehension. We do this because nature abhors a vacuum, but, in a time such as this, it is a recipe for repeated calamity. Failing to understand context is also a *carte blanche* invitation to fall into reliance on stereotype and hearsay. Further, failing to ground a situation contextually often causes us to disengage our hearts and minds and become sanguine, removed, and hard-hearted or simply ambivalent. Before long, the rich one steps over Lazarus as a matter of course (Lk 16:19-31).

Identifying a theological context for mission is essential. This context is comprised of the social, cultural, political realities of the mission field. In his

²⁰ David Mikkelsen, “World War I Christmas Truce,” *Snopes.Com*, accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/christmas-truce/>.

groundbreaking work on contextual theology, Stephen Bevans articulated six models for doing theology contextually.²¹ Bevans stated that in identifying which model to employ, no one model is the single, cut-and-dried choice. Some overlap among the models occurs naturally.

The praxis model, derived from orthopraxy, or right practice, provides the foundation here. In keeping with Bevans' recognition of the natural occurrence of overlapping models, the praxis model is informed further by the anthropological and translation models of contextual theology. The praxis model has specific characteristics, pros and cons, just like the other models. Although the praxis model is the "theology of the signs of the times," a model for liberation, it is important to note that the model can be susceptible to distortion since it is applied to changing times.

Consequently, missionaries employing the praxis method must maintain a strong tie between scripture and action. It has received negative critique for its closeness to Marxism.²² Jon Sobrino offered a connection between Karl Marx and the liberation context. Marx's groundbreaking observation was that "rationality or intellectual knowledge was not enough to constitute genuine knowledge."²³

Marx viewed individual, original thought as much preferred to parroting someone else's authority. He saw knowledge as "when our reason is coupled with and challenged by our action—when we are not just the objects of historical process but its subjects. This

²¹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Rev Exp edition. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2002), 141–144. The models are: translational, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, countercultural, and transcendental.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 71-72. See Jon Sobrino, "El Conocimiento Teológico En La Teología Europea y Latinoamericana," in *Liberación y Cautiverio: Debates En Torno Al Método de La Teología En América Latina* (Mexico City: Comité Organizador, 1975), 177–207. For an English translation of this article, see Alfred T. Hennelly, "Theological Method: The Southern Exposure," *Theological Studies* 38, no. 4 (December 1977): 718–725.

is perhaps best summed up in the famous sentence in Marx's critique of Feuerbach: 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.' Critical thought as a source for challenging capitalism and consumerism is inherently threatening for someone living in the US who supports the current economic system. For many Americans, the concepts of communism/Marxism and socialism are anathema to the "American way of life."

However, the praxis model has a "strong epistemological basis [and] provides an 'alternate vision.'" The mantra of this model is, "to know Christ is to follow him."²⁴ Sociology, anthropology, psychology and post-colonial theory inform the praxis model of contextual theology, and these disciplines are addressed throughout this project. It is, in its simplest expression, *practice-reflection-practice*. It must have action attached to it, and specifically, it is "faith seeking intelligent action."²⁵

The anthropological model sheds useful insights on the praxis model. It is an ethnographic method, and missionaries need to "know the culture to 'pull the gospel out of it.'" "It takes the Christian message seriously," and it offers new perspectives on the tradition. It finds people where they are. It is prone to "cultural romanticism," but is a reliable model. The World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism stated, "We are called to study the strange and sometimes offensive voices in various cultural milieus not only for the purpose of combatting or converting them, but also to learn from them and to deepen our insights and understanding of the gospel."²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 142. Bevens credits, "To Know Christ is to follow him," to Alfred Hennelly.

²⁵ Ibid., 73. This quotation adds to the famous words of St. Anselm in defining theology as faith seeking understanding. Sobrino's amendment addition to St. Anselm's famous definition of theology recognizes the imperative to exercise intelligent action by seeing/recognizing and learning the history and context of a situation prior to acting.

²⁶ Ibid, 54.

This is still true nearly thirty years after this statement was first made. Intense divisions at present resonate with an American society torn in half over the issues arising from undocumented immigration. The anthropological method's mantra is, "the seeds are already there, they just need water." The seeds here represent the need to overhaul our immigration legislation, now 35 years old. *Mujerista* theology²⁷ serves as a good theoretical framework for the anthropological approach.²⁸

Conversely the translation model seeks to "know the context so as to effectively insert the gospel." While it sounds averse to the anthropological model, it also applies to the dissertation because recognizing how the gospel compliments those times when, as in the translational model, a scriptural insight or insertion will aid in understanding context and in taking action. Concerns may arise in applying this theory, as it can lead missionaries to become naive regarding culture and gospel, but it also recognizes ambiguities present in a context. There is a symbiotic relationship where the message of the gospel appears in a given context, or the interpretation of the context could benefit from biblical and theological vision.²⁹

The Call to Moses affords the opportunity to review the history of the Israelites according to God's covenantal relationship with Abraham and Sarah (Gn 12). The covenant provides context for the time of Moses and Jesus as well as our own. It further tells of God's seeing and hearing the Israelites' plight in Egypt. God decides to act in

²⁷ *Mujerista* Theology expands feminist theology to provide the US Latina perspective. While Feminist Theology focuses on the dominant culture, white patriarchy, as it oppresses white women, *Mujerista* Theology teaches how minority women are oppressed and "othered," even by Latino Theology which has focused primarily on race, class, and culture, but fails to address the Latina experience of gender oppression. The late Latina theologian, Ada María Isasi-Díaz is credited with coining this term.

²⁸ Bevans, *Contextual Theology*, 141-142. Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "The Task of Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology--*Mujeristas*: Who We Are and What We Are About," in *Feminist Theology from the Third World: A Reader*, ed. Ursula King (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 90-91.

²⁹ Ibid.

helping the desperate slaves leave their taskmasters. God leads them to a good and broad land. In the following passage, God hears the peoples' lament and then initiates salvation.

Brueggemann writes that,

It is Israel's cry that evokes YHWH (2:24-25). This initiating power of voiced pain is characteristic of Israel's powerful tradition of 'lament,' a cry that is able to evoke the power of God and so initiate the contest of plagues that follow.³⁰

He further points out that the recording of the Exodus event is not merely historical information, but more importantly,

[M]aterial intended for liturgical reiteration, not only that the founding, saving event can be remembered, but that it can be 'represented' and reenacted in other times and places that await emancipation. The text is designed so that the memory is a generative event in subsequent generations of Israel, generative of energy and courage for the belated contexts in which God's people will again face oppression, will again cry out in pain, and will again appeal to the God of all departures.³¹

God repeats this process throughout the Bible: 1) Divine seeing, observing and recognizing, hearing and listening, followed by 2) thinking about and processing the situation, explaining it, 3) engaging in prophetic dialogue, 4) planning, and 5) salvific acting. And these actions operate as a "retelling paradigmatic confrontation with reference to a particular tyranny and a particular or anticipated rescue. . . and is bound to be pertinent in any particular time and place," like ours.³² Michael Walzer says that this idea of revolution resonates profoundly with the West, for instance, in the American Revolution. He concludes that Exodus holds our interest today because of "[I]ts emphasis

³⁰ Walter Brueggemann and Tod Linafelt, "The Book of Exodus," in *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 79–80.

³¹ Ibid., 80.

³² Ibid., 76.

on this worldly liberation—that is, one need not wait for heaven or the coming kingdom of God in order to see justice done.”³³

Recognizing and Hearing the Suffering Other

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” 4 When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5 Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” 6 He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10 So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.” 11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” 12 He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

13 But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14 God said to Moses, “I am who I am.”[a] He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I am has sent me to you.’” 15 God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord,[b] the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations. (Ex 3:1-15)

³³ Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 77.

From Hearing to Listening. God recognizes Moses's many abilities acquired under the auspices of pharaoh's house, and God has great faith in Moses as leader of Israel. The burning bush that is not consumed draws Moses towards the bush and into the Presence of the Lord. Neither understanding the non-consuming nature of the burning bush nor its implications, Moses approaches to hear God's voice reminding him of the Holy ground on which he stands. L. T. Johnson writes that the Presence of the Lord has been understood as a burning sensation, as in the Emmaus story.³⁴ The entire scene relies upon Moses seeing/recognizing and hearing/listening to the encounter with God.

God explains that God has been monitoring the situation in Egypt and sees and recognizes the Israelites' suffering. In Exodus of the LXX, the verb, *eidon*, to see, is used to indicate a comprehension or understanding (v 7).³⁵ The Lukan evangelist uses *pignoskō*, *epignoskō*,³⁶ to describe how Jesus recognized, or comprehended from the context of what was happening on the Road to Emmaus. For example, Jesus read the sorrow in his followers' faces, described as *skythrōpos* (24:17).³⁷ Each author underscores the thoughtful understanding that occurs in these similar situations.

In Exodus, God's attention trains specifically on the collective cry/cries of the people, through the terms, *kraugē*/*kraugēs*. This noun refers to a loud cry in the LXX.³⁸

Note the verb for ordinary crying, *klaiō*, does not fit here; the meaning is not strong

³⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina edition., vol. 3 (Collegeville, Minn.: Michael Glazier, 2006).

³⁵ "Kata Biblon - Exodus 3 - Greek Septuagint Interlinear," accessed February 23, 2019, <https://en.katabiblon.com/us/index.php?text=LXX&book=Ex&ch=3#v3>. The text note states, "Often fig: discern/perceive/experience/notice/attend . . . Distinct from "[oida] οἶδα" (G1492, know-by-seeing).

³⁶ Frederick W. Danker and Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), 141.

³⁷ Ibid., 324. The authors suggest "grumpy-looking, sullen," as definitions. See also Johnson, *Luke*, 393. *Skythrōpos* can be angry or sad.

³⁸ Ibid. *Kata Biblon*, Exodus 3.

enough. These cries are the great lament of their condition, of suffering and mistreatment, kákōsin, as slaves. God hears the loud weeping; God listens and internalizes the communal suffering; and, God acts.

In the prior chapter, Exodus 2, the term “groan” appears in addition to “cry,” and describing these cries across several chapters communicates that these cries had been loud and ongoing, the suffering pervasive.

³ After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God.²⁴ God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵ God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them. ³⁹ (Ex 2:23-24)

The Greek verb, to hear, is akouō. “The term is interpreted as -have-KNOWING-ed/perceive/be-aware-of/be-acquainted-with/notice. Often rendered "know" (by seeing/observing), in contrast to [ginōskō] ‘γινώσκω’ (known by thinking/reasoning/experiencing).”⁴⁰ Hearing is important in the Israelite faith-history as exhibited in the Shema, “Hear, O Israel” (Dt 6:4-7).

Two similar verbs are used to communicate the idea of burning. In Exodus, the verb, katakaiō, “to burn up (down)”⁴¹ are declined as kaietai, ketekaieto, and katakaietai. And in Luke, the term is, kaiō, to light or *kindle* (v 3:3). Danker indicates it is used to convey an “extended sense of emotional experience,” (v 24:32).⁴²

It is no accident that God's own self-naming of *I am that I am*, or “I am doing what I am doing,” has only a present tense conjugation. God's very name is ongoing.

³⁹ “Kata Biblon - Exodus 2 - Greek Septuagint Interlinear,” accessed February 24, 2019, <https://en.katabiblon.com/us/index.php?text=LXX&book=Ex&ch=2>. Anaboaō in verse 23, used here meaning: “‘hear-into’, hence *listen-intently*, hear-deeply, hearken-to, by extension obey.” See also, stenagmos, -ou, o, a sigh or groan, especially relating to prayer.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Danker and Krug, *Lexicon*, 184.

God's action is ongoing. The Godhead is at work in us and for us in every age. God heard the cries and remembered the covenant with Abraham and Sarah. After the generations that passed between the establishment of that covenant, God acts in new ways through the covenant with Moses and the people in the time of the Exodus.

The covenants with Abraham and then Moses are suzerainty agreements. Neither Abraham nor Moses were on equal footing with God as the other party. Thus Yahweh “cuts” the agreement. In parity contracts, the parties are equal. Each contract participant negotiates benefits and duties, and contractual duties flow back and forth between each party. It is a reciprocal agreement.

The suzerainty covenant, on the other hand, is more unilateral, for it is made between a suzerain, a great king, and his vassal, the head of a subordinate state. To his vassal, the suzerain ‘gives’ a covenant, and within the covenant the vassal finds protection and security. As for the inferior party, the vassal is under obligation to obey the commands issued by the suzerain, for the suzerain’s words are spoken with the majesty and authority of the covenant author . . . the most striking aspect of the suzerainty covenant is the great attention given to the king’s deeds of benevolence on behalf of the vassal. The vassal’s motive for obligation is that of gratitude for what has been done for him.⁴³

Accordingly, through this suzerain⁴⁴ contract with God as suzerain, God demonstrates to the Israelites personally how God constantly sees, acts, forgives, empowers, and rescues like a great monarch. God loves and remembers them, and, by adoption, us. The Israelites are released from Pharaoh by God’s power. The Israelites are led to the good and broad land where they begin a new chapter in Israelite history.

Just as it was vital for God to recognize and hear the suffering of the people of Israel, the people had a significant, albeit subordinate, role in their own liberation. God

⁴³ Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 88–89.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

was recognizing and hearing suffering, remembering covenant, and acting through a series of liberating acts. Likewise, the Israelites were recognizing God's power, publicly crying out, hearing God's vision and direction, and acting through obedience, gratitude and hope.

Our faith is not just about our interior conversions, it is also about the community and the movement towards liberation involving all of the parties.⁴⁵ W. Brueggemann explains

We may understand much about faith and personality from the perspective of stages of faith, but we are given no clue about the movement from stage to stage or about the religious dynamic that operates in the move . . . By contrast, biblical literature focuses precisely on the move from one place or posture to another. This literature knows that the move is neither smooth nor explicable, but is characteristically disjunctive, painful, and hidden. Biblical literature focuses on the wrenching transitions, not on the stages.⁴⁶

Brueggemann continues by stating the "Exodus narrative is an unquestioned, nonnegotiable given for any biblical understanding of human personhood." In turn, he suggests that we ask, "What happens when human experience is redescribed, explicated, mediated, and embraced through this paradigmatic prism of liberation?" He proposes three dimensions of transformed life and personhood: 1) The critique of ideology; 2) the public processing of pain; and 3) the release of new social imagination.⁴⁷ The same actions instruct us today in doing public theology mission.

These steps occur in the order presented. Pharaoh rules a world where it is clear the Israelites are outsiders fit only for brute labor. They understand they live

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Hope within History* (John Knox Press, 1987), 8–9.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 10–21.

in a world contrived by others, whether by accident, design, or indifference. They know this world can therefore be deconstructed because it is not of Yahweh. Finally, they know that Yahweh is the sole agent of this deconstruction and dismantling. The plagues are excellent examples of God's initial dismantling of Egyptian rule.

The Israelites reject the Egyptian ideology and cry out to their God. This is a very public, very subversive, hazardous groan. God recognizes and hears, recalls covenant, and acts with power and purpose. Brueggemann defines public processing as "an intentional and communal act of expressing grievance which is unheard of and risky under such an absolutist regime."⁴⁸ The empire knows there is pain, but grievances expressed in private do not constitute rebellion against misery and torture. The insurrection lies in going public. Private suffering does nothing to ease it.⁴⁹ The collective, "We are not taking it anymore," initiates the move from oppression to liberation. It marks the pulling apart of empire.

Such a public hue and cry parallels the filing of a legal complaint,⁵⁰ known in legal parlance as the initial pleading. This complaint describes wrongdoing. It further requests justice, some remedy, in the final section of the pleading which is called the "Prayer for Relief," even to this day. However, the Israelites' pleading, as public cry, is presented to the court of God. More discussion on public

⁴⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 11.

processing of grievances and the release of social imagination in our time continues in Part III.

Common threads connect Jesus's call at Emmaus with God's call at Sinai in striking patterns. This is another Divine teaching moment in history. The very *see-think-act* prescription for healing what ails the people in Exodus is brought forward by the evangelist Luke as the *Holy ritual of God*. Luke's unique Emmaus story is an extraordinary account of Jesus Christ's post-resurrection appearance. It is one of the richest passages in the Bible.

The Road to Emmaus

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. 17 And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" 19 He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." 25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly

over.” So he went in to stay with them. 30 When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” 33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Lk 24:13-25)

From Seeing to Recognizing. Seeing usually involves scanning a situation. We do this constantly and unconsciously to scope out our footing and to assess danger.⁵¹ However, to recognize is to register. To recognize is “to acknowledge or take notice of something in some definite way. . . to perceive to be something or someone previously known. . . to perceive clearly. . . to realize.”⁵² It can also mean to formally acknowledge someone’s status, title, or authority.⁵³ Inherent in “recognizing” is a state of intent, thought, or concentration. Thus, seeing can often be passive while recognizing is active.

Initially, Moses saw but did not recognize the Presence of the Lord in the burning bush. Moses was oblivious to God’s plans for him as the great prophet. He did not understand what was happening until God explained it and provided an action plan.

Like God the Divine on the Holy Mountain, Jesus the Divine first hears, sees and observes, and then recognizes the dejection of the two followers walking with him.

Johnson highlights the emotionality of the scene in lush words and meaning, as well as Jesus’s pastoral response to their sorrowful countenance, with “‘novelistic’ touches in the

⁵¹ “Definition of SEE,” accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/see>.

⁵² “Definition of RECOGNIZE,” accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/recognize>.

⁵³ Danker and Krug, *Lexicon*, 207.

story which give it vividness and psychological plausibility.”⁵⁴ Johnson notes how the Lukan evangelist

[C]ombines the element of a ‘recognition story’ with a sensitivity to genuine human emotion. At the same time, he provides a subtly shaded interpretation of the *mode* of Jesus’ presence to humans after his resurrection: he can really appear in the guise of a stranger on the road in the midst of human dialogue; he can be recognized in the ritual gestures of the community fellowship meal.⁵⁵

In the phrase, “ophthalmoi auton ekratounto, krateō, tou me epignōnai, piginoskō, auton,” Luke outlines how the Divine places a firm hold on the disciples’ eyes to inhibit their comprehension of who this stranger truly is. Danker generally defines krateō, as to “gain control of, secure,” and krátos, ous, tó as the “quality of being strong.”⁵⁶ For verse 16, Danker provides a definition specifically for the term epiginóska, “of awareness or recognition based on previous knowledge, know, recognize.”⁵⁷

Similarly, these followers not only were held from recognizing Jesus, but they did not understand their prophetic role in the New Jerusalem until Jesus disappeared and they recalled his teaching on the road. They were ordinary men, outsiders to the eleven apostles, yet Jesus chose them to spark the Way. God’s message is that the Good News is for ordinary people too. For us.

In this text, the firm binding of the followers’ eyes and the subsequent unbinding of them leads to a watershed moment of understanding, of recognizing the Risen Christ. It creates anticipation and, as the great photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson put it, it sets up the decisive moment.

⁵⁴ Johnson, *Luke*, 393.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 398.

⁵⁶ Danker and Krug, *Lexicon*. 207.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

The decisive moment is a concept made popular by the street photographer, photojournalist, and Magnum co-founder Henri Cartier-Bresson. The decisive moment refers to capturing an event that is ephemeral and spontaneous, where the image represents the essence of the event itself . . .

Bresson highlights two important skills that a competent photographer needs: *knowing* and *intuiting*. Knowing requires conscious attention and it is intentional. Intuition is immediate and does not require conscious reasoning. Conscious awareness occurs alongside unconscious processing. Both are required to release the shutter at the right place and time to capture the decisive moment.⁵⁸

Cartier-Bresson understood the importance of intentional seeing, recognizing, that occurs contemporaneously with scanning, when we put our minds to it. We might even say that the Lukan evangelist “released the ‘shutter’ at the right place and time to capture” one of the great decisive moments, the world-changing moment at the breaking of the bread with the disciples and the heretofore unknown stranger, the resurrected Christ.

The disciples’ knowledge of and familiarity with Jesus is key as it anchors Jesus’s resurrection and presence in a momentous way. For these reasons, “recognize” replaces the Bevanian term “see” from the Praxis model of see-think-act. Accurate recognition and deep listening, as modeled in the Exodus passage, lead to relevant thinking and processing, and subsequently, effective, saving action. The formula becomes **recognize/listen--think/process--act/create.**

⁵⁸ “The Decisive Moment and the Brain,” accessed March 31, 2019, <https://petapixel.com/2013/08/12/the-decisive-moment-and-the-human-brain/>. To me, photography is the simultaneous recognition, in a fraction of a second, of the significance of an event, as well as a precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression. Cartier-Bresson’s famous photo of the “decisive moment” features a man jumping a puddle. His front heel is less than an inch from the water. His reflection is perfectly mirrored upside down by the puddle, creating a doubly decisive moment. Emmaus is a doubly decisive moment as the followers recognize their mission, and Jesus moves to the next phase of his mission. See also Michel Frizot, Pierre Albert, and Colin Harding, eds., *A New History of Photography* (Köln: Könemann, 1998).

Thinking and Processing. Jesus addresses their sense of desolation by using his spiritual gift of exhortation and by opening the scriptures of “the Law of Moses and all the Prophets.” This underscores that ours is a salvific God who remembers and re-ignites the power of bilateral covenants with Abraham, with Moses, and finally with Jesus. T. J. White eloquently articulates the unquestionable soteriological roles of Moses and Jesus,

Christ is not only the new Moses but also the one whose intercession is intended by God from all eternity prior to all else in the economy of salvation. All genuine forms of mediation are ultimately Christocentric in nature. They depend upon his grace and are given in view of incorporation into the Church. ‘In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . . through whom also he created the world . . . Jesus has been counted worthy of as much more glory than Moses as the builder of a house has more honor than the house’ (Heb 1:1-2, 3:3).⁵⁹

Jesus begins mediating the followers’ sorrow first by thinking of a way to encourage them and then by opening the Scriptures for them. Jesus gives these demoralized travelers something to look forward to despite abject despair. Luke gives us a window into Jesus’s considered decision about how to lift their Spirits—he retells their faith history. In true Torah tradition, Jesus teaches the faith-history of Israel as if it was Passover.

¹⁸ You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. ¹⁹ Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. ²⁰ Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹ so that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your ancestors to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. (Dt 18-21)

⁵⁹ Thomas Joseph White, *Exodus*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 279.

Jesus catalyzes these faithful men to remember God's promises and actions since that time and helps them draw the conclusion that, therefore, God is not going to abandon Israel now, and neither is Jesus (Ex. 3:6). Maybe Jesus even said, "Think about it!"

Through the reciting of God's salvific action in history, Jesus exhorts them to work towards a brighter future. The Good News serves as the basis for a better world. This is a critical message for us today. Even when the world seems lost, there is love and hope, and the Good News wins the day. It is spiritually nourishing to accept God's call.

Acting. Eventually, the Presence of the Lord is revealed to Moses in Exodus, and to the followers and disciples in Luke. In each event, a burning presence is central. Vocally, God acknowledges the Holy presence in the unconsumed, burning bush on the mountain. Correspondingly, the unknown voice of Jesus burns in the followers' hearts, metaphorically, or even possibly physically on the road to Emmaus.⁶⁰ Jesus already has an intimate understanding of who these believers are, Cleopas and another devotee, and loves them.

Jesus opened the Scripture (v 31) via the word, *dianoigō*, and consequently, the same word was used to tell how the Spirit caused them to recognize Jesus (v 32). Noteworthy is how *dianoigō* receives a passive tense. The followers' "eyes were bound." Their eyes were opened through Divine intervention at a precise moment, the decisive moment, to allow them to recognize Jesus as the Spirit dictated.⁶¹ Then, Jesus powerfully

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Luke*. The author notes that "Probably because they sensed a conflict of fact, some Latin MSS change 'burning' to 'veiled' or 'blinded,' but that is to miss the psychological point of the recollection." "Burning" would have made sense to Luke's readers, as the burning heart was understood as an emotion such as love, 397.

⁶¹ Ibid. See Danker and Krug, *Lexicon*, 141.

revealed his presence in the instant of the breaking of the bread. That very fraction of cataclysmic time and space was opened in front of their very eyes.

God loved the budding prophets in each of these scenarios. The Holy One of Israel called Moses to be God's Holy Prophet. Jesus, the Holy Redeemer, called the disciples into the very first form of Christian service, evangelizing the Good News, to be Christ's prophets, teachers, healers, and preachers.

That same action in both situations demonstrates that the Great I Am is continuously acting. God prepares Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to effectuate the liberation of Israel under the auspices of God's divine power and purpose. God calls Moses to act. Moses acts and channels God's power. Jesus calls his believers to act in the moment of their divine revelation at the fraction, the breaking of the bread. Jesus verifies his presence in the bread and entrusts them with his Holy legacy, his mission to them. Jesus calls them to tell others about how he is perpetually present in our burning hearts and through the breaking of the bread.

In myriad ways, the Emmaus story is directly tied to the call of Moses. Jesus explains the Law of Moses directly by recounting Moses's prophetic witness. Jesus also extols all the prophets who furthered the Law until the time of Jesus. Each event involves achieving freedom from bondage, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Salvation occurs because God in Exodus and Jesus in Luke reject the worldly destruction of God's people. Each liberation incorporates the unleavened bread, brought forward by the Law and tradition from the Exodus moment to the Emmaus moment.

The believers' actions along the road underscore their continued Jewish piety according to the ancient Deuteronomic tradition. Though their eyes are held from

recognizing Jesus at the time, they not only offer Jesus food and lodging, they urge the stranger to stay. They offer hospitality by including the stranger as observant Jews of the first century would inevitably do. Strong's Lexicon defines paroikeō as "to sojourn, dwell in as a stranger," and "to reside as a foreigner."⁶² In these moments, Jesus is a stranger in his own country and even foreign to his own followers. This draws attention to Jesus's lineage of outsiders (discussed in chapter 2), his mission to bring the foreign idea of the Good News to the people, and his increasing separation or estrangement from the crowd as his true nature becomes known to the people.

Unwittingly, the believers have created Christian community in the burning presence of the Lord by faith and piety. In so doing, they are following Torah, acting out of love by recognizing Jesus's personhood although they initially do not "see" Jesus. Additionally, the men are honored through Jesus's assignment to continue his message of the Good News. They now recognize these Divine actions have been evidenced by a burning that does not consume. This burning presence of the Lord neither consumes the bush nor their faithful beating hearts. Rather, these instances of burning are the Divine fuel of liberation.

In Exodus, God sees and hears the distress of the enslaved Israelites. God offers comfort and an extensive strategy for liberation, and decides to act through God's agent, Moses. Aaron, Miriam and Moses mobilize for mission; God's plan unfolds and, consequently, the Israelites are liberated.

⁶² G3939 – Paroikeō – Strong's Greek Lexicon (RSV). N Strong's Lexicon defines paroikeō as "to sojourn, dwell in as a stranger," and "to reside as a foreigner." No Pages. Cited 7 Feb 2019. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G3939&t=RSV>.

Likewise, in Luke, Jesus observes and recognizes the distress of the followers. Jesus thinks about a way to comfort the believers and decides to retell the old, old story from the Law of Moses and all the prophets. He makes a covenant with them that he is and will be present in the Holy Supper. The unbridled Holy Spirit fires that burning and yearning for Jesus as light to light. This synchronicity is a bilateral agreement between Jesus and the believers. Jesus calls and they (we) act by operation of the Holy Spirit. It is a prophetic dialogue between Spirit and that Divine spark that resides within them and in all of us.

Jesus then acts by calling them to be his apostles in the breaking of the bread. Jesus reminds them of his purpose so that his disappearance makes more sense. “At that very hour,” these followers head to Jerusalem to mobilize their evangelical mission (Lk 24:33). They act immediately.

They accept Jesus’s mission with urgency. The disciples’ acceptance of their mission provides for Jesus’s own liberation through his ascension and release to his eternal mission. We, the current custodians of Jesus’s mission are equally called forever to repeat that mission, that model: to recognize the distress of the marginalized, to think on a means of delivering justice, and then to act accordingly, with prayer, courage and urgency.

Chapter 2

Jesus, Son of Outsiders

Truth at the first was naked born.
William Byrd

Matthew gives us Jesus's unique genealogy to demonstrate the undeniable truth—Jesus's mission and Good News are for everyone. Jesus descends from strangers, and he welcomes strangers to the Body of Christ (Mt 1:1-17). We would not have Jesus without the outsiders listed in his ancestral lineage. Remarkably, only the Matthean genealogy includes women, five to be exact: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba of the Hebrew Testament, and Mary from the Greek Testament. All are outsiders in some way. Scandalously, Mary was unmarried and pregnant with Jesus. And just as Matthew opens this gospel with a list of outsiders, strangers to Israel, Matthew closes the gospel with the Great Commissioning to evangelize *all people*.

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.' (Mt 28:16-20)

Matthew's Jesus is for everyone, as demonstrated in his ancestry of outsiders. Understanding Jesus's one-of-a-kind genealogy is key to understanding that his mission includes everybody.

Jesus's written genealogy is extensive and provides social prominence. Malina and Rohrbaugh place a fine point on this by identifying such a genealogy

as “a claim to authority, to place, to political or civil rights, various social roles, or *even the right to speak*”⁶³ (Italics mine). In fact, this genealogy recognizes Jesus’s lineage back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the first set of fourteen names. The second set of fourteen generations establishes Jesus’s relatedness to King David and his royalty. The third set of fourteen ancestors runs between the return from Babylon and the birth of the Messiah.

Recent studies indicate that genealogies can serve a wide range of social functions: preserving tribal homogeneity or cohesion, interrelating diverse traditions, acknowledging marriage contracts between extended families, maintaining ethnic identity, and encoding key social information about a person. But above all, genealogies establish claims to social status (honor) or to a particular office (priest, king), or rank, thereby providing a guide for proper social interaction.⁶⁴

While genealogies could be misrepresented or changed to benefit the one offering it,⁶⁵ it seems the Matthean writer would have purged these women from the text given the potential taint that has been read into their stories. However, the men of the genealogy do not escape taint as well. For instance, Judah shirked his duty by refusing the Levirate marriage of his son Shelah to Tamar and presumed she was a harlot. Tamar’s became “Tamar the Harlot,” despite strong evidence to the contrary. Rahab, too, carried the epithet, “Rahab the Harlot.” Ruth is wrongly

⁶³ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 23-24. Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina series 1 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2007), 40–50.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

presumed to have had sex with Boaz on the threshing room floor. Bathsheba was summoned by David to commit adultery. Mary was “supposedly” impregnated by the Holy Spirit and prior to marriage to Joseph.

Astonishingly, the Matthean evangelist included their perceived checkered past to shed light on how God works with intent and through all of us to achieve God’s plan, even through strangers and enemies. These women appear as matriarchs in a document intended to establish Jesus’s kingship, his messiahship. This is a new, radically different savior-king whose Good News includes the stranger, those surviving on the margins of society. He comes from creative and powerful women whose own attributes appear as hallmarks of Jesus’s ministry.

Each woman is also surrounded by unusual circumstances which potentially could have put her out of the community. Each woman engages her subjugated knowledge in solving her dilemma and moves Jesus’s lineage forward through her line. G. H. Albrecht describes “disqualified or naïve knowledges of the disempowered.”⁶⁶ This kind of knowledge reveals the “political struggles that underlie” the reality of the world through dominant eyes. While Albrecht has written in contemporary times, her insights are timeless and she offers instruction on how to stand in the shoes of these women as they navigate their normally disempowered lives.

The knowledge that the homeless have about social safety nets, the knowledge that women have about sexism, the knowledge that gays and lesbians have about loving relationships, the knowledge that people of color have about racism challenge dominant assumptions and explanations. The knowledge that illiterate farmers in El Salvador have

⁶⁶ Gloria H. Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 140.

about labor relations reveal the function of domination embedded in our institutions and the ‘knowledge’ that validates them. These are the disqualified or naïve knowledges. We, who are part of the dominant, literally cannot ‘see’ this without learning to see the eyes with which we see. We have to ‘see’ that we are socially located, and so is our ‘truth.’⁶⁷

Albrecht underscores the importance of “seeing,” of reading situations and recognizing need, being faithful, and being courageous even when one is disempowered.

Jesus, in understanding his ancestry and his Jewishness, adopts this self-knowledge and uses it as a critical emphasis in his ministry. Repeatedly he recites Torah, challenges systemic discrimination, and champions the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. First, we must explore these standout women from his family history to better understand the amazing nature of this genealogy, and how it teaches us to value “outsiders” as treasured contributors to society and our faith journey.

Tamar, Levirate⁶⁸ Widow (Gn 38:1-30). Judah, son of Jacob and Leah, had three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. Tamar married Er, but God struck him down as an evildoer. Having died without a male heir, Er’s next eldest brother, Onan, owed Er a duty to marry his widow, Tamar. This is the Levirate law as set forth in Deuteronomy. It is a mandate, not a suggestion.

⁵ When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband’s brother to her, ⁶ and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. (Dt 25:5-10)

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Carolyn Pressler, “Levirate Marriage,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Astrid B. Beck, and Allen C. Myers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2000), 803.

Onan was obligated to marry his brother Er's widow, so that any issue from the marriage would continue Er's line. Knowing any children would not be his heirs, Onan spilled his seed on the ground and intentionally refused to father children. So, God struck him down also. Judah, fearing death for his third son Shelah, would not give him to Tamar.

Since Judah refused to obey the Levirate law, Tamar, in an act of subversion, posed by the side of the road to Timnah. She took off her widow's garments and put on a veil. Judah took her to be a harlot and had sex with her. He promised to pay her with a young goat. As surety for this debt, Tamar obtained Judah's signet, cord, and the staff in his hand (v 18).

Upon learning Tamar was pregnant, Judah sought to punish her by burning her alive, a much harsher penalty than required.

²⁵ As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, 'By the man to whom these belong, I am with child.' And she said, 'Mark, I pray you, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.' ²⁶ Then Judah acknowledged them and said, 'She is more righteous than I, in as much as I did not give her to my son Shelah.' And he did not lie with her again. (Gn 38:25-26, RSV)

Significantly, Judah recognized his personal items through the same verb, *epignoskō*, translated as *epignōthi*, as was used in the Emmaus story. It was more than simply recognizing his possessions, it was also about Judah recognizing the error of his ways, and in so doing, he did not lie with Tamar again. Judah sought to be righteous, too; this penitence signaled a shift for Judah who became a great leader as successor to his father, Jacob.

Although an outsider as a Canaanite, Tamar nonetheless conducted herself as a God-fearer. Tamar held fast to the Levirate law even though her Israelite

father-in-law would not do right by her. In the end, her father-in-law acknowledged her legal righteousness in the absence of his own. Tamar took desperate, subversive measures, but she fulfilled the familial responsibility to Er, and, in so doing, contributed to Jesus's lineage. She also successfully defended herself against injustice when accused of harlotry, the kind of accusation so often made against women in times of conflict to ruin their reputation.

In the face of injustice, Tamar advocated for herself and won in a time when women had little recourse. Tamar bore twins by Judah: Perez and Zerah; Perez is one of the ancestors of Jesus.

Rahab, Righteous Gentile (Josh 2:1-24). In the conquest account, Rahab lived literally in the wall of Jericho (v 15). During Joshua's campaign to conquer Jericho, Rahab played a key role by hiding Joshua's spies. In the text, she was referred to as a harlot, although references to drying sheaves of flax on her roof call this characterization into question; perhaps she owned her own weaving business (v 6).⁶⁹ Nonetheless, her epithet was, "Rahab the Harlot." This immediately identified her as an outsider.

Rahab recited Israel's victory based on their Red Sea passage and military defeat of the Amorites. Rahab further stated that the city residents feared the Israelite God and were "melting" at the thought of their inevitable capture or worse (vv 10-11). Rahab was a Gentile but also a God-fearer, and her speech read

⁶⁹ Josephus "connects the word harlot (*zonah*) to the verb 'to feed' (*zon*) and suggests in Ant., 5.1.2 that she was an innkeeper, running something more akin to a bed and breakfast rather than a brothel." From Amy H. C. Robertson, "Rahab and Her Interpreters," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 3d ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 109–112.

as if she was a convert because she readily and faithfully acknowledged the power of YHWH, perhaps even prophetically so.⁷⁰

After misleading the king's men, she hid Joshua's spies on the roof amidst the stalks of flax. With the city gates now closed after dark, they were essentially trapped and needed to further hide on the roof amidst the sheaves. A sophisticated negotiator, Rahab utilized her position of strength and bargained with the spies while they were on the roof and vulnerable to being seen by others (vv 8, 12-14). Citing her hospitality, Rahab pledged to keep their identity and presence a secret. The spies agreed.

The spies state a three-pronged conditional pledge to protect Rahab and all her extended family. 1) The crimson cord they give her must hang in her window; 2) anyone outside of her house would not be protected, but the spies were responsible for keeping anyone inside from harm; 3) if Rahab reveals their whereabouts, the spies' promise to protect them is null and void. Note that Rahab's promise is unconditional and the spies' promise is conditional. The agreement is not equal. Single-handedly, Rahab bargains for all of her father's household in exchange for the lives of just the three spies; she proves a tough negotiator. Rahab hangs the crimson cord in her window (vv 17-24). The spies ultimately keep their promise by preserving alive Rahab's extended family during the battle (6:25).

Rahab undertook tremendous risk for herself and her family with the potential of being discovered lending aid and comfort to the enemy. Despite the

⁷⁰ Robertson, *Rahab*, 109-110.

taint of her perceived harlotry, Rahab played a noteworthy role in Israel's history. Rahab appears in a list of champions of Israel for her saving works (Heb 11:31). Rahab's acts are also used as an example that without works, faith is inevitably dead (Jas 2:25).

Ruth, the Moabitess, Levirate Widow, Convert to Israel. Prior to their departure from Moab, Ruth and Naomi have an earnest conversation about how families are made regardless of blood ties and that they stick together in crisis. Famine in Israel and Moab has taken its toll; Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth, all widows, have an emotional goodbye. Orpah is going back to her people, but Ruth will not leave Naomi.

14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. **15** So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." **16** But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

17 Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried.

May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" **18** When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. (Ruth 1:14-18)

Not only does Ruth decide to return to a foreign land as outsider, she swears an oath with her life that she will not leave Naomi. Ruth is righteous and honorable.

Ruth's story has an agricultural setting and focuses specifically on gleaning. Boaz noticed Ruth gleaning and instructed his workers to allow her all the grain she needed, even from the standing grain, without any bother from the servants (Ruth 2:8-23). Boaz saw something remarkable in this woman and

protected her as she struggled to support Naomi and herself under difficult circumstances. Boaz is likewise righteous and honorable.

Naomi knows that Boaz is righteous and will not shame Ruth. Naomi instructs Ruth to meet Boaz at the threshing floor at midnight; she asks him to cover her with his cloak. She has proposed marriage. Ruth could have sought someone younger, or better off, or married a Moabite endogamously. But in her second act of righteousness, she chooses Naomi's next-of-kin, Boaz. He recognizes her as worthy, and thus she is no longer a stranger in Judah. E. J. Campbell writes that the story of Ruth is about establishing *hesed*, relationship, and that Ruth must not be read as a sexually provocative text,

Once again, the story-teller signals us: the verb he uses is not 'lie down,' that ambiguous term but Hebrew *lwn/lyn*, 'to lodge,' the same term Ruth had used in her avowal to Naomi in 1:16 No ambivalence here! This term is never used in the Hebrew Bible with a sexual undertone. The dark ambiguity gives way to the clarity of the kinds of human commitments which characterize this story. Now it becomes clear that both of these people are worthy, and will do things in righteous fashion. It is not prudery which compels the conclusion that there was no sexual intercourse at the threshing floor; it is the utter irrelevance of such a speculation. What the scene must end with is something far more fitting, the clear evidence of Boaz's determination to care for these two widows as custom and generosity dictate.⁷¹

Further, Boaz gets Ruth away from the threshing place before dawn to avoid even the appearance of impropriety and to protect her reputation; he promises to do right by her.

⁷¹ Edward J. Campbell Jr., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 7 (Garden City: New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 138.

Following a discussion with elders at the gate, Boaz arranged to buy Naomi and Elimelech's land and to take Ruth in marriage. Prior superior rights were properly waived, and all at the gate bless Ruth.

¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate, along with the elders, said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and bestow a name in Bethlehem; ¹² and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah." (Ruth 4:11-12)

The elders understood that Ruth was becoming a daughter of Israel by joining Boaz's household. Ruth, now a full-fledged daughter of Israel, also received a communal blessing from a chorus of women.

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the LORD made her conceive, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. ¹⁷ The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David. (Ruth 4:13-17)

The women of the community even name the child, Obed, meaning "worshipper."⁷²

It is an act of kinship as were the many kindnesses Boaz offered to Naomi and Ruth when he initially met Ruth in the field (Ruth 2). Upon hearing of Boaz's support of Ruth's gleaning, Naomi calls Boaz "one of our circle of redeemers" (Ruth 2:20). Campbell notes that

Redeemers are to function on behalf of persons and their property within the circle of the larger family; they are to take responsibility for the unfortunate and stand as their supporters and advocates. They are to

⁷² Donald Fowler, "Obed," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Astrid B. Beck, and Allen C. Myers (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2000), 981.

embody the basic principles of caring responsibility for those who may not have justice done for them by the unscrupulous, or even by the person who lives by the letter of the law.⁷³

Boaz served as a redeemer of kinship by restoring these widows to his and Elimelech's clan. By operation of redeeming the kinship of Ruth and Naomi, Boaz also benefited by extending his family and having a son.

In bearing Obed by Boaz, Ruth satisfies her first husband, Mahlon's, legacy with a son. Naomi's duty to Elimelech is also fulfilled in the sharing of this long-awaited child (Ruth 4:7-21). Obed is in the lineage of the ancestors of Jesus.

For a second time, an outsider follows the law of levirate marriage and produces heirs in the lineage of Jesus, despite potentially scandalous circumstances. Ruth is a pivotal figure of the OT. G. Jackson writes "There is modern debate as to whether or not the purpose of the story was to settle the issues of universalism versus exclusivism, matriarchy versus patriarchy, the status of levirate marriage, the status of the poor, land rights, or the Davidic genealogy."⁷⁴ Perhaps, it serves all of these purposes.

P. Tribble provides an excellent summation of the gynocentric voice of the Book of Ruth and sets forth the success of Naomi and Ruth's ability to not only survive, but thrive.

Among the book's characters, women predominate. They embody a remnant theology in contrast to patriarchal perspectives. Scene 1 presents Naomi and Ruth all alone; they make their own decisions. This portrayal continues in scene 2, even though the appearance of Boaz complicates the situation. The power of the scene is not, however, transferred to him. The women prevail in their struggle for physical survival. Similarly, in scene 3

⁷³ Campbell, *Ruth*, 136.

⁷⁴ Glenna S. Jackson, "Ruth, Book Of," ed. David Noel Freedman, Astrid B. Beck, and Allen C. Myers, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 1143–1144.

they secure their cultural survival. At its beginning, the scene reverts to a traditional mode when males decide the future of the widows. At the end, the females of Bethlehem reinterpret the occasion. The newborn child symbolizes a new beginning with men. Overall, the book of Ruth shows females working out their own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in them (cf. Philippians 2:12).⁷⁵

The Community Practice of Gleaning. Additionally, the Book of Ruth centers around the Israelite agricultural Levitical laws governing gleaning and it is read in worship at Shavuot, (the Festival of Weeks or Pentecost) to celebrate the harvest of spring grain.⁷⁶ This is an appropriate time since her story centers on gleaning and Boaz's generosity with his grain. This practice inherited from the Law of Moses reinforces our duty to protect those who struggle.

As a part of God's holy covenant with Israel, God also gave ethical laws of conduct with specific instructions. This code enhances the Ten Commandments in order to further govern a society of peace and respect. Social order consists of a community that must not blaspheme God, kill, steal, commit adultery, or covet. Parents are honored, and God commands a day of rest. The code also emphasizes the importance of looking out for community members who struggle (Dt. 10:18, 14:29, and 22:22-24).

One way to do this was to allow the practice of gleaning by those in need of food. God called specifically for one of Israel's great festivals to include those who hunger. The following text describes gleaning during the Festival of Weeks or Pentecost.

⁷⁵ Phyllis Tribble, "Ruth, Book Of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al., vol. 5 (New York, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1992), 895.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Three times Naomi suggests Ruth stay in Moab, and three times Ruth says she is going with Naomi. This three-fold rejection serves as a model to test gentile converts to Judaism even today.

You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. Then you shall keep the festival of weeks to the Lord your God contributing a freewill offering in proportion to the blessing that you have received from the Lord your God. Rejoice before the Lord your God—you and your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you—at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes. (Dt 16:9-12)

The instructions for allowing the poor to glean offer an excellent example of caring for community. Torah orders the Israelites to help those struggling to make ends meet. Harvesters intentionally do not strip the field entirely clean of grain. They leave fruit on the vine for the poor and strangers to come to the field edges for easier access.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God . . .
³³ When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. ³⁴ The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. (Lev 19:9-10, 33-34)

Such practices strengthened the social system for those literally eating from the edges of the field, at the very threshold of survival. The Israelites recognized the humanity in people with whom no kinship existed. A woman lacking father, husband, brother, or son faced a harsh life without this legal form of compassionate grace. More succinctly put, it is justice.

Justice is “Protecting rights and punishing wrongs using fairness. It is possible to have unjust laws, even with fair and proper administration of the law of the land.”⁷⁷

⁷⁷ “What Is Justice? Definition of Justice (Black’s Law Dictionary),” *The Law Dictionary*, last modified October 19, 2012, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://thelawdictionary.org/justice/>.

Justice is not to be confused with the term “equality” because it is definitionally vague and overbroad. Justice seeks fairness. For example, if three people all receive equal shares of something, the share could be inadequate, adequate, or abundant given the individual’s context.

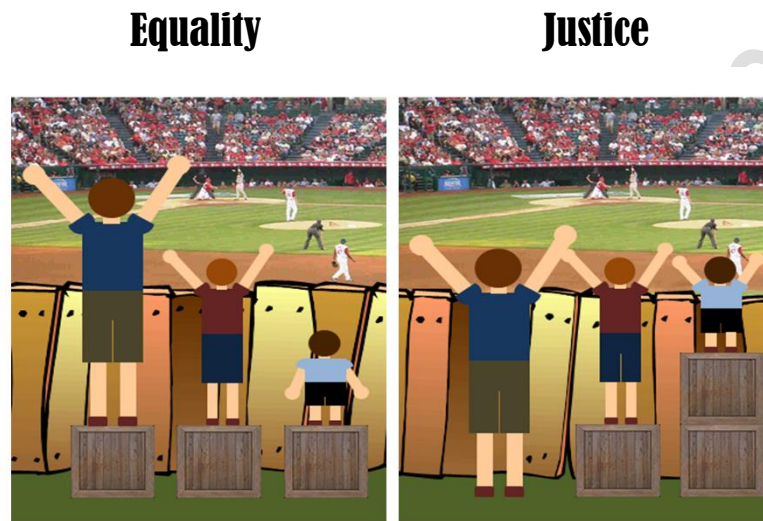


Figure 2. Equal distribution of something fails to contemplate the context of the subject. Justice is comprehensive, recognizing individual need through seeing, thinking and acting.⁷⁸

There is a profound difference between secular justice and biblical justice.

Biblical justice is more than a mathematical distribution of goods. The multiple writers of the Bible speak of justice as a chief attribute of God, with biblical justice inextricably tied to God’s mercy and grounded in the relationship between God and humankind. From the time of the wilderness wanderings when the Hebrew people were given ethical instructions about their treatment of widows,

⁷⁸ See “Craig Froehle,” accessed March 31, 2019, <https://business.uc.edu/faculty-and-research/departments/obais/faculty/craig-froehle.html>. Prof. Froehle, of the University of Cincinnati, is credited with creating this concept which has enjoyed numerous iterations around the world.

orphans, and strangers, the practice of justice in Judaism has been understood as the mission of those who follow Yahweh.⁷⁹

Ruth is an outsider, like Tamar and Rahab before her, as Israelites and Moabites are enemies. Yet because of her relationship to her beloved Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, Ruth risks everything to return to Judah with her to search for resources and help from Naomi's family. Ruth is likely motivated to accompany the elderly Naomi due to concerns about Naomi's ability to make the long journey without a younger escort. In this sense, this story is also a moral tale about the bond between women, of women's friendship, *hesed*, of human kindness and devotion.

Bathsheba, the Hittite. David is the architect of the most treacherous story in this recount of Jesus's lineage. He sees Bathsheba bathing on a roof, almost surely as she is performing a purification rite. He sends for her and has sex with her. Saying no to the king was not an option. Bathsheba is married to Uriah, the Hittite, a soldier in David's army who is away fighting for Israel, and she can be presumed to be a Hittite via marriage. She sends word to David that she is pregnant. David tries to confuse the paternity of the child by coaxing Uriah into having sex with Bathsheba while on leave. This plot fails, and David sends Uriah to the front with the intent to have him killed in battle. This plan works, and David marries the widow Bathsheba.

The child she bears David dies due to God's anger at David's sin. Ultimately, Bathsheba bears Solomon by David, and she orchestrates the

⁷⁹ Michelle Tooley, "Just, Justice," ed. David Noel Freedman, Astrid B. Beck, and Allen C. Myers, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 757.

circumstances by which Solomon succeeds to the throne of Israel upon David's death.

We must ask why each of these OT women is included. They subvert kyriarchy⁸⁰ by wrangling with powerful men and prevailing. Tamar was possibly an Israelite, but we do not know. She did press for Levirate marriage to continue her husband's line, though Judah's actions attempt to thwart it. Rahab and Ruth are strangers to Israel, yet they demonstrate great faith as God-fearers, and Ruth even converts to the God of Israel. Harrington states,

It is possible to accuse Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba of sexual misconduct. But matters are not so clear in the case of Ruth. It seems best to leave the idea expressed by the inclusion of the four women at the level of 'irregularity' or 'departure from the ordinary.' In their own distinctive ways they prepare for and foreshadow the irregular birth of Jesus that will be described in Matt 1:18-25.⁸¹

This summation falls flat by concluding this genealogical account as merely irregular and out of the ordinary. Further, Harrington seems content to allow perceived sexual misconduct of the women to stand. To be sure, the genealogy is both irregular and out of the ordinary, but it is so much more than these dismissive descriptors indicate.

The Matthean Gospel as a whole, introduced by the genealogy, repeats the pattern of the final book of the First Testament of Chronicles.

For Chronicles (called in Hebrew 'The Book of Days' = genealogy) begins with a genealogy and ends with an edict from the one with power over 'all the kingdoms of the earth' (2 Chron 36:22-23; used by Ezra 1:1-2), namely, God's Messiah, Cyrus (Isa 45:1; see Isa 44:28).⁸²

⁸⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

⁸¹ Harrington, *Matthew*, 32.

⁸² Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social Commentary*, 23.

Matthew opens with “Biblos geneseos Jesou Christou . . .” meaning the book of Genesis, and ends with a Divine edict, known as the Great Mandamus, to evangelize the world (Mt 28:16-20). Malina and Rohrbaugh conclude that

By whichever allusion, it appears that Matthew offers a new ‘scripture,’ which goes all the way from the ‘beginning’ to the ‘end.’ In between these brackets, Jesus’ five major speeches (each ending with the refrain ‘When Jesus finished . . .’: Matt 7:28, 11:1; 13:53; 19.1; 26:1) would have us think the new ‘scripture’ is a new Torah from the new prophet, the new Moses, Jesus, Son of David, Son of Abraham.⁸³

The Matthean evangelist took great pains to break the traditional pattern in genealogies by including five mothers in addition to the thirty-nine fathers listed. Each woman, even as an outsider which would normally be forgotten or ignored, has an extraordinary story wrought with scandal, seeming powerlessness, courage, intelligence, craft and wisdom, and subjugated knowledge. Each woman risked her life to bring Jesus forth; together, they are a multi-generational midwifery team that brings forth the birth of the Messiah.

While this historical record purported to go back to Abraham, the writer condensed it, in keeping with this common practice. Matthew likely intended to shape the Israelite history using the complete number of seven as the dividend. Additional complete numbers include five, ten, and forty. Matthew used a complete number to stress the importance of his point. Harrington does note that the “four women set up the reader to expect the unexpected. At the beginning of the Gospel they function as a part of a theme that runs through the entire text: the tension between tradition and newness.”⁸⁴

It is critical to halt the habit of androcentric interpretation which relegates the action of biblical women to the margins of the page or removes them altogether. The

⁸³ Ibid., 24.

⁸⁴ Harrington, *Matthew*, 33.

birth of Jesus is life-changing rather than irregular, and monumental rather than out of the ordinary. This is a song of Israel and of Jesus, and the women are the heart of the stanzas.

Mary, Mother of God

. . . [A]nd Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph
the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born, who is
called the Messiah (Mt 1:15b-16).

When Joseph and Mary are named in the genealogy, the literary and grammatical rules of the genealogical construction change from those of the OT in two significant ways. The patriarchal pattern of naming is established as from male to male: “Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers.” The pattern breaks when a matriarch is named: Tamar is added, “Judah the father of Perez and Zerah *by Tamar* . . . and Salmon the father of Boaz *by Rahab*, and Boaz the father of Obed *by Ruth* . . . And David was the father of Solomon *by the wife of Uriah* (Mt 1:2-7).

Mary’s listing is entirely different from every other. Joseph is not listed as “the father of Jesus by Mary.” Instead, Joseph is listed as “the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.” Joseph is honored as the faithful husband, but not as the presumptive biological father.

This was the scandal of Jesus’s conception and birth. Pregnancy before marriage could easily have brought shame on Mary’s father’s house. Mary was not alone in this dangerous predicament because if sex occurred in the city, both of the unmarried sexual partners potentially faced the death penalty. Rather than disgrace her, or face a worse fate himself, Joseph had first decided to end the betrothal quietly without naming a reason.

That proved to be a legal quagmire. God had other plans. In a dream, God told Joseph that Mary carried a holy child and he should stay with her.

And so, Joseph took Mary into his home. Finally, Mary, great with child, rode a donkey to David's Royal City, Bethlehem. Now married to Joseph, Mary birthed Jesus the Messiah in no man's land. Born in a barn, potentially illegitimate, or *illegal*, in the eyes of society, Jesus's beginning was less than auspicious.

We are given a window into Joseph's experience in Matthew, his thought processes, his dreams, his concerns, and his righteousness. While the genealogical subject stems from Matthew, it is important to read about Mary and Elizabeth intertextually through the window provided by the Lukan evangelist. We learn much about Mary's thoughts, concerns, righteousness, piety, and agency in the first three chapters of the third gospel. The gynocentric passages teach us about the experience of mothers and the bond they have.⁸⁵

R. Bauckham focuses on Mary's agency, noting the meeting between the two women is not just about family members sharing private joys. By describing the historical and theological significance of Mary and Elizabeth, "[T]hey constitute a turning point in the story of God's people Israel and the fulfillment of his purposes for them."²¹ They are laden with the promises and hopes of the past and pregnant with the future in which these promises and hopes will at last be fulfilled."⁸⁶

Elizabeth reminds us of the matriarchs of Israel, many of whom also enjoyed miraculous conceptions. Her piety and righteousness accentuate the magnitude of her

⁸⁵ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 2002), 54.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 55.

blessing of Mary, “Blessed are you among women,” (1:25). Mary, while initially confused by the physical impossibility of a pregnancy as a virgin, accepts her role humbly, devoutly, and with courage in her famous Magnificat (1:46-55). She encounters angels and shepherds bringing birth announcements out of nowhere, and she “treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart” (2:15-19).

As pious Jews, Mary and Joseph see to Jesus’s dedication at the temple. The holy man, Simeon, acknowledged Jesus as the savior of Israel. Addressing Mary directly, Simeon predicts that Jesus would cause many to rise and fall in Israel, and that a sword would pierce her heart (2:25-35). Mary was the first priest of the church in lifting Jesus up to the altar, as an offering to God, the symbolic sacrifice of the firstborn son, the foreshadowing of his cross and resurrection.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Refugees. While Luke focused on Mary, Matthew focused on Joseph as a righteous servant before God. Not only does Jesus have a bold and courageous mother, he has a devout father from the royal house of David. Joseph names Jesus, the expected act of a biological father in first century Judaism. He obeys every dream, and most important of all, he protects Mary and Jesus.

Later in a dream, God warns Joseph to flee, to get Jesus and his mother away from Herod the Great. The Holy Family, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, fled by night to Egypt as refugees. A refugee is “one that flees; especially: a person who flees to a foreign country or power to escape danger or persecution; someone who has been forced to leave a country because of war or for religious or political reasons.”⁸⁷

⁸⁷ “Definition of REFUGEE,” accessed February 8, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/refugee>. Barbara E. Reid, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The New Collegeville Bible commentary v. 1 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2005), 19. Reid indicates that

Jesus's parents loved and protected him in hiding until God again instructed Joseph to return the family to the land of Israel. There is a direct parallel between Joseph, son of Jacob and Rachel, and Joseph the husband of Mary. Through a series of dreams, Joseph, who was sold into Egypt due to the jealousy of his brothers, saved many people from starvation. He saw God's providence where most would not. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus fled to Egypt because Joseph, also a dreamer, listened to God and saved his family.

Parallels between Jesus and Moses are obvious as well. Just as Jesus was born in dangerous times for occupied Israel, so was Moses. Moses faced slaughter as a threat to the pharaoh and was rescued and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. Moses, though safe, was a refugee even though living in the pharaoh's house. The parallels in the stories of these great prophets is unmistakable. Moses is drawn from a papyrus basket in the Nile, and Jesus first sleeps in a manger.

God sent Jesus, the child of descendants from strangers: presumed harlots, refugees, and an unwed mother. He was born in a barn and fled to a foreign land to escape political assassination, a lynching. Jesus himself was a *refugee*, and *undocumented*, and even labeled a stranger in his own country by his own disciples. His patchy ancestry, sketchy birth narrative, and radical affront to the principalities and powers teach us much about our role as disciples in Jesus' Holy Name.

We are called to recognize the stranger, refugee, widow, orphan, and poor. We are called to process the situations we face and find constructive ways to act by working alongside those who struggle on the margins. We are called to hear their cries and listen

Israelites often found refuge in Egypt with examples from "Gen. 42-48; 1 Kgs 11:40; 2 Kgs 25:26; Jer 26:21; 41:16-18; 43:1-7."

for what they need, and not settle for what secular society says they should get. This is biblical justice, full of compassion, grace, and mercy.

In the next chapter, Jesus teaches these lessons in the story of the Woman Bent-Over for 18 Years, and the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge. He instructs us to name hypocrisy, and to challenge it directly with creativity, power and courage.

Chapter 3

Jesus, Public Theologian, Advocate, Radical Revolutionary, Public Theologian, Healer, Teacher, Preacher, Savior

But the Lord answered him and said, “*You hypocrites!*”
Luke 13:15

The burning bush of Exodus and the burning hearts on the road to Emmaus establish that God calls us to ministry in both testaments, and indeed through the Spirit of God and the Risen Son of God. These calls are radical and compel us to work for paradigmatic change in our social systems. Moses was radical in working to overthrow Pharaoh. Jesus was radical in demanding the need for change in both Israel and in Rome.

Much of Christianity is currently in league with our capitalist government which perpetuates greed over grace and commodity over care. And, as with Rome and Israel of the first century, sectors of Christianity are subordinate to and cozied up with the powers that be. Jesus consistently offered a drastic critique of the power brokers of both Rome and Israel. His challenges were viewed by Romans and the Jewish elite as treasonous. Yet, Jesus continually threw down the gauntlet to challenge greed, misuse of power, fear-mongering, and wickedness. It cost Jesus his life.

Jesus taught the importance of context in virtually every move he made. We must understand Jesus’s context in first century Palestine as well as our own. Even when he disagreed with or rejected or possibly misread a context, he was open to changing his mind, and actually did.

In this chapter, Jesus’s critique in the face of Empire and his call for justice are found in two biblical pericopes that will be used to underscore his ministry. The evangelist Luke provides an event and a parable, each centering on the plight of a

woman, where Jesus publicly denounces conduct that further marginalizes sectors of Jewish society.

These two situations exemplify Jesus's utilization of intelligent action through his knowledge of Torah and first century Palestine context. It was easy for Jewish women to become disenfranchised from the greater community were they to find themselves without a father, a husband, brother, or married son. The Torah addressed these situations by implementing a sacred duty to care for the widow and the orphan. However, if the community failed to practice this care, women and orphans could quickly find themselves in dire straits. In Hebrew, the term "widow" means

[O]ne who is silent, unable to speak. In a society in which males played the public role and in which women did not speak on their own behalf, the position of a widow, particularly if an eldest son was not yet married, was one of extreme vulnerability ... Left out of the prospect of inheritance by Hebrew law, widows became the stereotypical symbol of the exploited and oppressed.⁸⁸

Jesus underscores the importance of communal *shalom*, wholeness, and *hesed*, relationships.

These stories have three common threads running through them: 1) Jesus issues a public challenge to leaders for their malfeasance in protecting the *status quo* instead of those suffering; 2) Jesus directly or tacitly identifies and rejects hypocrisy; 3) Jesus points out how the theocratic or governmental institutions, Jewish and Roman, are complicit in advocating the perpetuation of these unjust systems solely to protect and preserve their own power and wealth.

⁸⁸ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, "Widow," in *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 423.

Malfeasance,⁸⁹ Nonfeasance, and Misfeasance. Because the Roman and the Jewish leaders, as public officials, intentionally conduct their offices in a manner that violates the public trust, they commit malfeasance. While this legal term comes from English and American common law, it helps us in understanding Jesus's modeling and teaching in our own context.

The failure to act, or nonfeasance, is a different term, but it can rise to the level of malfeasance. Nonfeasance, or failure to do anything, can give the false conclusion that an omission or lack of action does not make the situation worse. In fact, nonfeasance by society at large contributes to the daily cheapening of human life on an exponential trajectory. Thus, by operation of accrued neglect, nonfeasance rises to the level of malfeasance, as with compounding interest, when "silent good people" fail to act over time. In law, silence equals assent; therefore, acquiescence is legally interpreted as a form of silence, and thus becomes agreement. This can be characterized as an unstated intent to pervert the course of justice. For example, our nonfeasance of failing to publicly demand quick actions to relieve suffering at the US southwestern border with Mexico makes us complicit in these atrocious actions. Nonfeasance can therefore be just as deadly as malfeasance.

The law recognizes a third type of misconduct. It is call misfeasance. Misfeasance is doing something legal but doing it incorrectly or inappropriately. It, too, has negative possibilities when a just law is wrongly carried out.

⁸⁹ Anonymous, "Malfeasance," LII / Legal Information Institute, last modified August 19, 2010, accessed January 31, 2019, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/malfeasance>. Malfeasance is the "intentional conduct that is wrongful or unlawful, especially by officials or public employees. Malfeasance is at a higher level of wrongdoing than nonfeasance (failure to act where there was a duty to act) or misfeasance (conduct that is lawful but inappropriate).

Jesus instead taught us to “recognize” suffering through his works and parables. By knowing Torah and the history of the Israelites, Jesus possessed the correct context and understanding to assert that certain sectors normally had protection under the Law of Moses and the Prophets. The Torah established specific laws and duties to care for foreigners, widows, orphans, and the poor. The failure to understand history and context blinds us to the inevitable hypocrisy and institutionalized injustice by a people unable to recognize, think about, and care for the other.

In his day, Jesus models public challenge to the principalities and powers in an honor-shame society—no small undertaking. The only thing awaiting people perceived as treasonous for their public critique of the government in those days was the road to the Place of the Skull, the cross. As Americans today, we have the First Amendment to protect us. In these passages, Jesus employs a rhetorical technique and social construct known as challenge-riposte. This method is appropriate in our time, too.

Just as concern about money, paying the bills, or affording something we want is perpetual and pervasive in American society, so was the concern about honor in the world of the Gospels...Because honor was a limited good, competition for the scarce resource could be intense. In this competition the game of challenge-riposte is a central and very public phenomenon. Ideally, it is a game played among social equals: to challenge those lower on the social scale is to be a bully, while to challenge those above is a failure to know one's proper place.

The game consists of (1) a challenge (almost any word, gesture, action that answers in equal measure or ups the ante (thereby challenges in return). Both positive (gifts, compliments) and negative (insults, dares, public questioning) challenges must be answered to avoid a serious loss of face.⁹⁰

The following healing and teaching acts of Jesus demonstrate the challenge-riposte method.

⁹⁰ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social Commentary*, 334-335.

“Jesus Heals a Crippled Woman”

10 Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. 11 And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, “Woman, you are set free from your ailment.” 13 When he laid his hands on her, immediately she stood up straight and began praising God. 14 But the leader of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had cured on the sabbath, kept saying to the crowd, “There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be cured, and not on the sabbath day.” 15 But the Lord answered him and said, “You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger, and lead it away to give it water? 16 And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day?” 17 When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing. (Lk 13:10-17)

Jewish leaders criticize Jesus for healing a woman unable to stand for 18 years. In turn, Jesus responds by accusing these same leaders of malfeasance, that is, desiccation of Torah because they espouse rules over compassion, or in legal terms, procedure over substance. They have effectively freeze-dried the Spirit of grace in Torah. It is shrunken and lifeless in their hands. The leaders practice a strict rule-based adherence to the Law of Moses by promoting their rote behavior as more important than identifying and following the Spirit, power, and meaning of Torah.

In the synagogue no less, the Jewish elders criticize a Sabbath healing in violation of the Law—they admonish the woman to come back another day though she has suffered mightily. Their words are cutting and constitute a direct and public challenge to Jesus’s healing and compassion. The elders’ damning address to Jesus link their ersatz piety to an artificial faith. The woman’s condition has stricken her for 18 long years, and her spiritual leaders could care less. Not only do they close their eyes and refuse to truly

see her suffering, they relegate her social standing to that which is less even than a beast of burden, an ox or an ass.

Jesus so deftly rejoins (riposte) them, stating they treat a daughter of Abraham like chattel. They see her, they close their eyes figuratively. They fail to recognize her humanity, let alone her Jewishness. In describing her as a daughter of Abraham, Jesus is engaging God's very covenant with Abraham and all who came before who lived righteously in the sight of God. This woman represents the chain of evidence that Torah is still dispositive. It is a powerful moment for this vulnerable, elderly daughter. For disciples of Christ, Torah and the Gospel form and shape who we are and inspire gracious care for the "least of these."

Since the elders likely presume that Jesus is their social inferior, they understand that by having raised the original challenge, the elders must win the argument or lose face. Jesus knows this, and consequently, he goes on high alert and becomes her defense attorney, as well as his own. He is her advocate pointing to the Spirit of God's Holy Law. Jesus flat out calls them hypocrites, *hypokritai*. The preposition, *hypo*, can be translated as the following: by, by means of, at the hands of, under the authority of, or under. *Hypokrisis*, *eōs*, includes descriptors of insincerity and pretense. *Hypokritēs*, *ou*, is defined as "one who pretends to be other than what he is."⁹¹

The "underhandedness" of the elders' behavior is clearly present. Jesus directly condemns the elders for not only failing this daughter of Abraham but also, just as harmfully, for holding her back from wholeness. In their pretense of devotion, they subvert Torah for their own gain—the power to hold things in place.

⁹¹ Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament, 4th Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000), 189.

Johnson asserts that the “and” in verse 17 is intended to draw a distinct line of demarcation between the elders and the opposing crowd.⁹² This separation showcases the rival interests of the peasants versus the rich elders who are allied with the double-layered tiers of establishment and power in Rome and in Jerusalem.

The unfolding event is a kind of trial, and the crowd serves as judge and jury in the court of public opinion. The peasantry evinces a verdict with boisterous rejoicing. Jesus proves that God’s law exists to protect the marginalized, as a shield, and that Torah must never be employed like a sword to cut down the vulnerable. Before their very eyes, Jesus has held the elders to both the letter and the Spirit of the Law. Jesus won the argument, “*and* all of his opponents were put to shame (v 17).” The elders lost face.

The Parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge

In the following parable, Jesus craftily implies the judge’s hypocrisy by underscoring how the judge pretends to be a dedicated jurist and community leader. Canonically, Luke presents this story five chapters after the healing of the woman bent-over. In that situation, Jesus reacted to an event unfolding in real time. He was angry.

However, here we may deduce that Jesus has carefully put this lesson together. He is calm and constructs a masterful example of challenge-riposte for his listeners to imagine and consider more reflectively. Jesus is teaching prayer and courage, and persistence. Jesus never uses the word hypocrite in this text, as he does in the story of the women bent-over from a back malady. He demonstrates our duty to recognize hypocrisy when it is not directly obvious.

18 He told them a parable with the point that it is necessary to continue praying always without giving up. 2 He said, “There was a judge in a certain city. He did not fear God. He had no regard for people. 3 There

⁹² Johnson, *Luke*, 213.

was widow in that city. She kept coming to him saying, ‘Vindicate me against my opponent!’ 4 And for a long time he was not willing to do it. But after this kept up, he said to himself, ‘It’s true I do not fear God or have any regard for people. 5 but this widow gives me so much trouble that I will give her justice! Otherwise she will keep coming and give me a black eye!’” 6 And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God do justice to his elect ones who are crying out to him day and night and show patience toward them? 8 I tell you that he will do justice for them quickly. But when the Son of Man comes, will he in fact find faith on earth?”⁹³ (Lk 18:1-8)

The judge is selfish and hard-hearted in refusing to dispatch his public duty. He is underhanded and worried she might “black his eye,”⁹⁴ and wear him out if she keeps coming. It is an interesting turn of phrase, and it has the same meaning today. He is concerned about the sully of his reputation and wants to avoid showing a “bruised face” in public. The judge admits that a lowly widow will hurt his business with her public accusations.

The widow publicly challenges the judge, and she is willing to exercise challenge-riposte to achieve a just verdict. The judge grants justice to avoid loss of face, his loss of face; he states no other reason for exercising his judicial prerogative. We must be vigilant to recognize the misapplication of the law or the outright refusal or failure to administer justice by derelict judges and authorities.

In these past chapters, God’s call to mission by all of us is clear. Because Jesus came from outsiders and mandated that our mission must include outsiders, too, we cannot claim mission work is only for some people. The Prophet Micah has encouraging words for our mission (6:8),

⁹³ Johnson, Luke, 268. The pericope was translated from the Greek by L.T. Johnson

⁹⁴ Ibid., 270. See Note 5.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice,
and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Part II opens with a consideration of how the history of American chattel slavery has embedded prolific racism and the devaluation of human bodies of color as part of our American ethos. Next, we look at recent examples of how that devaluation is practiced as destruction in contemporary times. Part II ends with an exegesis of “Render Unto Caesar” and Jesus’s view on what is “owed” to the state. A recent interview with Evangelical leader, Jerry Falwell, Jr. exposes his reliance on civil religion to evade the gospel teachings of mercy and care for the marginalized. Falwell’s views are then juxtaposed with the public theological act by former NFL player, Colin Kaepernick, as he protested police brutality against people of color.

In Part III, the parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge will be re-introduced and juxtaposed to a real-life deportation protest by a Latina who is a tacit widow. Her story helps us to see how our faith and theology can be acted out in the public square. As articulated by Brueggemann, this Latina critiques the US ideology of exploiting people of color. This section will provide an overview of First Amendment case law, results of the survey “Religion and Politics,” and a description of various acts of public or political theology.

Part II – We are Called to Process Injustice Theologically and Civically.

Chapter 4

**A Short History of the US:
From Governmental and Biblically-Sanctioned Slavery,
to Marked Bodies and the Legacy of Lynching**

Chapter 5

Modern Day Lynchings

In Memoriam:

**African Americans Michael Donald, Emmett Till, James Byrd, Jr., Freddie Gray,
Michael Brown, and Latino Teen, David Ritcheson**

Chapter 6

**From *Caesars-Herods*, Sovereignties, States and Uncle Sam:
the American Nation-State's Civil Religion
and Reckoning the Furor over Colin Kaepernick's Political Theology**

Chapter 4

A Short History of the US: From Governmental and “Biblically-Sanctioned” Slavery, to Marked Bodies and the Legacy of Lynching

*There is not a man under the canopy of Heaven
who does not know that slavery is wrong for him.*
Frederick Douglass, 1852

Thinking Theologically. To open Part II, it is important to explore what it means to “think theologically.” In Part I, the biblical foundation for this project was established so that we may recognize our call and mission. This serves as the basis for our theological *thinking* about how to effectively employ public theology. Part II bridges the biblical work of recognizing and listening to the pain of others, and of speaking truth to oppressors from Part I with the action of Part III. To build a solid bridge, we need a working knowledge of the society we have inherited, including the ugly, “biblically-sanctioned,” chattel slavery of Africans. We must recognize how we perpetuate the defunct system of slavery by marking bodies stigmaphobically, with hatred and fear. This truth is especially evidenced in the rampant historical practice of lynching throughout three of four regions in this country.

For Christians to do this hard work, we also must recognize our own agency in thinking theologically for, as clearly stated by H. W. Stone and J. O. Duke, we are all theologians.⁹⁵ They explain

If you practice your religion, live according to your Christian faith, even take seriously the spiritual dimension of life, inescapably you think theologically.

It is a simple fact of life for Christians: their faith makes them theologians. Deliberately or not, they think—and act—out of a theological

⁹⁵ Stone, Howard W. and Duke, James O., *How to Think Theologically*, Third. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 1.

understanding of existence, and their faith calls them to become the best theologians they can be. . .

We hold to a time-honored conviction that when Christians are baptized they enter into a ministry they all share, responding to a God-given call to disclose the gospel (God's good news of Jesus Christ) through all they say and do. Their calling makes them witnesses of faith, and hence theologians as well.⁹⁶

As Christians, we constantly process our experiences and measure them, not only against the gospel message, but to determine if such a message is understandable for Christians, as in a litmus test, and whether such situations comport with Christian morality.

Processing our complex world is a tall order. And, processing it within a theological framework complicates the enterprise even further, especially in the waning days of Christendom and with the rising of religious pluralism in the US. However, to engage in the mission of eradicating racism and classism in the US immigration system, the focus of this project, we must process how racism developed in the US, both historically and theologically.

In Chapter 4, we examine how the unholy scheme of American slavery and treatment of people of color, made in the image of God, has brought us to where we are today. Arguably, its sinister nature pervades in less severe modes. However, the vestiges of slavery are still toxic for the oppressed—and to be sure, for the oppressors as well. Chapter 5 offers a memorial to five men of color who were lynched between 1981 and 2015.⁹⁷ To conclude Part II, in chapter 6, we look at how the US became a nation-state, complete with its own peculiar civil religion.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1, 38-40. In the Anglican tradition, the sacrament of Christian initiation is usually referred to as the “ministry of the baptized.”

⁹⁷ It also does not consider the slaughter of nine African-Americans in prayer at an AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2017, or the 11 members of the Tree of Life Synagogue who were executed in their house of worship in 2018. Both sets of mass murders were conducted by white male supremacists.

Racism and classism against the Latin@ diaspora (and all people of color)
cannot be understood without a close examination of our history of chattel slavery of African peoples. The horrific habits developed during that inhumane period have carried over into how the White⁹⁸ majority treats people of color in general. It has become an *institution, established, organized, as if a separate government*, within our federal, state, and local systems. We must be frank about the continuing implications for all people of color--the oppressed, White Americans--the oppressors, and white onlookers; each group suffers in different ways. In his classic work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, P. Freire explains how even oppressors suffer in meting out their particular brands of oppression.

Any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence, even when sweetened by false generosity, because it interferes with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human. With the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun. . . There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their own subjugation. . .

Violence is initiated by those who oppress, who exploit, who fail to recognize others as persons—not by those who are oppressed, exploited, and unrecognized. It is not the unloved who initiate disaffection, but those who cannot love because they love only themselves. It is not the helpless, subject to terror, who initiate terror, but the violent, who with their power create the concrete situation which begets the 'rejects of life.'⁹⁹

These same perpetrators of violence are shaken when the objects of their oppression resist. Oppressors then seek to deflect the oppression itself, blaming the oppressed by

⁹⁸ The term "White" refers to white people who believe in the concept of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, white superiority and Manifest Destiny of Eurocentric, or white, peoples. They subscribe to American civil religion as the proper arbiter of American morality. This is to be contrasted with a second category of "whites" who possibly view the US as unique, perhaps even special, in its experiment in freedom but do not espouse a white superiority. A third group ascribes to an overt white supremacy, hate speech, and participation in neo-Nazi or white supremacy groups. This category will be referred to specifically as "white supremacists."

⁹⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 55.

categorizing them as, “‘those people’ or ‘the blind and envious masses’ or ‘savages’ or ‘natives’ or ‘subversives’ who are disaffected, who are ‘violent,’ ‘barbaric,’ ‘wicked,’ or ‘ferocious’ when they react to the violence of the oppressors.”¹⁰⁰

Yet, despite the power and agency of being the dominant group, oppression comes at a terrible cost. “As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized.”¹⁰¹ The oppressed are the only ones who can free the oppressors, through a liberation where both sides are freed. Freire is clear that exchanging places does nothing to solve the problem. But when the oppressed achieve their freedom, they in turn free the oppressors that they may retrieve the humanity they lost in the habit of violence and exploitation.

Processing American Society using Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. Having established that we are all theologians, we can look to Anglicanism’s approach to studying theology through the metaphor of the three-legged stool: scripture, tradition and reason. We have our sacred texts, we have traditions derived from those texts, *and* we have the God-endowed resources of knowledge, intelligence, wisdom and reason.

While theologian Richard Hooker did not actually coin a specific phrase, like the “three-legged stool of Anglicanism,” he is credited with arriving at the concept in his tome, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Hooker is considered the primary interpreter of the English Reformation and lived during the reign of Elizabeth I. He steered Anglicanism to the *via media*, by retaining major attributes of both Roman Catholicism and the burgeoning Protestant movement of that age.

Jay Emerson Johnson provides insight into this idea of the three-legged stool.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

When faced with nearly any theological or moral dilemma (though most often the latter), Anglicans resort almost immediately and in some fashion to the three legs of that stool. We turn first to scripture and try to discern whether any of the biblical authors address the issue at hand. We turn next to the traditions of the church, whether in the form of ecumenical councils or recognized theological authorities from the past, and try to search out any further insight for the question. Finally, we examine the topic through the lens of our own God-given reason, now rightly expanded to include “experience,” which amplifies what we mean by reason by including affectivity, intuition, social context, and so on. The goal throughout this procedure is to give each of these legs its due and to construct a balanced approach in which none of the three legs trumps the other two.¹⁰²

While the metaphor seems understandable, Johnson explains the drawbacks of this concept. The

legs of a stool are static, rigidly separated, and never touch each other . . . The same is rarely if ever true for the ‘legs’ of scripture, tradition, and reason. They constantly blend together, frustrating nearly every attempt to separate them into individual, clearly defined legs . . .¹⁰³

These limitations mean that

We are suspicious of appealing to biblical texts apart from the insights gleaned from historical-critical method, literary criticism, or human reason. At the same time, we are suspicious of appealing to rational principles if these are made at the expense of aesthetic or affective principles. Yet we are also suspicious of appealing to human experience unless it is informed by biblical insights, resources in the human sciences and theological traditions. We are suspicious of all these things, not because we want clearly to identify our sources, but precisely because we know these sources interact with each other in complex ways. Rather than a stool, theological method is more like a dance. In a dance, one’s legs actually move.¹⁰⁴

Experience/context was gradually added to the three-legged stool to remodel it into a four-legged stool.

¹⁰² Jay Emerson Johnson, *Dancing with God: Anglican Christianity and the Practice of Hope* (Harrisburg, Pa: Morehouse Pub, 2005), 28–29. See also Stephen Sykes, John E. Booty, and Jonathan Knight, eds., *The Study of Anglicanism*, Rev. ed. (London: SPCK/Fortress Press, 1998).

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

There is one more addition proffered here and that is the “leg” of *compassion*. The necessary component of compassion will be discussed in Part III—Action. While it seems obvious to include, our society does not always show its willingness and ability to love mercy and do justice for a transfigured society. So, now we have the *five-legged stool* for thinking theologically: scripture-tradition-reason-experience/context-compassion.

Further applied, the dance metaphor described provides the framework for envisioning an approach to praxis mission. These mission activities *dance* together: seeing-recognizing, hearing-listening, processing-thinking, and—applying the *five-legged stool*—having compassion, then loving-acting.

Johnson describes the Virginia Reel, a contra dance, as a metaphor for theological activities and mission.

Contra dances are so named because of the configuration of the dancers; the men line up on one side and the women on the other, facing the men. While the Virginia reel creates clearly identified couples, each man actually dances briefly with each of the women . . . Moreover, while folk dances, especially contra dances, are structured with couples, they are not designed for the purpose of coupling. Instead, they serve to nurture the bonds of the larger community. Folk dances encourage communal cohesion . . .¹⁰⁵

Likewise, various theological “pairings” break off to interact with all the other theological components in an intricate venture. Reconsider the “reel” as a circle.

The pairings of theological mission listed in the circle represent various combinations of missional actions. And, as in the Virginia Reel, each dances, or interacts, with the other. It is a “theological reel” of missional actions. It is encircled in a purple ring to symbolize the liturgical seasons of Lent and Advent, times of deep reflection of the church.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 132, 134

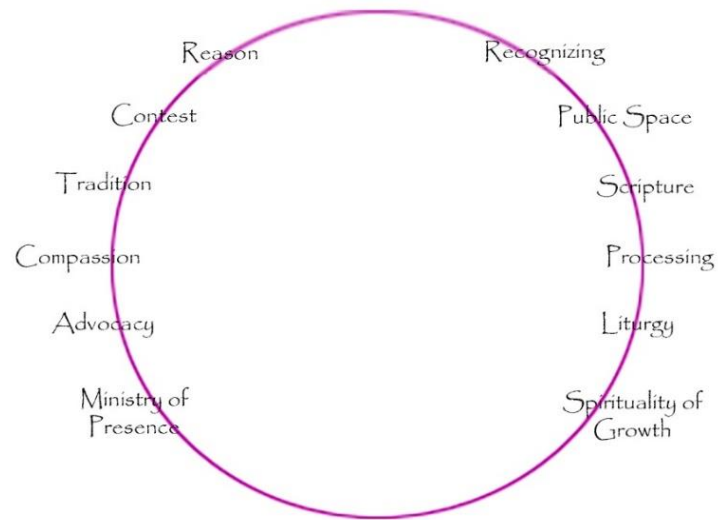


Figure 4. Elements of public theology and missional work.

But, the picture is not complete. The environment within which the dance plays out needs to be added -- that is the space(s) or sphere(s) of Church and State. Church and State, often thought of as distinct entities, are a fluid pair dancing an intimate *pas de deux*.



Figure 5. The relationship between church and state as intimate dance.

This space is depicted in green, the color of Ordinary time of the church. The green ring is embedded with black speckles to convey the permeable nature of the ring. It interacts

with the inner ring, the Trinity, and the outer ring, missional activities.

For Christians, the Divine action of the Trinity—Maker, Redeemer, and Sustainer—are the universal center, working together to anchor and inspire the heavenly and earthly partnership of mission. This, too, is a dance, known as *perichoresis*. A direct translation of *perichoresis* from Greek to English is difficult, but

It evokes a sense of permeation without confusion, encompassment without circumscription, penetration without violation . . . some have discerned in this Greek word a hint of the English word ‘choreography’ . . . a fluid partnership in which there are neither leaders nor followers but only an eternal movement of shared giving and receiving. From this perspective, to speak of God as three *persons* is not really adequate at all; we must instead speak of three *dancers*, the mutual and eternal choreography of which makes it impossible to discern the dancers from the dance itself. And the dance is nothing less than creative self-giving love.¹⁰⁶

The Trinity, the Maker (M), Redeemer (R), and Sustainer (S) are shown with red shapes, the traditional color of the Holy Spirit/Comforter, our Divine actor, working in concert with the Maker and the Redeemer. The ring is also speckled with black to represent the permeability between the Trinity, church and state, and theological action.



Figure 6. A depiction of the Trinitarian perichoretic dance.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 74.

Putting the diagrams together shows a complex interrelationship. Of course, all language for God is metaphorical. The Great Mystery evades mortal description. Therefore, we must try to find language that assists us in concepts without Divine precision. The motivation for these diagrams is one of trying to process our complex relationship with God, each other, our society, and our government. All of these parts of our lives impact us substantially every day.

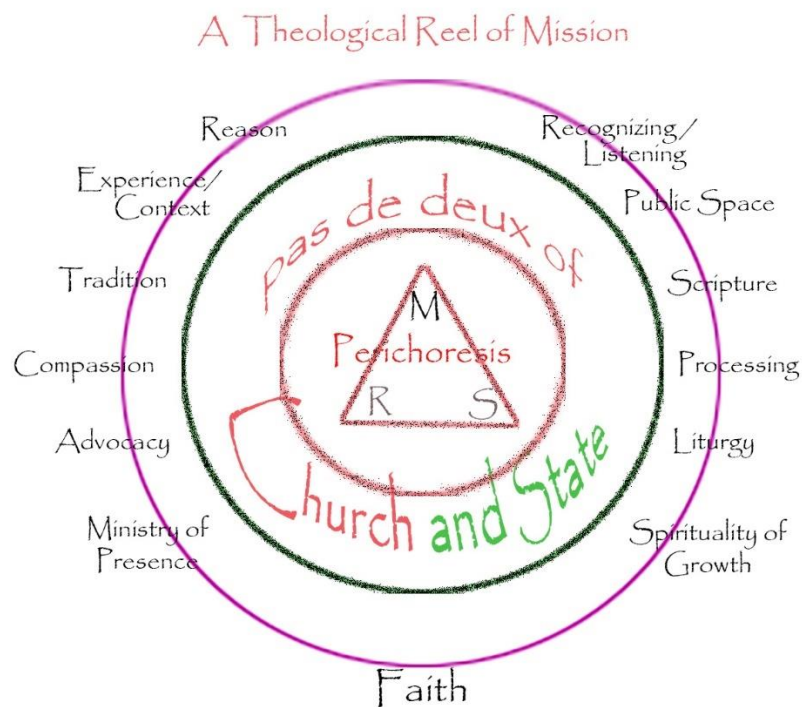


Figure 7. Three dances are happening: the *perichoresis* of the Trinity (Maker, Redeemer, and Sustainer), the *pas de deux* of Church and State, and the *Theological Reel* combining Part I concepts of Recognizing/Listening, Processing, and Acting, all while drawing from scripture, tradition, reason, context/experience, and compassion, and anchored by faith. To further spark the imagination, picture each ring, and the Trinity, in varying rotations on infinite axes.

The Theological Reel is intended to encourage creativity and innovation in one's own mission. Some questions for discernment might include: "Where is my placement on this Theological Reel?" "Where do my talents fit best?" "How am I called to serve in this

dance?” “What new action could I add to the reel? And, “What is my *process* for discernment?”

In Part I, the biblical rootedness (first leg of the five legged-stool) of our duty to work for justice was established by drawing from scripturally mandated, mission-centered calls by God in the OT and by Jesus in the NT. The Israelite and Christian communities have been charged with imperatives to include the outsider; *there is no expiration or sell-by date* on these Divine mandates. Praxis mission mandates a thorough understanding of the mission field context. The following section reaches back several hundred years to review the American history of slavery and how it was sanctioned by the three branches of US government under the auspices of the Bible.

The Reality of Government-sanctioned American Chattel Slavery and American Exceptionalism. Western Christianity authorized slavery and conducted it in the US from 1619–1865.¹⁰⁷ In 1787, the US Congress adopted the “Three-Fifths Compromise” to establish the number of Congressmen per state.¹⁰⁸ The population was counted like so: free whites and free blacks were counted on a parity. However, only three/fifths of black slaves were added to the full count of white people in slave states. The policy assumed as *fact* that black slaves were just three-fifths of a whole person—a brazen proclamation of white supremacy. Ironically, by *counting the slaves at all* resulted in the creation of more legislative seats for slave states.

Almost 40 years later, the Missouri Compromise was enacted to balance the

¹⁰⁷ Abraham Lincoln, “The Emancipation Proclamation,” January 1, 1863, accessed February 17, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation>. An excerpt of the proclamation declared “that all persons held as slaves” within the rebellious states “are, and henceforward shall be free.” Abraham Lincoln, “The Gettysburg Address,” November 19, 1963. The Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution abolished slavery and was enacted December 6, 1865.

¹⁰⁸ “Three Fifths Compromise - Constitution | Laws.Com,” n.d., accessed February 25, 2019, <https://constitution.laws.com/three-fifths-compromise>.

admission of free and slave states. In 1820, Missouri was added as a slave state, and Maine (formerly part of Massachusetts) was admitted as a free state. From then on, all states created in the remaining Louisiana Purchase territory north of the 36th parallel would be free. Missouri's southern border runs roughly on the 36th parallel.

In time, Dred Scott took his case to the Supreme Court of the United States (hereinafter SCOTUS) and argued that because he had lived with his owner in the free state of Massachusetts, he was therefore now free although he had moved back to Missouri, a slave state, with his owner.¹⁰⁹ He spent years in litigation prior to the case reaching SCOTUS.

Scott's legal premise, because he had lived as a free man with his owner in free states then he was free everywhere, had been successful in other state cases and Scott was expected to prevail in his case. However, in 1857 SCOTUS Chief Justice, Roger B. Taney, opined for the majority that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional because the compromise deprived slave owners of the right to move their property as they saw fit. Although it sufficed to keep a fragile peace, the Missouri Compromise produced a patchwork of free and slave states. As a result, the court noted that slave owners risked the loss of ownership when moving a slave (their chattel) from a slave state to a free state. The court upheld the practice of slavery and struck down the Missouri Compromise by a vote of 7-2.

The Missouri Compromise legislation had helped the expanding, nascent country to hold together despite increasing regional tensions between the northeast abolitionists and the slave owners of the southern states. President James Buchanan (1857-1861) allied

¹⁰⁹ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 393 (Supreme Court 1857).

himself with the South and approved of the ruling. SCOTUS was also packed with proslavery justices. During this period of American history, it was nigh unto impossible to abolish slavery in the slave states. The Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches of the US Government were all controlled by proslavery majorities.

In what is considered by many legal scholars to be the worst case ever decided by SCOTUS, Chief Justice Taney, stated that,

The words ‘people of the United States’ and ‘citizens’ are synonymous terms, and mean the same thing. They both describe the political body who, according to our republican institutions, form the sovereignty, and who hold the power and conduct the Government through their representatives. They are what we familiarly call the ‘sovereign people,’ and every citizen is one of this people, and a constituent member of this sovereignty. The question before us is, whether the class of persons described in the plea in abatement compose a portion of this people, and are constituent members of the sovereignty? We think they are not, and that they are not included, and were not intended to be included. Under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and whether emancipated or not, remained subject to the authority, and no rights or privileges but such as those who held the power of the Government might choose to grant them.¹¹⁰

Justice Taney further describes this “inferior class of beings,”

[F]or more than a century before been regarded as being of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold, and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever a profit could be made by it. This opinion was at that time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race. It was regarded as an axiom in morals as well as in politics, which no one thought of disputing, or supposed to be open to dispute, and men in every grade and position in

¹¹⁰ Ibid., *Scott v. Sandford*, 404-405.

society daily and habitually acted upon it in their private pursuits, as well as in the matters of public concern, without doubting for a moment the correctness of this opinion.¹¹¹

The court's convoluted logic and rejection of the Missouri Compromise created a firestorm of contempt and dissent in the northeast and catalyzed the tensions that ultimately led to the US Civil War just four years later.

The three branches of government were in league with the practice of slave ownership and the Bible was used specifically to justify slavery although this issue was roundly debated during the Second Great Awakening. Proslavery advocates used the Bible as an endorsement of slavery, and abolitionists used the Bible to apply an ethic of compassion.¹¹²

In January 1861, Henry Ward Beecher challenged his congregation.

"It is well, then, that every one of us make this day the beginning of a solemn review of his own life . . . [for] the sins of a nation are always the sins of certain central passions."¹¹³ Beecher focused his fervent call for justice by citing "the mistreatments of the American Indians, Mexicans, and above all African slaves, in which he implicated Northern merchants and consumers as much as Southern plantation owners."¹¹⁴

B.T. Lynerd notes the influence of two awakenings as predicating a "[F]ree republic upon the moral rectitude of its people, and not just because certain vices, like chattel slavery and alcoholism, undermine the image of a free society. The connection between moral virtue and civil liberty is cosmic."¹¹⁵ C. G. Finney describes how

¹¹¹ Ibid., 407-408.

¹¹² Benjamin T. Lynerd, *Republican Theology: The Civil Religion of American Evangelicals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112-122.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

American exceptionalism was caused through the Divine granting of our free democracy.

God has always providentially given to mankind those forms of government that were suited to the degrees of virtue and intelligence among them. If they have been extremely ignorant and vicious, He has restrained them by the iron rod of human despotism. If more intelligent and virtuous, He has given them milder forms of limited monarchies. If still more intelligent and virtuous, He has given them still more liberty, and providentially established republics for their government. Whenever the general state of intelligence has permitted it, He has put them to the test of self-government and self-restraint, by establishing democracies.¹¹⁶

Lynerd identifies not only a connection between liberty and moral virtue, but also society's keen awareness of the relationship of the individual and the collective morality as a reflection of worthiness for citizens of a free country. Consequently, it was important to have peaceful relations with neighbors and regulation of private behavior, such as "marital fidelity, personal moderation, and the proper worship of God."¹¹⁷

Another way to understand this notion of American exceptionalism comes from

A. R. Murphy. Quoting Murphy, Lynerd points out that,

[T]he 'jeremiad,' a prophetic genre with roots in the Old Testament, has maintained a nearly constant presence in American discourse from the Puritan era into the twenty-first century. This type of sermon, moreover, has exhibited several continuous features, including reference to a 'larger, sacred story,' a belief in the 'chosen' status of the nation a 'lament' over the nation's moral decline, and a warning to reform. What is unique about the American jeremiad of the early nineteenth century, Murphy notes, is the consciousness of America as not only a chosen nation, but also as a liberated nation: 'The notion of an American Israel throwing off oppression in order to take up its national mission settled ever more deeply into American public rhetoric.'¹¹⁸

Lynerd continues, "The American jeremiad, in other words, became inflected with

¹¹⁶ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 109-110.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Andrew R. Murphy, *Prodigal Nation: Moral Decline and the Divine Punishment from Hew England to 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.

specifically republican stakes.”¹¹⁹

Out of the Bible comes “Slaves, Obey your Masters.” K. B. Douglas explains how slave owners consistently promulgated a “White Christ’s” slaveholding Christianity via an erroneous preference for and misinterpretation of the epistles. A common proslavery mantra was “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ” (Eph 6:5). Douglas notes that “One ex-slave witnessed to the frequency with which she would hear Ephesians preached: ‘[The white preacher] preached, you must obey your masters and be good servants.’ That is the greater part of the sermon when they preach to colored folks.”¹²⁰

Using verses such as these, the slave owners eclipsed the Son’s gospel of love and mercy. Instead, the White minority chose to manipulate the epistolary guides for living to maintain control of an illiterate population. The “White Christ” of the slave owner ignored the gospel because the teachings of Jesus were radical and, therefore, dangerous. Roman and Jewish leaders feared Jesus’s words and action as seditious. In both eras, Jesus’s radicality spelled danger for the powerful elite.

Douglas explained, “The Gospels are unimportant since they concentrate on Jesus’ liberating activity in human history. The epistles are important, because they stress knowledge of and belief in Jesus Christ as essential for human salvation.”¹²¹ The Gospel is about grace and compassion. The White sense of entitlement to do whatever one pleased to a group of human beings, due to a cultural view of inferiority, morphed into an inviolate brutality. Our society has inherited this immoral mindset. At times this mentality

¹¹⁹ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 109-110.

¹²⁰ Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994), 16.

¹²¹ Ibid.

seems immune to abolition; it is, then, more dangerous.

Consequently, the slaveholders and missionaries portrayed Jesus as rigid, demanding obedience and suffering by the oppressed in order to win the ultimate prize of everlasting life. In practice, this kind of Christianity not only encouraged violence, but sanctioned, or rather *sanctified* suffering, the infliction of pain and rage towards slaves.

Douglas explains that the

[P]ractical outcome of the New Testament selectivity in understanding Jesus is that it provided proslavery evangelists a way to quell the fears of the slaveholders. . . They essentially reasoned that what Jesus did in human history was disconnected from the salvation that he offered. Subsequently, the salvation that he offered was unrelated to what took place in human history. Jesus's salvation had nothing to do with historical freedom. The slaves could be Christian without being free. According to this version of Christianity, the only freedom Jesus offered was in 'heaven' not on earth.¹²²

Once the slaveholders were "saved," by grace, they went on owning people and doing whatever they wanted to them—no works of grace were required of the owners. Likewise, once the slaves were saved, they were still bound, supposedly by the Bible and baptism, to endure unending brutality and dehumanization to earn their heavenly reward. In fact, slaves had to acknowledge through solemn vow prior to baptism that baptism in no way provided earthly freedom from slavery, as follows,

You declare in the presence of God and before this Congregation that you do not ask for the Holy Baptism out of any design to free yourself from the Duty and Obedience you owe to your Master while you live, but merely [sic] for the good of your Soul and to partake of the Graces and Blessings promised to the Members of the Church of Jesus Christ.¹²³

¹²² Ibid., 17.

¹²³ Douglas cited, Milton Sernett, ed., "The Carolina Chronicle of Dr. Francis Le Jau, 1707-1717," in *Afro-American Religious History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 25.

As Douglas so aptly puts it, trivializing Jesus's ministry allows for "White enslavers to be Christians, and for Black Christians to be slaves."¹²⁴ The systematic theology of slave owners is perverse. And, while slavery has met its demise, its theology remains readily identifiable today in several manifestations.

African-American theologian, J. H. Evans, Jr., cogently challenges this warped version of Jesus's teachings.

Who and what we are in the sight of God and what there is about us that merits God's attention are the proper subject matter of a theological anthropology. Indeed, no systematic theology is complete without a significant consideration of human nature and destiny as it relates to God.¹²⁵

Evans invites connecting human beings, the slaves, with the doctrinal structure of Christianity in this case. Evans asks several questions naturally stemming from systematic slavery existing alongside the Christian tradition: initially, "What is the content of God's revelation;" and "How is that revelation legitimated?" Evans fittingly concludes

[F]rom the perspective of the poor and people of color, God's revelation involves more than solving abstract epistemological problems. The emergence of the Enlightenment period accompanied the imperialistic expansion of Europe and the large-scale encounter between Europeans and aboriginal peoples. This encounter, and the exploitation of those peoples that followed, resulted in the demise of the classical homogeneous picture of humanity.¹²⁶

Furthering his logic, Evans asks two more critical questions: "To Whom is this revelation given?" and "Where does this revelation occur?" White Western Christianity determined people of color and women as *the other*, and Evans

¹²⁴ Douglas, *The Black Christ*, 17.

¹²⁵ James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 14.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

accurately surmises

The confluence of Christianity and political confrontation meant that one could not speak of God's revelation without the consideration of the question "To whom is God revealed?" The ulterior motives of enslaving Africans, exterminating Jews, and rendering women invisible and aboriginal peoples extinct blinded theologians to the importance of this question, and in most cases they merely assumed that, of course, they (as members of the so-called civilized European societies) alone were the recipients of God's revelation.¹²⁷

Our teachers and theologians ratified a theology of denigrating the non-white, Jewish, and female *other* systematically until these denigrating practices were called into question in the mid-twentieth century. J. H. Cone challenges the White assumption that all relate to God in the same way.

What is Christ's relation to human culture? . . . [It] must be recognized that the answer varies from situation to situation, from people to people, and time to time. . . God's relation to black and white cultures is not identical. When it is considered, on the one hand that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Richard Nixon are representatives of the white way of life, and on the other hand, that the biblical God is the God whose will is disclosed in the liberation of slaves, then the divine relationship to white culture is obvious. The biblical God stands in *opposition* to the culture of slave masters, who idolatrously usurp the power to define humanity on the assumption of white superiority. Since white theology has not transcended the axiological perspective of white culture (Chap 3), we must conclude that white theology is an ideological distortion of the gospel of Jesus.¹²⁸

Cone excoriates American theology as a White disfigurement of the gospel, and rightly so. His critique includes White theologies developed to suppress the lives and spirits of First Nation peoples by quashing their history.

When people can no longer listen to the other people's stories, they become enclosed within their own social context, treating their distorted visions of reality as the whole truth. And then they feel that they must

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 88. Rest in peace, Dr. Cone (2018). He taught us to think theologically about American racism's relationship to White theology.

destroy other stories, which bear witness that life can be lived in another way. White people's decimation of red people and the enslavement of black people in North America are examples of attempts to deprive people of their stories in order to establish the white story as the only truth in history.¹²⁹

Consequently, concludes Cone, Africans lose their languages, and Native Americans wind up on reservations. Theology's *marked* delay in catching up with the American social suffrages, especially since 1865, has had a lasting, profoundly negative result over time by obstructing the establishment of a just society.

Cone draws a direct correlation between the atrocities developed by slave owners and their White sense of entitlement to exploit and destroy African peoples to the White genocide of First Nation peoples. As the American settlement continued west across the continent, that same entitlement to exploit and destroy African and indigenous peoples was readily transferred and continued to Latin@ and Asian peoples. In other words, once slavery and racism were systematized with African peoples, all other non-White populations experienced the same abusive and manipulative treatments especially to build White wealth, political supremacy and economic hegemony.

Fortunately, White, heterosexual, patriarchal theology is being challenged worldwide. Various Third World, indigenous, womanist, *mujerista*, and feminist theologies confront White theologies from European and North American academics. Scholarly challenge is important; however, what the oppressed know in their hearts is more compelling. In paraphrasing Blaise Pascal, Evans continues:

[R]evelation has more to do with the reasons of the heart than with the

¹²⁹ Ibid., 94.

reasons of the head.” Further, African American Christians have consistently resisted the tendency to divorce the fact of God’s revelation from the identity and social location of those to whom it is given . . . revelation concerns whole persons and whole communities in their particularity. It is the loving and gracious giving of Godself to the world.¹³⁰

God continues to reveal the Good News to human hearts containing the Divine Spirit.

The mystic, Thomas Merton, maintained we all have an indwelling Divine spark. Our divine indwelling responds to God’s revelation regardless of systemic human corruption and fallibility. *This is why our call to action for shalom is so important. We can hear God over the sirens.*

The Marked Body. Slavery robbed African peoples of their wholeness through denial of substantive and procedural due process using an ersatz biblical authority. First, Africans were stolen from their continental and tribal homes; they were brutalized and raped on the middle passage, and they were forced to row in the galley, propelling themselves right into the very swamp of slavery. Next, they were humiliated on the auction block, and relegated to the unsafe plantation quarters. Akin to the Lukan Daughter of Abraham, slaves were treated “*wholesale*,” as dumb animals.

Because of wrong-headed and hateful application of the Bible to slaves in the US, “The physical color of the African became a way of marking the slave. It took on a symbolic significance and in time became associated with the defective religion, savage behavior (as defined by the captors), bestiality, and finally as the mark of unforgiveable sin.”^{8”131} Yet, as Evans noted, the slaves found a way to survive and to recognize the saving grace Jesus offered despite blatant exploitation, unbridled cruelty, and a twisted

¹³⁰ Evans, *Believers*, 15.

¹³¹ Ibid., 102. Evans cites, Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man’s Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 3–25.

White theology.

M. McInnis, in writing about the operation of the auction block where black people were bought and sold, gives insight into this horrifying practice.

By undressing slaves, traders reinscribed the connection between those being sold and savages. The inspections by traders in America, however, had a completely different focus than had those in the African market. *Here it was not eyesight or teeth that received the most attention, as in Africa, but instead the back.* Slaves being sold in America had already lived in slavery, and traders wanted to determine whether they had scars from earlier whippings . . .

The value of a slave was diminished by the presence of scars, because they were seen as evidence ‘not of the cruelty of the former master, but of the restiveness and laziness in the slave.’ Slave traders themselves developed a range of descriptions to measure the evidence: ‘not whipped,’ ‘a little whipped,’ ‘considerably scarred by the whip,’ and ‘he had many old stripes and scars on his body and head.’¹³²

Slave traders read these scarred bodies like biographies or resumés for signs the whip was weal worn on a “mulish” slave. Eyre Crowe,¹³³ an English painter, observed the juxtaposition of “American liberty and American slavery,” and noted of twenty slaves, only four had *unmarked* flesh. Chillingly, he wrote, “A closer inspection reveals a world of *scars* and stripes . . .”¹³⁴ (Italics mine)

In her acclaimed novel *Belovèd*, Toni Morrison gave us a tender glimpse of how slaves escaped to the woods, where there was no whip, to worship.¹³⁵ The character Baby Suggs shepherds her flock to and in the Clearing with hope and respect in the face of

¹³² Maurie D. McInnis, *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (University of Chicago Press, 2011), 129.

¹³³ Ibid. Eyre Crowe (1824-1910) was a member of the Royal Academy of Art in London, and was known for painting scenes of social realism, historical art and genre scenes. One of his best-known works is *Slaves Waiting for Sale*, ca. 1861.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Toni Morrison, *Belovèd* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987). Cited by Joy R. Bostic, “Flesh That Dances: A Theology of Sexuality and the Spirit,” in *The Embrace of Eros: Bodies, Desires, and Sexuality in Christianity*, ed. Margaret D. Kamitsuka (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2010), 277–279.

utter despair. Baby Suggs tells her congregation, “Yonder they do not love your flesh . . . here, in this place, we flesh.” It is a corporal statement that, “I am somebody.” Intended or not, the Clearing was subversive, as subversion arises in the face of oppression. The Black Church’s very roots were formed in the revolutionary nature of these clearings.

Clearings allowed not just words of hope and speaking truth to power, the space allowed for a reconnection to African culture, to dance, for instance, and to the things that once nurtured. The slaves had stolen moments to be more fully open to their lives in the safe space of nature’s embrace. One might liken the Black Church tradition of singing Call and Response hymns as a way to “be open,” to loosen the tongue of the one silenced by slavery to speak one’s own truth. The people moved mystically from being object to subject, from being mute to having something to say, something that mattered to someone else in the clearing.¹³⁶

This communal expression is mindful of Jesus looking to heaven and saying, “Ephphatha,” *be opened*, when healing the man who was deaf and mute (Mk. 7:34). It calls for an opening of our ears to hear others, to speak and be spoken to with kind words and to express our thoughts and desires. By extension, it calls for an opening or clearing of our hearts to compassion and mercy.

What the community did in that arboreal *opening* was to mimic the *perichoretic* dance of the Divine Trinity, healing, blessing, de-cursing (speaking anew), re-cleansing with tears, and re-invigorating. They imitated the relational Divine love as Makers of peace, as Redeemers of wholeness, and as Comforters of flesh.

The Clearing was a marvelous consolation, a re-taking of the human spirit

¹³⁶ Bostic, *Flesh that Dances*, 278.

(everything) while materially possessing absolutely nothing. The Holy Spirit called people together, salvifically. The Spirit provided a healing balm and strength for the return to the plantation. Salvation is not just about receiving our eternal life as we cross over and into that heavenly country. Salvation is in the small moments when we behave as the beloved community. It is *transfigurational*, as it alters us permanently. It is a thin place where the vault of heaven opens, and the curative balm of the Holy Spirit spills down and heals like the fragrant oil of Holy Unction.

Those gatherings in the clearings throughout the slave states were also political statements. The slaves imitated Jesus by challenging the system in claiming their personhood. They spoke truth to power. Then as now, going to a worship service, in and of itself, *is a political statement*. This action communicates that the participant believes there is a Divine power in addition to, and more powerful than, any earthly government. This has profound implications for the attendee and for a society at large which is increasingly pluralistic.

Many Christians speak of belief in a Jesus who is detached from the sociopolitical realities of domination and oppression. They do not care about justice and the ongoing exploitation of the earth. They do not care that Jesus advocated for the marginalized. Many White Christians are ambivalent to the US practice of chattel slavery. This is a passive continuation of the White-slaver theology. Many ignore the fact that the struggle to bring about healing and liberation of the oppressed was central to the ministry of Jesus. It made his ministry prophetic across time.

For C. S. Song, Jesus connected the Reign of God to salvation in heavenly/eternal

and earthly/temporal forms.

The meaning of salvation is derived from the reign of God, and not the other way around . . . The quality of it is shaped by the quality of God's reign. This has been very much obscured in the faith and thought of many Christians. For them the reign of God—they prefer to call it the 'kingdom of God'—is defined by what they understand to be salvation, that is deliverance of the soul from the suffering of this world and enjoyment of eternal bliss in the bosom of God . . . an extension of their unfulfilled desires in the present life. This is not what Jesus meant by the reign of God. He directs us to be 'witnesses' of God's reign not in the future, but here and now.¹³⁷

In other words, Song maintains that *life is not* just about what we can get out of it in the end. Life is about living the Good News daily, in a community open to and benefiting all.

Cone asserts that,

The essence of the gospel *is* the liberation of the oppressed from sociopolitical humiliation for a new freedom in Christ Jesus (and I do not see how anyone can read the Scriptures and conclude otherwise), and if Christian theology is an explication of the meaning of that gospel for our time, must not theology itself have liberation as a starting point or run the risk of being at best idle talk and at worst blasphemy?¹³⁸

In these few lines, Cone concludes that theologians of privilege seldom define theology this way because their social locations protect them from the plight of the poor. They have not recognized the "influence of culture" on their "theological task."¹³⁹ Further, Cone argues that theologians have failed in their theological tasks.

Unfortunately, White theologians with their eyes "held firm and failing to recognize" have taught a theology bound and blinded by racism, sexism, and classism; this is the theology that trickled down and was taught to the people. It is no wonder that

¹³⁷ Song, C. S., *Jesus & the Reign of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 153.

¹³⁸ Cone, *Oppressed*, 47.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

so many Christians distance themselves from the liberative crux of the gospel. This is what they are taught to do, directly and indirectly.

Yet, to say we are disciples of Christ is to say that we take up Jesus's mission of compassion and earthly salvation, that is, his cross and the marks of the piercing spikes, and we are called to recognize those marks, *the stigmata*, as suffered by others. We must understand how their markings are perpetually used to hold them back from their full self-actualization. The stripe of the whip may be gone, but skin color and racial attributes remain the basis to desacralize others. What endures is the insidiousness of immeasurable, invisible blows to spirit, mind, and the incarcerated body.

Modern Day Marking of Bodies. This section explores how bodies of color continue to be marked as other, inferior, bad, even 154 years since the adoption of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the US Constitution. M. Shawn Copeland offers much to consider regarding the badging of someone as defective.¹⁴⁰ Copeland gives a cogent account of how 20th century Detroit came to be, and how it came to be in crisis. It is an even-handed critique of the complex factors contributing to the rise and fall of my beloved city.

Southern African-Americans migrated north to work in the automobile and related manufacturing jobs in Detroit in the 1910s and 1920s as part of the Great Migration. Arab workers joined the rank and file in these industries during the worker shortages caused by WWII. However, they were relegated to the dirtiest, noisiest, most dangerous jobs in the plant. Workers were supplied with defective, broken equipment that went

¹⁴⁰ M. Shawn Copeland, "A Theologian in the Factory: Toward a Theology of Transformation in the United States," in *Spirit in the Cities: Searching for Soul in the Urban Landscape*, ed. Kathryn Tanner (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2004). When a newly manufactured model looks good in a certain color, it is said to "badge well." Example: "That Mustang badges well in cherry red."

without repair, even after serious injuries had occurred. Supervisors would remove repair tags instead of fixing equipment and simply put the machines and tools back in use. As primary employers in Southeast Michigan and beyond, the auto companies marked people of color as expendable and easily replaceable.¹⁴¹

Copeland shed further light on the implications of *being marked by another*,

[F]or bodies are marked -- made individual, particular, different, and vivid—through race, sex and gender, sexuality, and culture. The protean ambiguity of these marks transgresses physical and biological categories, destabilizes gender identities, and disrupts ethical and relation patterns (who is my brother, who is my sister?). These marks delight as much as they unnerve. They impose limitation: some insinuate exclusion, others inclusion, for the body denotes a ‘boundary’ that matters.³ But, in a finite and sinful context, some unnerved concrete historical human beings manipulate this ambiguity to violate in multiple vicious ways the bodies of others.¹⁴²

In short, we all are “read” as *bodily texts*. Various markings, like skin color and non/binary gender situate us socially, usually either positively or negatively. Our socio-economic class can be read based on our dress or what kind of car we drive. These markings carry into all aspects of life and society, including acceptance in church. To be sure, reading bodily texts is not always about reading racial features. LGBTQ people are excluded because of who they love; sexual orientation, like racial features, is not a choice.

Reading bodies for exclusion has serious sacramental implications. Recall the practice of “baptized yet bonded,” during the slave era, when slaves had to swear that they knew baptism did not free them from slavery. Conditionalizing the sacraments

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 34-40. It is no wonder Detroit blew up in 1967; Whites had their homes for sale within days, resulting in “white flight” to the suburbs. Consequently, the property tax structure collapsed leading to 50 years of strife, decay, joblessness, and crime. Detroit is beginning to rise from the ashes in pockets.

¹⁴² M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2004), 56.

continues to this day and has unholy ramifications for those who are still viewed as inherently defective and the unequal “other.”

As baptism is specifically recognized by the Episcopal Church as the community-based rite of initiation and inclusion, the entire congregation also participates in and makes vows to support the baptizand. The newly baptized are brought into the full Body of Christ comprised of all the world’s Christians *with* full assent of the congregation. This is an essential, serious, and joyous rite.

In the Episcopal baptismal rite, the priest makes the sign of the cross with chrism blessed by the bishop. Simultaneously, the priest proclaims, “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism, *and marked as Christ’s own forever*. Amen.”¹⁴³ (Italics mine). None of the sacraments contain exclusions or exemptions if one is black, male, or lesbian, homeless, female, or other-abled; there are absolutely no exceptions.

The sign of the cross made by the priest on the forehead of the baptized leaves an indelible mark of inclusion in the Body of Christ. Though indelible, it is invisible, unlike those whose bodily texts cause them to be *marked as other* and which isolate them to the margins and, thus, away from full membership in *church* and society.

Retired Suffragan Bishop Barbara Clementine Harris addressed the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 2009 about the hypocrisy and “othering” when ordaining someone as a deacon, while deeming that same person as ineligible to be a bishop, because the deacon is gay,

If the Church honestly believes that LGBT people should not be bishops, she said, then don’t ordain them deacons. ‘Better still be honest... don’t bestow on them the blessing of baptism.... *How can you initiate someone*

¹⁴³ Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*, 308.

*and then treat them like some half-assed baptized?*¹⁴⁴

Bishop Harris imitates Jesus by directly calling out the hypocrisy and names such disparate treatment as a marking. Her example identifies this ridiculous logic—that an LGBTQ deacon is unworthy to be elevated to bishop due to her/his sexual orientation. This basic syllogism cannot be proved.

Bishop Harris continued to criticize discrimination in the church's refusal to bless a same-sex union when it had been blessing even mundane events for centuries.

If we can develop rites and blessings for fishing fleets and fisherfolk, and for hunts, hounds, horses and houses, including the room where the indoor plumbing is located, we should be able to allow clergy in the exercise of their pastoral ministry to adapt and to appropriate the pastoral office of blessing of a civil marriage for use with all couples who seek the church's support and God's blessing in their marriages.¹⁴⁵

Her staccato, alliterative style pulls no punches in condemning doctrine designed to recognize some—and not others—as fully baptized members of the Body of Christ. In other words, church and society often collude to allow “elites” to dub some and damn most. Bishop Harris is the first woman consecrated bishop in the worldwide Anglican Communion and is African-American. She knows all too well about being marked and othered.

Christian America grapples with who is “acceptable,” even though such persons are baptized. Albrecht cites Womanist theologian, K. G. Cannon, who has “[a]nalyzed the dominant ideology that arose from the political loyalties, economic needs, and social commitments of Christian apologists for slavery. Her analysis reveals how the ideology

¹⁴⁴ Scg, “Wake up and LIVE: Convention Quotes,” *Wake up and LIVE*, July 12, 2009, accessed February 26, 2019, <https://scg-wakeupcall.blogspot.com/2009/07/convention-quotes.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

of a social position grounds hermeneutical principles and practices.”¹⁴⁶

Albrecht notes Cannon’s work in that

She points out that for most of the history of legal chattel slavery, ‘the mainline Protestant churches never legislated against slavery, seldom disciplined slaveholders, and at most gently apologized for the ‘peculiar institution.’ The point of her analysis is to expose the same functions of dominant discourses today to justify violence against women, opposition to homosexuality, and the exploitation of the poor. A dominant discourse identifies the ‘other’ as different (perhaps inferior to, perhaps complementary to, the norm).¹⁴⁷

These mindsets and practices demonstrate how

The Christian narrative is then told by locating God’s action in history with the actions, intentions, and goals of the dominant group. For example, the imperialism of European nations and the U.S. becomes God’s way of civilizing and saving the heathen. The practices of the dominant that sustain their domination can then be labeled by them as expressions of Christian charity or Christian duty.¹⁴⁸

From Cannon who links the distortion of the “White Man’s Burden” in “civilizing the heathen,” we look to Copeland who sheds light on the layers of stealthy conduct of the dominant group.

Copeland likens those who are not part of the socioeconomic, racial power structure, as the *anti-body*. A friendly amendment modifies this characterization since an anti-body is a blood protein which *protects* one from viruses, bacteria, the bad stuff. Those bad things trying to take over the system are called *antigens*. Members of the power structure are really the “anti-bodies.” They fight any *body* that is not like them. They are “anti-**other-bodies**” whereas the antigens are viewed as *other*, (attackers,

¹⁴⁶ Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities*, 143. Rest in peace, Dr. Cannon (2018). Prolific writer of theology, and a woman of many firsts, Dr. Cannon was the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. from Union Theological Seminary in 1983.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

interlopers, usurpers, foreigners) the (white human) *blood enemy*, such as people of color. As one example, for many politicians, the undocumented immigrant operates as the antigen, the polluter, the one seeking to sully an otherwise great America, and is therefore slandered. This operates in contravention of NT examples, directly from Jesus, of the importance of bodies through his compassionate acts of healing, conversing, commensality, etc.

Historical Extrajudicial Executions of African-Americans. The vestiges of slavery are still very much with us today. Lynching and quasi-lynching behavior continues in a variety of forms. After the Civil War ended, lynchings became rampant, especially in the South, Midwest, and Western regions of the US. Lynching is defined as:

the action of unofficial persons, organized bands, or mobs, who seize persons charged with or suspected of crimes, or take them out of the custody of the law, and inflict summary punishment upon them, without legal trial, and without the warrant or authority of law. See *State v. Aler*, 39 W. Va. 549, 20 S. E. 585; *Bates' Ann. St. Ohio*. 1904.¹⁴⁹

The war upset prevailing economic, social, racial, legal, and constitutional orders. It precipitated racial leveling, centralization of state authority, and the ascendancy of the North's dynamic industrial and agricultural capitalism . . .

In the South, Union army occupation and the emancipation of slaves destroyed slavery and the physical prerogatives of white supremacy, including the slaveholder's recourse to corporal punishment and the slave patrol's police power. In the late 1860s and early 1870s a vast wave of homicidal violence swept the South as white, often through paramilitary organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia in southern Louisiana, reclaimed political power from franchised African American men. Although historians have yet to systematically study lynching across the South during Reconstruction, evidence suggests that episodic collective violence reinforcing white masculine authority in

¹⁴⁹ "What Is LYNCH LAW? Definition of LYNCH LAW (Black's Law Dictionary)," *The Law Dictionary*, last modified November 4, 2011, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://thelawdictionary.org/lynch-law/>.

all walks of southern life accompanied the political violence.¹⁵⁰

With the emancipation of slaves, former white male slave owners developed a psychic fear of black males. Their extensive history of physical, emotional and verbal abuse towards the male slaves, and sexual abuse of the female slaves caused former owners to fear retribution in the same forms they had doled out. J. W. Perkinson explains.

The history of white fear—perhaps the deepest meaning of whiteness itself—is clear: a male terror of male trauma, should a level playing field ever intrude between black and white. Ku Klux Klan grand wizards had regularly intoned the refrain: the chain must be maintained, by lynch-rope if not law, or a ‘bastard, mongrel race’ is in the offing. But what is thus confessed? Either projection or preference. Plantation life had been systematically structured in white male rape of black female slave in the presence of the black male, as ‘disciplinary’ dismemberment of the black family—extra insurance against revolt! It was a form of systematic psychological warfare that returned like a form of haunt in the white male night, threatening post-Civil War revenge. It was almost unthinkable—psychologically—that the same would not be visited on the perpetrator.¹⁵¹

M. J. Pfeifer explains how this appetite for “rough justice,” has been carried over to populations of color.

Investigation of the relationship between lynching and the law is critical because of what it reveals about a seminal moment in state and legal formation in the United States. In the late nineteenth century, many rural and working-class Midwesterners, Westerners, and Southerners sought to impose communally based solutions to the dilemmas of social order ostensibly provoked by serious criminal acts. Collective violence most often served the goals of white supremacy, as lynchers especially targeted alleged African American offenders. Lynchers responded in part to a middle-class reform movement, present in all regions, that stressed due process and attempted to rid the performance of criminal justice of its popular trappings.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Michael J. Pfeifer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874-1947* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 13–14. Citing George C. Wright, *Racial Violence in Kentucky, 1865-1940* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University, 1990), 41–42.

¹⁵¹ James W. Perkinson, *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 109–110.

¹⁵² Pfeifer, *Rough Justice*, 2–6.

Simply put, for people living in or moving through the American frontier, criminal trials took too long; furthermore, they considered the judicial results as too lenient. Lynchers wanted swift, deadly retribution for alleged crimes. In their book, *A Festival of Violence*, S. E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck “confirmed 2,805 lynching victims between 1882 and 1930 in the South, roughly 2,500 of whom were African American. . .”¹⁵³ Their title is as apt as it is unnerving.

However, in the Northeast, lynching was not practiced with nearly the frequency of the other regions. Rather, Pfeifer pinpoints the Northeast as the epicenter for the abolition of slavery, and the codification of criminal law and procedure. Middle-class leaders in opposition to lynching included editors, clergy, lawyers, and entrepreneurs who voiced humanitarian concerns. They also worked for ending capital punishment, or at least relegating it to an inside venue with limited witnesses. Pfeifer concludes, “The advent of the modern death penalty can be discerned in the eventual compromise, in the early twentieth century of the rough-justice and due process camps.”¹⁵⁴

Ida B. Wells-Barnett, born into slavery in 1863, made an invaluable record, as a journalist and newspaper editor, of unjust lynching practices against black men. She travelled the South and made meticulous records, reviewing police reports and speaking with witnesses. In retaliation, Ida suffered vandalism of her Memphis news office, and “she was run out of the city. Still, she went on to publish ‘Southern Horrors,’ a long-form article that proved lynching was a form

¹⁵³ Stewart Emory Tolnay and E. M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995). See their introduction, p ix.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

of racial violence aimed at ambitious black southerners.”¹⁵⁵ Her dedication to this dangerous work in speaking truth to power provided an invaluable historical legacy to facilitate the unmasking of lynching behaviors.¹⁵⁶

Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America is a book of photographs and postcards chronicling lynchings collected by James Allen in 2000. The foreword to the book is written by Congressman John Lewis. An attendant exhibit took place, initially in New York City, with some criticism about whether there was the need to view such images. The collection includes over 100 images of lynchings and is a testament to the enterprise of taking photographs to profit from the event through the selling of photographs or postcards as souvenirs. These images show the desecrated bodies of black victims in stark contrast to the partylike atmosphere that whites were experiencing. The postcard mementos then entered the stream of commerce through the US Mail until the practice was banned in 1908. The ban followed a group hanging that took place in Florida. Imagine all the hands that had to process the postcards as they were franked, sorted, bundled, bagged and delivered. Imagine, too, the vile messages written, literally, on the backs of the victims.

In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, published in 2003, Susan Sontag, author and documentary photographer, argues that society must scrutinize exhibits of macabre materials, wrestle with their reality, and our role in that

¹⁵⁵ Lolly Bowean, “9 Things You Must Know about Ida B. Wells-Barnett,” *Chicagotribune.Com*, accessed March 11, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-met-idabwells-nine-things-to-know-20180719-story.html>. Wells-Barnett was a mentor of W.E.B. DuBois, friends with abolitionist Frederick Douglass, and was a founder of the NAACP.

¹⁵⁶ Ida B Wells-Barnett, *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases*, 2012. See also Ida B. Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record: Tabulated Statistics and Alleged Cause of Lynchings in the United States* (Chicago, IL: Donohue and Henneberry, 1895), www.gutenberg.org/files/14977/14977-h/14977-h.htm.

reality.

Some people, it was said, might dispute the need for this grisly photographic display, lest it cater to voyeuristic appetites and perpetuate images of black victimization—or simply numb the mind. Nevertheless, it was argued, there is an obligation to ‘examine’—the more clinical ‘examine’ is substituted for ‘look at’—the pictures. It was further argued that submitting to the ordeal should help us to understand such atrocities not as the acts of ‘barbarians’ but as the reflection of a belief system, racism that by defining one people as less human than another legitimates torture and murder. But maybe they were barbarians. Maybe this is what most barbarians look like. (They look like everybody else.)¹⁵⁷

Her point is well taken. We can look back in history and criticize the behavior of others anachronistically. However, this behavior continues in our own time, expressed in different ways, as is discussed in the next chapter. We find ourselves facing the same dilemma as those who fought for legislation to abolish slavery and to criminalize the practice of lynching. That dilemma is how to reverse inertia into energy to destroy the evils of racism.

Historical Extrajudicial Executions of Mexicans.¹⁵⁸ We can draw this parallel with Latin@s as well as black people. While mob violence against African-American people grew substantially in the postbellum era, violence against Mexicans was also prevalent. Through their recent scholarship focusing on the vigilante actions against Mexicans in the late 1800s and earlier 1900s, W. D. Carrigan and C. Webb note that

From the California Gold Rush to the last recorded instance of a Mexican lynched in public in 1928, vigilantes hanged, burned, and shot thousands

¹⁵⁷ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York, N.Y: Picador, 2003), 92.

¹⁵⁸ Carrigan, William D. and Webb, Clive, *Forgotten Dead: Mob Violence against Mexicans in the United States from 1848-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). The authors note that they elected to use the term “Mexican” rather than “Hispanic” or “Latino,” as the terms were not in use at that time and are therefore anachronistic. They note that “most native Spanish-speaking victims of mob violence in the United States were of Mexican descent.” The group is comprised of Mexicans native to Mexico, and Mexican-Americans born in the US of Mexican descent, xiii.

of persons of Mexican descent in the United States. The scale of mob violence against Mexicans is staggering, far exceeding the violence exacted on any other immigrant group and comparable, at least on a per capita basis, to the mob violence suffered by African Americans. Yet despite its importance and pervasiveness, mob violence against Mexicans has never been fully studied. More than almost all other victims of lynching, Mexican victims have been the ‘forgotten dead.’¹⁵⁹

In the chart below, Carrigan and Webb provided a detailed summary of the various methods of violence used by mobs. It is as astonishing for the detail as it is for the number of deaths by lynching—547 in total.

Judge Lynch on the Border 79

Table 2.3 Modes of Execution

Modes of Execution	Number of Episodes
Hanged	345
Shot	129
Tortured and then hanged or shot	11
Burned as part of execution	9
Hanged and shot	6
Dragged as part of execution	5
Decapitated as part of execution	3
Beaten and then hanged	3
Whipped and then hanged or shot	3
Beaten to death	2
Clubbed to death with rifle	1
Beaten to death with clubs	1
Executed with axe	1
Throat slit	1
Stabbed to death	1
Shot and fed to hogs	1
Shot and ears cut off	1
Trampled to death by horse rider	1
"Lynched"/"killed"/"murdered"/"tortured"/not reported	23
Total	547

Figure 8. Carrigan and Webb have documented 547 occurrences of executions conducted by mobs according to method.¹⁶⁰

While lynching of one person is horrifying enough, Mexicans were often lynched in groups. Carrigan and Webb cite three primary factors. First, Mexicans usually worked in groups in mining and cattle ranching, whereas blacks worked alone as sharecroppers on

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 79.

small farms in the late nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.

The second factor is related to racial stereotypes. Sexual assault, a crime that whites often accused blacks of committing (but rarely Mexicans), is usually considered the act of a single individual. Theft and robbery, crimes for which Mexicans were often lynched, can be regarded as group crimes. Thus, varying stereotypes of blacks and Mexicans, which led to lynch mobs to associate different crimes with each group, played a role in the greater incidence among Mexicans of multiple victim lynchings.¹⁶¹

The third factor has to do with the cultural divide between Mexicans and whites, and between Mexicans and blacks. By the late nineteenth century, whites and blacks were culturally very different, but they had the same language, and shared a similar Protestant religious background.

While whites and blacks were certainly not allied with one another, they had been in varying relationships with each other for centuries. Whites and Mexicans were not in contact much before the 1850s; culture and language were quite different and Mexicans were predominantly Roman Catholic.

There is little doubt that the unfamiliarity of most Anglos with Mexican culture, especially the Spanish language, made it difficult for them to conduct legal and extralegal investigations. Mobs seeking Mexicans accused of crime often found it difficult to determine who among a group of Mexicans was guilty of an alleged transgression. Frustrated with the necessity of translation, unable to decide who was really 'guilty,' and fueled with racist feelings against persons of Mexican descent, Anglo mobs often chose to indiscriminately lynch whole groups of Mexicans.¹⁶²

It is submitted that the Anglo legacy of punishing this combination of ethnicity, culture, language, and religion of Mexicans continues to this very day.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁶² Ibid., 77-78. The authors cite, Roberta Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow: The 1908 Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008). Roberta Senechal de la Roche, "The Sociogenesis of Lynching," in *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the South*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

Vigilantism is still conducted along the border although without the full sanction this behavior enjoyed in the past.¹⁶³

Anglos need to understand that confining “modern-day militias within a historical vacuum cannot hope to comprehend, let alone alleviate, Mexican anger.”¹⁶⁴ Xenophobic practices towards Mexicans continue and have expanded under Trump to include present day Latin@s of the Central and South American diaspora. We must connect the dots between our cruel racist past to what is happening now at the Southwest Border.¹⁶⁵

In contrast to the seamless narrative of repression and resistance constructed by Mexicans, Anglos have seldom situated contemporary anti-immigrant violence within a large historical framework, a *limited perspective that allows the actions of vigilantes to be dismissed as aberrant behavior rather than an expression of brutal racial bigotry rooted in American political culture*.¹⁶⁶

In the course of providing nearly 50 pages of information about lynch murders of Mexicans in Appendix A, Carrigan and Webb chart the following facts about each lynching incident: name, closest locality and state, the alleged crime, the makeup, size and action of the mob, and the source of this information.

The authors’ meticulous work is impressive. Yet, one set of data is often glaringly missing despite their best efforts--the victims’ names. Many are listed as

¹⁶³ <https://www.facebook.com/lindseybever>, “An Armed Militia Was ‘Detaining’ Migrants at the Border. The FBI Arrested Its Leader.,” *Washington Post*, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2019/04/21/an-armed-militia-was-detaining-migrants-border-fbi-arrested-its-leader/>. “Hopkins leads the United Constitutional Patriots, or UCP, one of several militias that have taken to patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border. The patrols have been prompted by a recent surge in caravans of Central American migrants and emboldened by President Trump’s assertion that the arrivals constitute an “invasion.” The militia’s stated objective is to “uphold the Constitution of The United States of America” and to protect citizens’ rights “against all enemies both foreign and domestic” — which mimics the Oath of Enlistment taken by U.S. service members.”

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

“unknown.” Looking at Appendix A, covering 1849-1873, over 70 people, including some women, were listed without a name. One such entry lists six unnamed Mexicans who were lynched near Rio Grande City, Texas. The victims were “charged upon and shot dead by Anglos for murdering Thomas Harris, ‘in all probability,’” the New York Times reported on May 13, 1852.¹⁶⁷

Carrigan and Webb have done an amazing job in exhuming the Mexican forgotten dead. Their forensic history provides a necessary foundation in this budding discipline. It seems only right to repeat their shared insight to conclude this chapter,

Uncovering the forgotten dead murdered by Anglo lynch mobs is therefore less a reopening of old wounds than a means to enhance mutual understanding in a nation where race remains one of the deepest fault lines.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., see Appendix A, pagination was not included in the appendix. The authors recorded the fate of another 470 people through 1928 in the appendix—many more were unnamed.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 177.

Chapter 5

Modern Day Lynchings

In Memoriam:

African Americans, Michael Donald, Emmett Till, James Byrd, Jr., Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, and Latino Teen, David Ritcheson

*Give to the departed eternal rest. Let light perpetual shine upon them.
Amen.*¹⁶⁹

People of color continue to suffer the same fates that have been presumptively relegated to the annals of history. A cloaked indentured servitude holds people of color and the poor via a capitalistic, carnal, and consumerist economy. To flesh out this statement, contemporary accounts of five lynchings are presented. This discussion is divided into two categories: 1) violent conduct by private citizens based on racial stereotyping and profiling, and 2) police action and the use of excessive force.

While their killings are offered as real stories of the persistence of American racism, they also serve another very important purpose. The hope is to honor the memories of Michael Donald, James Byrd, Jr., David Ritcheson, Michael Brown, and Freddie Gray, as they continue to teach us how we must work for social justice. These four men and one teenaged boy have not died in vain.

Contemporary Lynchings by White Private Citizens.

Michael Donald and Emmett Till. In 1981, two members of the Ku Klux Klan, Henry Francis Hays and James “Tiger” Knowles, were infuriated over the second mistrial of a black defendant accused of killing a white man. They sought any black man to

¹⁶⁹ Episcopal Church, *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*, 387. See Prayers of the People, Form III.

punish and happened upon Michael Donald, aged 19. By the end of the night, Mr. Donald had been severely beaten and then strangled. The two men even took his dead body to the home of Klansmen elder, Bennie Hays, to show him off before stringing Mr. Donald's corpse up in a tree. "It was a 20th-century lynching in the most brutal sense of the word—and thanks to a landmark civil lawsuit by Michael's mother, Ms. Beulah Mae Donald, it would end up being the last."¹⁷⁰

Journalist Erin Blakemore goes on; "Though Mobile police knew that Klansmen had murdered Michael Donald, they dragged their feet. They took three obviously uninvolved men into custody, then released them without charges—and did little else to move the case forward."¹⁷¹ Beulah Mae Donald continued to press for justice. Through the Black community, she held rallies to draw attention to the lack of prosecution. She also utilized Ms. Mamie Till's strategy to expose the depths of racism by holding an open casket funeral for her son Emmett.

In August 1955, Emmett Till, a black teenager from Chicago, was visiting relatives in Mississippi when he stopped at Bryant's Grocery and Meat Market. There he encountered Carolyn Bryant, a white woman. Whether Till really flirted with Bryant or whistled at her isn't known. But what happened four days later is. Bryant's husband Roy and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, seized the 14-year-old from his great-uncle's house. The pair then beat Till, shot him, and strung barbed wire and a 75-pound metal fan around his neck and dumped the lifeless body in the Tallahatchie River.¹⁷²

With little deliberation, Bryant and Milam were quickly acquitted by a white jury.

When Till's mother Mamie came to identify her son, she told the funeral director, 'Let the people see what I've seen.' She brought him home to Chicago and insisted on an open casket. Tens of thousands filed past Till's

¹⁷⁰ Erin Blakemore, "The 1981 Lynching That Bankrupted an Alabama KKK," *HISTORY*, accessed March 11, 2019, <https://www.history.com/news/kkk-lynching-mother-justice>.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² "How The Horrific Photograph Of Emmett Till Helped Energize The Civil Rights Movement," *100 Photographs / The Most Influential Images of All Time*, accessed March 20, 2019, <http://100photos.time.com/photos/emmett-till-david-jackson>.

remains, but it was the publication of the searing funeral image in *Jet*, with a stoic Mamie gazing at her murdered child's ravaged body, that forced the world to reckon with the brutality of American racism. For almost a century, African Americans were lynched with regularity and impunity. Now, thanks to a mother's determination to expose the barbarousness of the crime, the public could no longer pretend to ignore what they couldn't see.¹⁷³

After Michael Donald's funeral, the FBI got involved.

Slowly, the wheels of justice began to grind. In 1983, police arrested Henry Francis Hays, the son of Alabama's second highest-ranking Klan official, and Knowles, who quickly confessed the crime to the FBI. Knowles was the star witness in Hays' trial, and both men were convicted and sentenced—Knowles to life in prison for violating Michael's civil rights, Hays to death for murder. It was the first time since 1913 that a white man was given the death sentence for killing a black man in Alabama.¹⁷⁴

It took nearly two years to arrest Knowles and Hays, and the men likely would not have been brought to justice without the courage of Michael Donald's grief-stricken mother. In addition to suffering the loss of her young son, Beulah Mae Donald endured the grotesque display of Michael's ruined body. Her bravery, however, made it impossible for law enforcement to drag their feet any longer.

At his trial, Knowles demonstrated how to tie a noose, and in explaining the process, he took great care, as if second nature to him. "There was a strand left over, about like this [indicating], it was cut off and burned, just similar to this right here . . . both ends were cut and burned prior to the time of the noose so that they wouldn't, neither of them, unravel."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Jack Shuler, *The Thirteenth Turn: A History of the Noose*, First edition. (New York: Public Affairs, 2014), 265. Knowles was paroled in 2010.

When asked by a trial attorney why he got a rope to begin with, Knowles's answer was blunt:

'I intended to use it to hang a black person . . . Henry [Hays] and me went to East Mobile, and we drove around for a while. Exactly how long, I don't remember. And eventually, we came on Michael Donald, and we kidnapped him and took him to Baldwin County and killed him, and brought him back to Herndon Avenue and hung him up earlier Saturday morning.'¹⁷⁶

In writing about the noose used to lynch Michael Donald, Shuler makes some poignant yet chilling observations that lend reasons to why he titled his book, *The Thirteenth Turn*.

[T]his noose was shaped, turned, and crafted as a tool for killing. In literature a 'turn' is a major transformation in a poem's narrative, rhetoric or form Poet and friend David Baker tells me the turn 'is both a turn in the language, story, argument, and often—like a sonnet—a turn of the line and visible re-turn of the poem's shape itself.' It's a dramatic change. 'It's magic,' he explains. When a noose is formed from rope a kind of sorcery occurs, indeed. The structure is transformed—the meaning of the rope is transformed . . .¹⁷⁷

Shuler goes on to liken the noose to other instruments of execution and wisely cautions all of us about letting these realities fade to historical "other-worldliness," the noose must never be forgotten for what it is.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. For his crime, Henry Hayes was executed. See also The Associated Press, "Klan Member Put to Death In Race Death," *The New York Times*, June 6, 1997, sec. U.S., accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/06/06/us/klan-member-put-to-death-in-race-death.html>. Ironically, Jeff Sessions, then Alabama Attorney General, as well as former US Attorney General wanted to avoid prosecution of Donald's killers. See also Kenneth Lipp, "Jeff Sessions Wanted to 'Drop the Case' Against KKK Lynching, Attorney Testified," January 9, 2017, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2017/01/09/jeff-sessions-wanted-to-drop-the-case-against-kkk-lynching-attorney-testified>. [Former assistant attorney general under Sessions, Thomas] "Figures testified to several examples of his former boss's alleged racial insensitivity before the Senate Judiciary Committee, saying Sessions had once told him that "he believed the NAACP, the SCLC, Operation PUSH, and the National Council of Churches were all un-American organizations teaching anti-American values." "Senator Paul Simon asked Figures if it would 'be fair to characterize Mr. Sessions as an able, decent person but simply not sensitive in the area of race?' 'Senator Simon,' Figures began, 'I believe that the statements and actions of Mr. Sessions regarding race, and regarding civil rights, impact tremendously on whether he is decent. And for that reason I could not conclude, based on those statements and those actions, that he has the sufficient perspective and integrity to serve as a federal judge.'

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

It is a serious symbol and, therefore, should be taken as a legitimate threat. The noose represents an act of ultimate violence, and when we look at it we are also gazing upon the sword, the gallows, the guillotine, the gun, the electric chair, the gas chamber, and the syringe. But do we really see these things? In the 1960s Robert Penn Warren wrote, ‘When one is happy in forgetfulness, facts get forgotten.’ If we don’t remember these things when we see the noose, then we have normalized violence. Or, rather, violence has normalized us . . . The noose signifies an international history of execution, legal or otherwise. The knot itself was crafted as a technology of execution; it was the way of death for young and old, men and women, rich and poor—but mostly poor—across centuries.¹⁷⁸

We turn now to one of the most heinous crimes of the twentieth century, where a length of rope was replaced with a length of logging chain in the dragging death of James Byrd, Jr.

James Byrd, Jr. In 1998, James Byrd, Jr. accepted a ride from three white men in Jasper, Texas. Instead of driving him toward his destination, the men drove him to his death. They chained Mr. Byrd to their truck and dragged him by the ankles. The excruciating ride went for three miles on a paved logging road. They discarded Mr. Byrd’s mangled, decapitated body by tossing it in front of a Black church for all to see. The three men were Shawn Berry, Lawrence Russell Brewer, and John William King. Billy Rowles, then Sheriff of Jasper County, recalls

[t]hat bloody, lengthy crime scene — still haunt [sic] him. ‘The fact that a human being — a living, breathing human being — was jumped, beat, chain wrapped around his legs and drug behind their truck for close to three miles, that is so far over my head that anyone could do something like that, let alone three of them, could do something like that,’ said Rowles, who’s now sheriff in nearby Newton County.

Drag that man until his body came apart, and untied the body, left it in the middle of the road so everybody could see, and drove off and went home and went to bed.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 265-266.

¹⁷⁹ “James Byrd’s Horrifying Death Still Haunts East Texas Town Two Decades Later,” *Dallas News*, last modified June 7, 2018, accessed March 11, 2019,

The forensic pathologist, Dr. Tommy Brown, testified in haunting detail as to the injuries caused by such depravity.¹⁸⁰ Journalist Shane Croucher summarized Dr. Brown's testimony.

Almost all of Byrd Jr.'s front ribs were broken. Most of his body was covered in what Brown described as 'massive brush burn abrasions.' His testicles were missing and Brown found gravel in the scrotal sac. The knees, feet and buttocks were worn down. So was the flesh on the left cheek, exposing the jawbone. Toes were missing. Muscle was exposed on the legs. But there were no injuries to Byrd Jr.'s brain and skull. Brown concluded that Byrd Jr. was conscious and holding up his head until the culvert killed him. Moreover, the formation of some of Byrd Jr.'s wounds left Brown to conclude that he was moving deliberately during the dragging to relieve the pain. 'I think I can probably remember all the details of evidence, of trials, of juries. Everything about it. It's just about as raw today as it was 20 years ago to me,' Gray says. 'It was tremendously emotional.'

The men were convicted. Berry got a life-sentence. Brewer was executed in 2011. King was also sentenced to death and was executed on April 24, 2019. He made no statement and kept his eyes closed during the entire procedure. He had no witnesses from his family and friends.¹⁸¹ Journalist and author, Joyce King, warns against the impulse to remain silent about what happened.

Like countless others, I have never accepted that some people simply do not want to talk about or lecture on the myriad lessons from Jasper. Since I became the black woman who wrote the book about the Jasper dragging, it is disappointing when I'm invited to shut up about something that deserves more debate. Not discussing Jasper will never change what happened on Huff Creek Road. Not confronting homegrown terrorism is

<https://www.dallasnews.com/news/crime/2018/06/07/james-byrds-horrifying-death-still-haunts-east-texas-town-two-decades-later>. The term 'hate crime' was not widely heard before Byrd's murder. His suffering, and name, inspired the Texas James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Act and the federal Hate Crimes Prevention act of 2009, which is also named for Matthew Shepard, a college student murdered for being gay."

¹⁸⁰ Shane Croucher On 4/20/19 at 5:00 AM EDT, "The Lynching of James Byrd Jr.—After Two Decades on Death Row, His Remorseless Killer Faces Execution," *Newsweek*, last modified April 20, 2019, accessed April 22, 2019, <https://www.newsweek.com/james-byrd-jr-lynching-texas-death-row-execution-1394474>.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

to downplay its existence.¹⁸²

When systemic criminality is sanitized by silence, it will never stop.

David Ritcheson. In Houston, Texas, in the spring of 2006, a middle-class, Mexican-American teenager, David Ritcheson, was viciously attacked and sodomized by two white teenagers yelling “white power” and anti-Latino insults. It happened at a party in a mostly white suburb of Houston. Suffering from multiple serious wounds, including a swastika cut into his chest, the young man was hospitalized for months and had numerous surgeries for his severe injuries. Mr. Ritcheson later committed suicide, and his white attackers were eventually imprisoned for the ferocious crime.¹⁸³

The two men were convicted of aggravated sexual assault in the attack. David Henry Tuck, then 18, was sentenced to life in prison. Keith Robert Turner, then 17, was sentenced to 90 years in prison. Each must serve at least 30 years before being eligible for parole. Turner became enraged with Ritcheson upon learning from his sister that Ritcheson was interested in her romantically. J. R. Feagin and J. A. Cobas explain the nature of racism directed at Latin@s.

Most whites often do hold to significant elements of a widespread anti-Latino perspective. From this *white-framed viewpoint, the lives, livelihoods, and cultures of Latinos at various class levels are frequently viewed as having less value than those of whites. Indeed, over the past several decades, the negative racial framing of Mexican Americans and other Latin Americans has increased substantially*—framing that is dramatically seen in incidents like this one, in white vigilante groups patrolling the border with Mexico, and in the many whites who support forceful “border security” measures such as vigorous border patrols and big electrified fences on the Mexican border. In numerous areas of the US Southwest, white policing agencies have accelerated the vigorous policing and racial profiling of Latinos of diverse nationality and class

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ “NATION IN BRIEF,” July 3, 2007, accessed March 20, 2019, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/02/AR2007070201668.html>.

backgrounds. Moreover, everyday discrimination targeting Latinos takes not only these more blatant forms but also more subtle and covert forms.¹⁸⁴

One of the most disturbing, ongoing, blatant examples of anti-Latin@ racism is the detention of hundreds of Latin@s entering the US via the Southwest border. Agents of the Trump administration are rounding families up, separating children from their parents, and holding them in deplorable conditions, sometimes even in cages. This is perpetrated under the guise of immigration-flow control. In actuality, these practices prove that white Americans believe that Latin@s are “less than.” The Trump administration, led by then Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, professed to be justified in staving off the “Latino menace.” These detentions will receive further discussion in Part III.

It is hard to decide which is more disturbing, hate crimes by private citizens or extrajudicial killings by police that go unprosecuted. They are both disgusting and must stop. Two of the most notorious police-custody deaths of young men of color, Michael Brown of Ferguson, and Freddie Gray of Baltimore, are discussed next. Like the detention of emigrating Latin@s at the border, the stories carry the added shock that these atrocious acts are committed by a government.

Police Conduct as Lynching

An important point needs to be made. Americans tend to think in terms of “right or wrong,” and there is usually no possibility for middle ground. In our binary-thinking society, if one criticizes the police, one is often quickly labeled as “anti-police.” That is

¹⁸⁴ Joe R. Feagin and José A. Cobas, *Latinos Facing Racism : Discrimination, Resistance, and Endurance* (Routledge, 2015), 1, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781317256953>.

not the position here. When vetted and trained correctly, most police officers do a very difficult job well. However, when they have not been fully assessed psychologically, and when they diverge from their training or do not discharge their duty properly, people can and do die.

It is offered here that the psychological evaluations and sensitivity training are insufficient. Police operate in a paramilitary culture with a siege mentality, and such a culture heightens the chances that excessive force will occur. Sensitivity training, alternate self-defense options to fatal force, and processing officers' internal perspectives cannot be taught enough. A psychic fear, a stigmaphobia, seems to pervade the air that most all White Americans breathe. That fear is of black men, and by extension, men of color.

Michael Brown. In August of 2014, a police officer shot and killed Michael Brown, 19, in Ferguson, Missouri. According to an investigation by the US Department of Justice (hereinafter DOJ), the police officer did not use excessive force based on forensic evidence. Mr. Brown and the officer had wrestled for a service pistol while the officer was seated in a squad car. Mr. Brown stood outside the car and reached into the open window, arguably to get the officer's gun. A bullet was recovered from the driver's door panel and Mr. Brown had an injury to his hand. Eventually, Mr. Brown walked away and turned to face the officer. He then made what is referred to as a "furtive gesture" by reaching one hand toward his waistband.

Common belief was that Mr. Brown was shot in the back, but three autopsies disprove this. Mr. Brown was shot in the front of his head. The officer said he feared for his life and that he shot as Mr. Brown gestured toward his waistband and began to walk

towards the car. When he fell, Mr. Brown landed on his arm at the waist and was likely dead when he hit the ground. He did not have a weapon.

During the investigation, the DOJ found racist emails from Ferguson city officials:

- 1) An email stated, “President Barack Obama would not be president for very long because ‘what black man holds a steady job for four years?’” (Nov 2008)
- 2) A mocking email using speech and familial stereotypes, “I be so glad that dis be my last child support payment! Month after month, year after year, all dose payments!” (Mar 2010)
- 3) President Obama was depicted in an email as a chimpanzee. (Apr 2011)
- 4) An email joked: “An African-American woman in New Orleans was admitted into the hospital for a pregnancy termination. Two weeks later she received a check for \$5,000.00. She phoned the hospital to ask who it was from. The hospital said, ‘Crimestoppers.’”¹⁸⁵ (May 2011)

The officer was not prosecuted.¹⁸⁶ It was estimated by DOJ investigators that Mr. Brown was about 180 feet away when he began to walk toward the officer. What is so troubling about this is the distance. Why was fatal force necessary? The officer could have landed Mr. Brown with a non-fatal shot to incapacitate him and then call for back-up officers.¹⁸⁷ A documentary film entitled, *Stranger Fruit*, tells this story. The title, “Stranger Fruit” is a word play on “strange fruit,”¹⁸⁸ a euphemism for lynching victims hanging in trees “as fruit.”

From Michael Brown, unarmed and shot in the head from a significant distance by a Ferguson police officer, we move to the last story, focusing on a 25-year-old Baltimore man—from “rough justice” to the “rough ride” of Freddie Gray.

¹⁸⁵ Howard Rahtz, *Race, Riots, and the Police* (Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2016), 54.

¹⁸⁶ “DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE REPORT REGARDING THE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION INTO THE SHOOTING DEATH OF MICHAEL BROWN BY FERGUSON, MISSOURI POLICE OFFICER DARREN WILSON,” March 4, 2014, accessed March 12, 2019, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/press-releases/attachments/2015/03/04/doj_report_on_shooting_of_michael_brown_1.pdf.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 79-86.

¹⁸⁸ The song, “Strange Fruit,” was recorded by Billie Holiday in 1936.

Freddie Gray. In 2015, Freddie Gray, 25, died in police custody after being arrested for running from Baltimore police officers on bicycles. Mr. Gray surrendered after a short while and was cuffed and laid on his stomach. A knife was discovered on him but was later determined to be of a legal length. Mr. Gray was arrested and placed in a police van on April 12, 2015. In contravention of arrest protocol, he was not secured in the van with a seatbelt.

In route, Gray was screaming in the back of the van and the driver, Officer Caesar Goodson, stopped to allow the arresting officers to check on him. The officers removed Gray from the van, applied flexi-cuffs, and put shackles on his ankles. Gray was reloaded in the van lying face down on the floor. The van made two other stops. At one stop, Sergeant Alicia White opened the back door of the van, and per the prosecutor's report, tried to talk to Gray. Despite a lack of response from Gray, she took no action and the van continued to the police station.

On arrival, the officers called medics, who found Gray critically and severely injured and suffering cardiac arrest. Gray was taken to the hospital, where he was in a coma and then died a week later. The prosecutor's report states Gray's death was the 'result of being handcuffed, shackled by his feet and unrestrained inside of the [Baltimore Police Department] wagon' (Peralta 2015).¹⁸⁹

He died April 19, 2015, one week after his arrest. Mr. Gray's death also occurred less than one year after Michael Brown's death. The autopsy report indicated the only injury on Mr. Gray was a nearly severed spine at the neck, suffered during an agonizing ride in the paddy wagon, known as a "rough ride." It is an "unsanctioned technique" in which "police vans are driven to cause 'injury or pain' to unbuckled, handcuffed detainees."¹⁹⁰ Journalist Puente reports, "When a handcuffed Freddie Gray was placed in

¹⁸⁹ Rahtz, *Race, Riots, and the Police*, 41–46. See also, Eyder Peralta, "Timeline: What We Know About The Freddie Gray Arrest : The Two-Way : NPR," accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/05/01/403629104/baltimore-protests-what-we-know-about-the-freddie-gray-arrest>. Peralta has reported extensively

¹⁹⁰ Doug Donovan Puente Mark, "Freddie Gray Not the First to Come out of Baltimore Police van with Serious Injuries," *Baltimoresun.Com*, accessed March 2, 2019,

a Baltimore police van on April 12, he was talking and breathing. When the 25-year-old emerged, ‘he could not talk and he could not breathe, according to one police official, and he died a week later of a spinal injury.’¹⁹¹

None of the six officers were convicted in state court, and the DOJ declined to prosecute.

After an extensive review of this tragic event, conducted by career prosecutors and investigators, the Justice Department concluded that the evidence is insufficient to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Officer Caesar Goodson, Officer William Porter, Officer Garrett Miller, Officer Edward Nero, Lieutenant Brian Rice, or Sergeant Alicia White willfully violated Gray’s civil rights. Accordingly, the investigation into this incident has been closed without prosecution.¹⁹²

It is submitted here that this case should have gone to a federal jury, although investigators evaluated the evidence and elected not to try the officers. Only the police had complete control over Mr. Gray’s person in the paddy wagon, and they violated proper safety protocols while he was shackled. This is an instance where one must wonder what the result would have been if Mr. Gray were white.

The lack of the state’s attempt to secure convictions in this case is alarming. It has fueled a continued distrust by Baltimore residents because it was a capital killing issued without the due process of law. The crime rates in Baltimore have increased dramatically

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-gray-rough-rides-20150423-story.html>. But Gray is not the first person to come out of a Baltimore police wagon with serious injuries. Relatives of Dondi Johnson, Sr., who was left a paraplegic after a 2005 police van ride, won a \$7.4 million verdict against police officers. A year earlier, Jeffrey Alston was awarded \$39 million by a jury after he became paralyzed from the neck down as the result of a van ride. Others have also received payouts after filing lawsuits. “Baltimore Reaches \$6.4 Million Settlement Proposal With Freddie Gray Family : The Two-Way : NPR,” accessed March 19, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/09/08/438561298/baltimore-reaches-6-4-million-settlement-proposal-with-freddie-gray-family>.

¹⁹¹ Evans, *We have Been Believers*, 100.

¹⁹² “Federal Officials Decline Prosecution in the Death of Freddie Gray,” last modified September 12, 2017, accessed March 18, 2019, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/federal-officials-decline-prosecution-death-freddie-gray>.

since Gray's death in 2015.¹⁹³ This rise in crime should serve as a billboard to us all that Gray's ghost still haunts Baltimore and needs to be put to rest. Riots in 2015 went on for days. A crowd even torched a paddy wagon similar to the one in which Mr. Gray rode as a means of venting generations of anger over racism.

This is the reason that important issues must be tried in open court for the betterment of society; let the facts come out! These matters should be tried, *no matter the outcome*. Let people think critically about race, and power structures, and the evidence, regardless of the likelihood of winning convictions. When the judicial system defers prosecution of extrajudicial acts of violence, it is essentially rubber-stamping the behavior. Such a failure to discharge its duty also makes the judiciary constructively implicit in the conduct, and consequently, it is viewed as lacking integrity. When that perception exists, what is the point of having laws and courts when governmental racism allows attacks on the citizenry?

From a theological perspective, we cannot allow systemic racism to continue. Evans insightfully provides us with language to comprehend the pervasive nature of American Racism.

The true nature of black humanity has been veiled by a litany of stereotypes endemic to western European culture. People of African descent have been described as inferior, savage, profane, and invisible; they have been called outsiders, intruders, interlopers, and subhuman beasts. Zora Neale Hurston, demonstrating how powerful these images can be, vividly described African-American women as the 'mules of the world.' It is unfortunate that, historically, the European-American Christian church has accepted and employed these negative images of people of African-descent in its own theology. Even in an enlightened society on the verge of a new millennium, the question of the humanity of black people and others is shrouded by racist associations.

¹⁹³ Alec MacGillis, "The Tragedy of Baltimore," *The New York Times*, March 12, 2019, sec. Magazine, accessed March 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/magazine/baltimore-tragedy-crime.html>.

Spanish-speaking people are characterized as lazy, Asians as untrustworthy, and black people as criminals. Members of these communities find themselves having to work through a myriad of preliminary issues in order to get to the central question of what it means to be human.¹⁹⁴

People of color have been viewed as inferior for hundreds of years. The carte blanche entitlement to enslave categories of others resulted in creating a racially-motivated ethos in this nation-state, complete with its own civil religion (as discussed in chapter 6). It sometimes seems impossible to move towards justice.

The damage racism has caused and still causes has an indecipherable calculus. We can only work at achieving a just society one day at a time. This is the mission for the twenty-first century -- to negate racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and all of the “isms” that keep our world from *shalom*, from the arrival of the reign of God.

The Noose “Lives” On. While the noose is no longer the main instrument of lynching, it is still used to intimidate people. It holds undeniable power to convey the danger of a mob calling for blood. Shuler captures the significance of a piece of rope tied and turned in this unique configuration.

The hangman's knot is a simple thing to tie, just a rope carefully coiled around itself up to thirteen times. But in those thirteen turns lie a powerful symbol, one of the most powerful in history, and particularly in America, whose relationship to the noose is all too deep and complicated.¹⁹⁵

Former chair of the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Ida L. Castro, stated, “The noose shows up in the workplace and these incidents are not ‘confined to a particular geographic area or region of the country. Rather they are

¹⁹⁴ Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 100.

¹⁹⁵ Shuler, *The Thirteenth Turn*. See abstract.

occurring from coast to coast and border to border.”¹⁹⁶

In Jena, Louisiana, in the summer of 2017, a group of black students gathered under a beautiful oak tree on their high school campus. The next day, their parents were outraged upon learning that some white students had hung two nooses in that same tree. After “many persons of authority” interviewed the students involved, the superintendent stated that the white students were not motivated to harm the black students. Interviewers concluded the students truly did not understand the history of black people and the hangman’s noose. In the following days, black and white students had violent encounters on and off school property, and the story made national news; all related events were referred to as the “noose incidents.”

A few months later, the New York Times included an editorial graphic depicting forty-seven noose incidents around the country.¹⁹⁷

[L]ynching was the “ultimate cultural technology whites had at their disposal for controlling black people. Before the war slave codes governed black people’s movements, access to information, and in general, the ways in which black people could act in the public sphere. After the war a new world emerged, and whites felt the need to assert their authority anew.”¹⁹⁸

Noose incidents increased significantly during the campaign and presidential terms of Barack Obama, the first African-American US President. In the first 23 months of his election, 106 noose-related lawsuits were filed.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 3. Castro noted a spike in noose-related workplace harassment lawsuits during an address to the NAACP in 2000.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 1-5. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and Diversity Inc., gathered this info from news reports or others.

¹⁹⁸ Shuler, *The Thirteenth Turn*, 176.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 253. Citing Robert Kahn, “Liars or Cowards?,” Legal News Service, *WWW.Courthousenews.Com*. Accessed March 19, 2019.

Shuler has concluded that the use of the noose as a message is significant. The noose has replaced the burning cross to intimidate and threaten.²⁰⁰ From a practicality standpoint, replacing a large incendiary device with a piece of rope is much easier to transport, for one thing; it is also inexpensive. One can learn to make a noose on the internet. They can be delivered anonymously, and the noose is a universal symbol, as almost every American knows its purpose.

God's View of the Textual Body as Sacred. Just as we read others as bodily texts, we recognize the *textual bodies of scripture*. These texts, often written in large sections or books of the OT, describe in detail how God saved Israelite bodies from debasement and abuse by Pharaoh. God saved them from drowning in the Red Sea, from starving in the wilderness, and from countless assaults by surrounding gentile armies. God provided healings, economic prosperity, restoration of relationships, and resurrection. God saved bodies throughout Israel's history, and God made it clear that a devout Israel would enjoy shalom.

When the people veered away from God's law, trouble appeared. God smote the disobedient on occasion, but only after many warnings. Failure to be devout resulted in loss of life, loss of body, and loss of future embodied life through descendants. Disobedience also led to Israelite bodies being ruled by those who did not share the faith and purity code. This kind of punishment resulted in loss of bodily freedom through captivity. Such catastrophic loss of freedom and bodily separation from the Temple represented the worst kind of loss. However, even though Israel succumbed to other deities and cultures, rendering them unfaithful, God forgave and continued to save.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 3.

Today, God still saves because people matter to God.

Jesus's View of the Textual Body as Sacred. For Pilate and the various Herods, life was cheap. Bodies, especially non-Roman bodies, were readily expendable. Pilate sent 2000 Galileans to the cross after a rebellion. Herod the Great killed baby boys who threatened his domain. Herod Antipas colluded with Rome to rid himself of the revolutionary Jesus whose scorching critique had to be silenced as soon as possible. Jesus's words riled up the peasantry, the backbone of the economy. To Pilate and Herod Antipas, what difference would one more dead Galilean Jew on a cross make? None whatsoever.

However, of the many things that Jesus did, his revolutionary treatment of the outcast and healing of the sick stand as concrete examples of the importance he placed on the bodies of his community. The gospel accounts are full of such examples. Jesus did the unthinkable by eating with those who, for various reasons, lived in a near constant state of cultic impurity. They received seats of honor despite strictly proscribed dining habits for the first century host and other invitees. And just like the God of Israel, Jesus offered a restoration to wholeness, the mending of relationships, and the raising of others—and himself—to new life.

Jesus spoke to people, often outsiders, as peers; he freely offered teaching without their need to present credentials to prove their worthiness, because everybody was worthy. In other words, for Jesus, if you were *embodied*, you had a place at his table, even when resources were limited, and even if your party numbered 5000 men plus women and children (Jn 6). If you were embodied, Jesus washed your feet (Jn 13).

Not only did Jesus feed, host, and converse with anyone, Jesus healed them. So

many examples describe Jesus as being interrupted by someone whose faith called her/him to act, either immediately or even at a distance, by asking for his help. Jesus did not assume or exercise divine knowledge about someone's situation. Instead, he asked the individual, the person, the body imbued with a soul, knowledge, reason, and expression, "What do you want?"

To poor people, blind beggars, day laborers, foreigners, prostitutes, and tax collectors, *all* outsiders, Jesus responded directly to their requests and concerns by healing or invitation. This was indeed revolutionary. Every marginalized body had a legitimate claim to call upon Jesus, including the Canaanite woman who changed Jesus's mind about his role as redeemer to the gentiles (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). Jesus's openness to the suffering other was countercultural in first century Palestine. He blessed people instead of cursing them. Jesus gave people hope.

Hope in the Face of a Hazardous Society. Every era has faced significant, often life-threatening challenges, and we can draw hope for mission even from the gruesome incidents described above. Mamie Till forced people to look at racism in the face of her unrecognizable son. Beulah Mae Donald took strength from Ms. Till's example and opened her shattered life to the world in order to forbid it from ignoring what was done to her son. She took her call for justice further by holding the United Klans of America (hereinafter UKA) accountable, too. Ms. Donald and attorney Morris Dees, founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center, filed a federal wrongful death lawsuit against the UKA. Dees had already successfully sued Klan organizations. In this case, he demonstrated that the UKA leadership ordered Michael Donald's lynching in keeping

with the KKK's institutional policy.²⁰¹

Beulah Mae Donald won a \$7 million verdict after an all-white jury deliberated just four hours. Unable to satisfy the judgment, the UKA turned over the title to its headquarters to Ms. Donald. It had a value of \$225,000.00, and she sold it for \$52,000.00 and bought a home. Beulah Mae Donald put the UKA out of business. She died just a year after the historic verdict was handed down. "She was the rock on which [the entire challenge to the Klan] was ultimately built," her attorney, Michael Figures, told *Ebony's* Marilyn Marshall. "She never backed out; she just stayed there."²⁰²

In another positive action, in 1999, the family of James Byrd established the James Byrd Jr. Family Foundation for Racial Healing. Its mission focuses on eradicating prejudice. All funds contributed to the foundation are used to pay for messages of ethnic tolerance to schools and other groups across Texas. Clara Taylor, one of Mr. Byrd's six sisters, chairs the foundation. She said she hopes something positive can result from her brother's death.²⁰³

Joyce King, chronicler of James Byrd, Jr.'s. death, wonders

[I]f most people fully comprehend the magnitude of how extraordinary and rare the level of justice in Jasper was. Or that a lynching could still happen in Texas. All three culprits were found guilty of capital murder for a racially motivated crime in a Southern state. That is almost unheard of in American legal history.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Ibid. "By then, the Klan had terrorized African-Americans in Alabama for over a century. The United Klans of America, in particular, had been linked with some of the most notorious Klan crimes of the 20th century, most notably the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. The bombing, which killed four young girls, was carried out in retaliation for black activism in the city. It was one of the Civil Rights Movement's most devastating and galvanizing moments."

²⁰² Blakemore, "The 1981 Lynching That Bankrupted an Alabama KKK."

²⁰³ "James Byrd Jr. Foundation," *WWW.KTRE.COM*, accessed March 11, 2019, <http://WWW.KTRE.COM/story/1080484/james-byrd-jr-foundation>.

²⁰⁴ "20 Years Later, Justice for the Lynching of James Byrd Jr. Might Finally Be Complete | Commentary | Dallas News," accessed March 11, 2019, <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2019/02/03/20-years-later-justice-for-the-lynching-of-james-byrd-jr-might-finally-be-complete>.

King shared her own fears about covering this story, as she is African-American. “Thanks to a lifetime of being targeted, ticketed, threatened and taken to jail on one occasion driving through those Piney Woods, I was in no hurry to spend my nights in a little town where a horrific crime had been perpetrated against someone black like me. But I went.”²⁰⁵ Her need to record this history-in-the-making gave her the courage to feel the fear and do it anyway. She is an excellent example of the importance of speaking truth to power.

In chapter six, we examine how a colony became a nation-state, complete with a civil religion and backed with nuclear power. Two NT texts are exegeted in order to identify the biblical instruction we have regarding how to negotiate the relationship between church and state. One is the well-known story of “Render unto Caesar,” and the second is Paul’s instruction to be good citizens from his Letter to the Romans. Jerry Falwell, Jr.’s idiosyncratic interpretation of “Render unto Caesar” is juxtaposed with the recent game-day public protest of police brutality by professional football player Colin Kaepernick and the ensuing recoil by a fractured American citizenry.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 6

From *Caesars-Herods*, Sovereignities, States and Uncle Sam: the American Nation-State's Civil Religion and the Furor over Colin Kaepernick's Political Theology

Nationalism is the most powerful religion in the United States.
Carolyn Marvin²⁰⁶

The Road from the State to the Nation-State and Empire. The Western world experienced the creation of nation-states over a substantial time period. From clans or tribes as political communities of the ancient world, the idea of sovereignty arose between the late fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries and it was arranged around the prince. Machiavelli first wrote about “*stato* to refer both to the prince’s powers and position and to an abstract apparatus above prince and people. By the mid-sixteenth century, the abstract usage had won out in French and English legal writing.”²⁰⁷ The character of ancient political associations changed markedly as the notion of sovereignty, or state, developed.²⁰⁸

W. T. Cavanagh offers a working definition of “state” for this project, and he describes the “state” as artificial and unnatural,

[A] political form based on the distinctly modern concept of sovereignty, which may be defined as ‘supreme authority within a territory.’ . . . The

²⁰⁶ Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, “Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Revisiting Civil Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64, no. 4 (n.d.): 768. Marvin describes what blood sacrifice does for the nation. “After enough bloodletting, the slate of internal hostilities is wiped clean. The group begins again. The external threat is met. Our bad feelings toward one another are purged. Time begins anew, space is re-consecrated. The group basks for a while in the unanimity of its effort, until internal hostilities accumulate once more, and the entire cycle must be repeated. Thus, what constitutes the nation in any moment is the memory of the last successful blood sacrifice that counts for living group members. In the United States this is World War II, fast receding in its effect as a national unifier as those who carry its body memory become a smaller and smaller proportion of the population. Lacking that memory, we must search for new sacrifices, while agonizing over our internal disunity,” 775.

²⁰⁷ William T. Cavanagh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), 10.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 9. Citing Quentin Skinner, *The Foundation of Modern Political Thought*, vol. II (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1978), 352–258.

state claims legitimate authority—as opposed to mere coercion—a supreme authority that no lesser authorities within a recognized set of geographical borders may legitimately oppose. Sovereignty is a departure from earlier forms of governance, in which people’s political loyalties were based not necessarily on territoriality but on feudal ties, kinship, and religious or tribal affiliation.²⁰⁹

Cavanagh maintains “[t]he state does not arise as the establishment of a uniform system of common good and justice on behalf of a society of people; rather, a society is brought into being by the centralization of royal power.”²¹⁰ And, that ability to centralize power depends heavily upon war-making and military success. He clarifies this necessity,

Building a state depended on the ability of state-making elites to make war, and the ability to make war was in turn depended on the ability to extract resources from the population, which in turn depended on an effective state bureaucracy to secure those resources from a recalcitrant population. As Tilly puts it, ‘War made the state, and the state made war.’²¹¹

Further, C. Tilly observes that the state is not the author of civil rights. To the contrary, he notes that “the state either absorbed rights previously resident in other bodies (guilds, manors, provinces, estates) or eliminated them altogether, as in the enclosure of common lands.”²¹²

Uncle Sam’s Founding and the Scottish Enlightenment. B. T. Lynerd recognizes philosopher John Locke’s works as one of the main influences in the drafting of the American Constitution. Locke was likewise an important influence for American Evangelicalism and its assumed role as preservers of that embedded Lockean view:

²⁰⁹ Cavanagh, *Migrations*, 10-11.

²¹⁰ Ibid., citing Charles Tilly, ed., “Reflections on the History of European State-Making,” in *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 26.

²¹¹ Cavanagh, *Migrations*, 15. See also Tilly, *State-Making*, 42.

²¹² Cavanagh, *Migrations*, 15. See also Tilly, *State-Making*, 37-38.

White men are born free, live under a limited government, and they define moral virtue. The exception for unlimited freedom is when one violates the public order by breaking the law or straying from the law of nature. The application of law, then, could be harsh.

As definers and enforcers of moral virtue, White, male Protestants were the bedrock of this new frontier. They viewed themselves as a people destined for great things, as white Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPS), and they forged a frontier and an American secular trinity of civil religion: freedom-limited government-(defining and maintaining) moral virtue.

This trinity was further influenced by Francis Hutcheson and John Witherspoon and the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment. It envisioned a “society committed to high moral standards with the aid of the [Protestant Christian] church, albeit within a system of limited government that protects the individual liberty.”²¹³

In the 40 years prior to American Independence, the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers had to contend with the First Great Awakening (ca. 1735-1750), and the theologians who rejected the idea of human perfectibility. For 15 years, people experienced the theological battle between Calvinism and its tenets of original sin, or total depravity, versus the Arminian (Wesleyan) view that God has intentionally gifted humanity with free will. The First Great Awakening undoubtedly shaped the direction the American Revolution.

Lynerd seems to advocate for the argument that Arminianism prevailed during the Second Great Awakening (1810s to 1830s) with free will serving as the cornerstone of the American experiment. However, an argument can be made that Calvinism is still

²¹³ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 8.

identifiable as a conduit to the notion of free will as influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment. Whatever hybridity emerged, these theologies contributed to a republican theology that fashioned the American consciousness as a means to “preserve” the republic.

It is vital to avoid confusing “republican” with the current day “Republican.” The US is a republic; it is a representative democracy and is led by non-hereditary, elected leaders. If one identifies as a member of the Democratic Party, one is still a republican in the sense of supporting the structure of the government as a republic, and not, say, as a monarchy. Likewise, a party Republican should be identified only as a member of the Republican Party. Yet, many Republicans believe that *the republic* and **Republic-ans** are or should be the same thing. They recognize themselves as the morally virtuous trustees of this elected form of government and they act as if their brand of Republicanism is the equivalent to supporting the republic at the exclusion of all other parties. The importance of keeping these concepts as discrete realities is well-described here, especially as they developed during the Second Great Awakening.

During the early nineteenth century a growing catalogue of sins—hard drinking, Sabbath breaking, dueling, and an ever more depraved system of chattel slavery in the South—shook the conscience of American clergy, raising their anxieties over the fate of the republic. Republican theology took root as a source of apprehension and as an incentive for the reform: if Americans failed to achieve godly virtue, went the rationale, God would withdraw his blessing from the nation, and Americans would cease to be free. . . Even as these movements gathered steam, however, the tensions embedded in republican theology manifested in conflicts within American Christianity over the priorities of moral reform, over the theology of sin, and over the question of whether slaveholding constitutes a violation of God’s law—a debate that pit the Bible itself against republican theology and would ultimately form the theological subtext of the Civil War.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Ibid., 8-9.

This *secular trinitarian belief* in freedom-limited government-moral virtue still articulates the ideal of American life for many Americans, but especially for Evangelical Americans. They view freedom, limited government, and maintaining a moral compass as mandatory requirements for America to continue to forge its greatness; therefore, these must not be eroded.²¹⁵ Evangelical Whites believe they are the singular definer of moral virtue and are therefore charged by God with a sacred duty to preserve the morality they espouse.

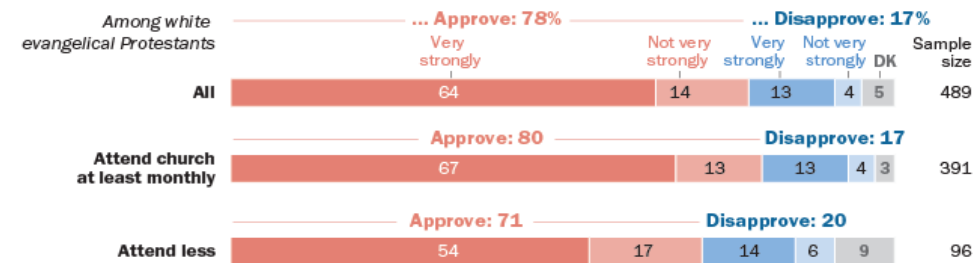
Many Americans believe in American exceptionalism. However, the most recognizable Protestant voting block is the Evangelical block, and this group is significantly responsible for electing Trump in 2016. The two-part chart below first shows the relationship between being white, Evangelical, and Protestant and attitudes toward the president's performance and how likely a responder was to vote for Trump. Results from surveying done between February and April of 2017 describe approval and the surveys from June to October 2016 shows how white evangelical Protestants indicated they would vote.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

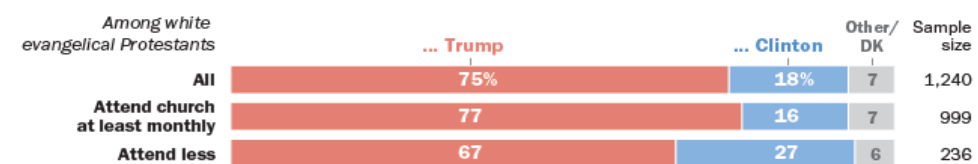
²¹⁶ 1615 L. St NW, Suite 800 Washington, and DC 20036 USA 202-419-4300 | Main 202-857-8562 | Fax 202-419-4372 | Media Inquiries, "Two-Thirds of Churchgoing White Evangelicals Strongly Approve of Trump's Job Performance," *Pew Research Center*, n.d., accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/26/among-white-evangelicals-regular-churchgoers-are-the-most-supportive-of-trump/ft_17-04-26_evangelicaltrump-2/. The survey found, "Religiously unaffiliated Americans consistently express among the lowest levels of approval of Trump's performance, ranging from 17% to 27% across the polls the Center has conducted since the president assumed office. Most black Protestants and nonwhite Catholics also have disapproved of the way the president handles his job."

Two-thirds of churchgoing white evangelicals strongly approve of Trump's job performance

Since becoming president, % who ... of Trump's job performance



During the 2016 campaign, % who intended to vote for ...



Source: Data on presidential job approval (which is based on all white evangelical Protestant respondents who are registered to vote and those who are not) are based on aggregated Pew Research Center surveys conducted in February and April of 2017. Source for data on intended vote (which is based on registered voters) is based on aggregated Pew Research Center surveys conducted between June and October of 2016.

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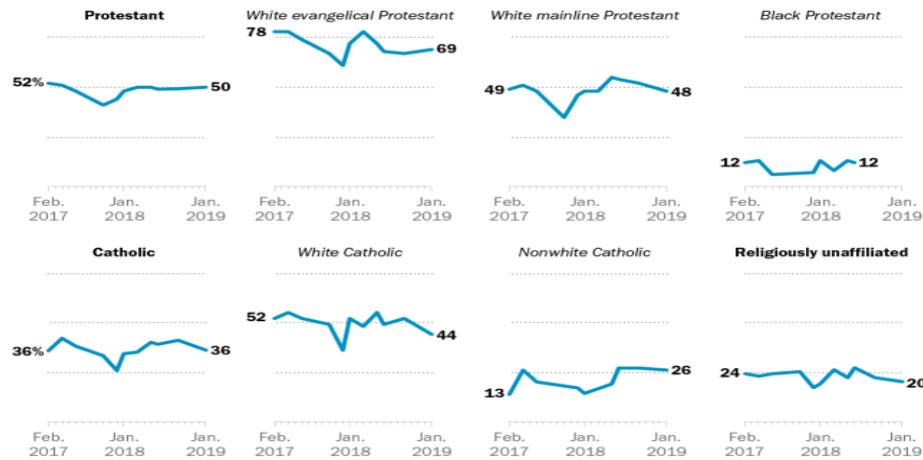
Earlier in 2019, Trump was still receiving support from nearly 70% of white Evangelicals.

Roughly seven-in-ten white evangelical Protestants (69%) say they approve of the way Trump is handling his job as president, according to the Center's latest polling in January 2019. This is somewhat lower than Trump's approval rating in the earliest days of his tenure – when about eight-in-ten white evangelicals (78%) approved of his job performance – but is in line with most polls conducted by the Center since the inauguration.²¹⁷

²¹⁷ Ibid.

White evangelical Protestants consistently give President Trump high marks

% who approve of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president



Note: In some surveys, black Protestant and nonwhite Catholic groups had insufficient sample size for analysis.
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 9-14, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Embarrassing as it is, 50% of white mainline and general Protestant groups support Trump according to data collected in January 2019. This survey shows that one in two mainline Protestants are comfortable with the embedded racism of the American status quo.

Even more embarrassing is that those who identify as unchurched have a high rejection rate of Trump. This group's approval rate has been decreasing across the previous two years, from 24%-20%, as of early 2019. Rejection of the Trump administration by the religiously unaffiliated group shows percentages that are very similar to those of nonwhite Catholics and Black Protestants. During the same time period, nonwhite Catholics' approval rate has risen from merely 13% to 26%. However, Black Protestants, not surprisingly, have the lowest approval rating of all, holding firmly across two years at an abysmal 12%. One may reliably conclude from these statistics that America remains deeply divided over race.

Trump's "Make America Great Again," is the battle cry to White Evangelicals who wish to fully restore White hegemony. We must ask what perpetuates the inability of mainline white Protestants from acknowledging and working to eradicate the reality of American racism. Why are one in two white mainline Protestants supporting Donald Trump?

The Myth of American Exceptionalism. The US as a state and as a republic is the largest and most powerful nation-state in the world, and the attendant characteristics of nation-state are readily present. Its shared cultural attributes as English-speaking, Eurocentric settlers developed the WASP ethos as the new American historical construction, along with the myth of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism. Fueled by Manifest Destiny as God's chosen to settle the vast American West, Whites conquered the Native peoples in their path. The nation-state builds on the cornerstone of "state" over time. Of equal importance is the action of the people to compose and impose an unending national folklore.

Once a territorial state exists, nationalism forms. A nation-state is: As the hyphen implies, the nation-state is the result of the fusion of the idea of the nation—a unitary system of shared cultural attributes—with the political apparatus of the state. Nations are most commonly united by some combination of shared ethnicity, language, or history, but nationality is not simply 'natural' or 'objective,' since ethnicity, language and history are all themselves the result of contingent historical construction. The construction of a national sense is a matter of 'common feeling and an organized claim.'¹⁰ Historically, this claim is first organized by the state. It is only after the state and its claims to territorial sovereignty are established that nationalism arises to unify culturally what had been gathered inside state borders. National claims tend to construct historical myths of origin stretching back into antiquity . . . the majority opinion [is] that nationalism first appeared in the eighteenth century and became prevalent only in the nineteenth century and following.²¹⁸

The US can also be characterized as "Empire." The old form of imperialism,

²¹⁸ Cavanagh, *Migration of the Holy*, 11.

defined by military and political control of foreign territories, has been replaced by Empire: 'In contrast to imperialism, Empire established no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a *decentered* and *detritorializing* apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers.'²¹⁹

Our evolving nuclear ability after WWII and the technical know-how to “reach” any state with the touch of a launch button elevated our status to a borderless nation-state, or empire. We have dedicated a great deal of time and money building a state-of-the-art military force and nuclear arsenal. We have also been instrumental in determining which other states are allowed to keep their weapons of mass destruction and which cannot. We have been cornering the nuclear market for decades in order to protect our marketplace position and to exploit the world’s resources, like crude oil, with near absolute sway.

Tilly even went so far as to identify war-craft as racketeering.²²⁰ Like organized crime, “emerging states offered their citizens protection against violence [but] ignored the fact *that the state itself created the threat and then charged its citizens for reducing it.*”²²¹

The citizenry generally does not recognize this racket, as it is situated within the auspices of legitimacy, the prince, or in our case, the three branches of federal government. In

Chapter 7, an argument is made that retaining social security taxes, paid by

²¹⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, “Theology and Social Theory,” in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians*, ed. Kwok Pui-Lan, Don H. Compier, and Joerg Rieger (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2007), 23.

²²⁰ “Racketeering,” *The Free Dictionary*, n.d., accessed February 20, 2019, <https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Racketeering>. “Traditionally, obtaining or extorting money illegally or carrying on illegal business activities, usually by organized crime. A pattern of illegal activity carried out as part of an enterprise that is owned or controlled by those who are engaged in the illegal activity. The latter definition derives from the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corruption Organizations Act (RICO), a set of laws (18 U.S.C.A. § 1961 et seq. [1970]) specifically designed to punish racketeering by business enterprises.”

²²¹ Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169.

undocumented workers is racketeering. Such workers do not receive the benefits for which they pay. This constitutes an ongoing “business” operation by the federal government and keeps the Social Security Administration afloat.

Church and State in the Twenty-first Century--The New Evangelical “Right” as Regulators of American Civil Religion. We must process what makes the Evangelical Christian tick if we are to respectfully counter their exclusionary, morally-judgmental messaging with a more inclusive Gospel message. Lynerd states the term “‘evangelical’ will refer to any Protestant who actively promotes a ‘conversion narrative’ to faith in Jesus Christ.”²²² Lynerd affirms David Bebbington’s conclusion that there is no official “church of Evangelicals,”

[I]nstead, evangelicalism forms a spray of subcultures within various denominations and nondenominational congregations. David Bebbington calls it a ‘wine that has been poured into many bottles.’ Theologically, the evangelical tradition has long straddled one of the deepest divides within Protestant Christianity—between Calvinist believers in the doctrine of divine election and Arminian [Wesleyan] believers in the human capacity for free will. . .²²³

Most historians today follow Bebbington’s fourfold definition of evangelicalism; it emphasizes:

- (1) a deferential reading of the Old and New Testaments (“biblicism”),
- (2) the cosmic significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection (“crucicentrism”),
- (3) the transformative importance of adopting a personal faith in Jesus (“conversionism”), and
- (4) the impetus to share the gospel of conversion with others (“activism”) as the unifying features.²²⁴

²²² David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. (Place of publication not identified: Routledge, 2015), 1–3.

²²³ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 19–20. Many non-Evangelical Americans believe in American exceptionalism but are not as entrenched in maintaining control of morality-related policies.

²²⁴ Ibid.

The project adopts this definition as well. We next examine the “New Right” and its predominantly Evangelical membership as regulators of American civil religion.

Popular Social Commentary on the “New Right.” The New Right is broader in composition and desires to retain more than limited government. It harkens to “many social arrangements in America—white supremacy, male supremacy, Protestant hegemony, and Victorian sexuality.” By way of example, Lynerd refers to the

[S]atirical jingle, ‘Those Were the Days,’ which opened each episode of ‘All in the Family’ (CBS, 1971–1979) and wove together multiple layers of nostalgia in 40 seconds: Archie Bunker, the archetype reactionary of the post-60s era, pines for his prewar youth, when ‘guys like us, we had it made,’ when ‘girls were girls, and men were men,’ and when America ‘didn’t need no welfare state’ because ‘everybody pulled his weight.’²²⁵

Creator of “All in the Family,” Norman Lear, equipped Archie Bunker with many traditional ideas prevalent in 1970s America. A few of those ideas did ring true, but most were somewhat blurred by his lens on life. At the core of his being, however, Archie waxed nostalgic over the loss of White social power.

In reviewing the theme song above, one can easily hear the Trumpian refrain, “Make America Great Again,” whispering in the ears of Archie wannabes. This is not to say that all conservatives agree on every issue. There is tension between the conservative idea of supporting limited government and the desire to enforce an Evangelical moral code. Strangely enough, Evangelicals, champions of limited government, seek to dictate a national moral code by expanding governmental action, either judicially, or legislatively.

²²⁵ Ibid. As a teenager, I loved *All in the Family* because it was the only social commentary to which I could relate. It was especially good at spurring critical thought of the viewing audience. It was not preachy, but it was pithy in raising issues about patriarchy via women’s rights and education, homosexuality, abortion, and white/black relations. Lear playfully invited us to be honest with ourselves regarding our assumptions about truth—are the assumptions what we *actually* believe, or was our sense of truth merely implanted in us by our elders without allowing our era and context to have voice? This show made my coming out so much easier because Lear’s characters would name the “taboo” words of our times with respect. That 45-year-old show is still incredibly relevant now.

Yet, many Americans would call these “actions” governmental intrusions on our freedoms, especially the right to privacy.

Norman Lear continues to challenge American society with its racist and socioeconomic double-talk in his current television show, “One Day at a Time.” Lear has rebooted the 1980s show, originally of the same name. It featured a white single mom with two daughters. The current show is about a Cuban-American single mom and her daughter and son. Anchored by famed actress, Rita Moreno, the show addresses the permanent damage of deportation, especially for American-born children left behind.

Lear challenges several other contemporary social problems: 1) the cost of military action by exposing the realities of veterans who suffer from the long-lasting effects of post-traumatic stress disorder; 2) the lead character’s daughter comes out as a lesbian during her traditional coming-of-age celebration, the *quincini*era, and her father rejects her; and 3) various socioeconomic stressors for single mothers, and the challenge to keep teenagers drug-free.

As with all his productions, Lear’s show is funny, current, poignant, sad, and hopeful. Moreno’s delightful character, Lydia, or *Abuelita*, is traditional in many ways. Yet she lets love be the default when facing conflict, like accepting her daughter’s divorce and her granddaughter’s sexual orientation. As a foil to this modern American family, show writers have re-purposed the building superintendent as a Canadian immigrant – wealthy and in recovery from substance abuse and from his white privilege. When the two cultures are in conflict, he frequently listens to what he says from his social location and says, a slow, “Oooooohhh” when he realizes the presumptions with which he approaches some issues. Our society is complex, and in no way is there a

monolith of progressive-thinking people, and there is also a diversity of concerns among conservatives, as they balance freedom and moral virtue while keeping the federal government limited.

Diversity in Conservatism. There seems to be a perception among progressives that conservatives are in solid agreement on many social issues. But that is a mis-perception, as

The modern right wing in America thus covers a wide range of ideologues and interest groups—business advocates opposed to commercial regulations; critics of the welfare state and of income redistribution; libertarian purists; “originalist” interpreters of the U.S. Constitution; both military hawks and isolationists; defenders of “traditional family values”; foes of abortion; certain religious cohorts like conservative Roman Catholics and Protestant evangelicals; and, farther from the orbit of national politics, white supremacists and members of antigovernment militias like the Montana Freeman.²²⁶

Here, Lynerd expresses the breadth, the diversity even, of conservative views. In concert with this knowledge, we must also be sure to understand how this broad group of conservatives interpret their role as theologians in the public square. Conservatives are, *en bloc*, more active or at least more vocal, in the public square than are progressives. We must reverse this reality. Jesus was very vocal in the public square, calling out injustice. The next section offers exegesis of two NT passages, from Luke and Romans, that are instructive for Christians about how to navigate their relationships with the state.

Political Theology in First-century Palestine. The social system of Jesus’s first century Palestine had a different design than what we have in present day. Again, understanding the past and present contexts that are in play is vital. Such an understanding allows us to accurately apply the Gospel message of Jesus’s time to ours.

²²⁶ Ibid., 26.

In contrasting first-century society with our twenty-first century life, Malina and Rohrbaugh explain how, “Europeans and Americans generally believe there are four basic social institutions: kinship, economics, politics, and religion.”²²⁷ We recognize these distinct social systems and we seek to keep them separate. In contrast to our social understanding, the writers describe a different system in the NT world, as

[P]eople attended to only two institutions as distinctive: kinship and politics . . . In the New Testament period, neither religion nor economics had a separate institutional existence and neither was conceived of as a system on its own, with a special theory or practice and a distinctive mode of organization. Both were inextricably intertwined with the kinship and the political systems.²²⁸

Further, Malina and Rohrbaugh identify the family as the consumer/producer economic unit of ancient times which they call a “family economy.” However, “The political economy controlled the flow and distribution of goods, especially luxury and temple goods, and war materials.”²²⁹ An argument can be made this is still the case but now the private sector drives the distribution of goods. Additionally, we employ an integrated and specific economic nomenclature like stocks, bonds, 401(k)’s, currency, and market, even free market.

Our concepts like, “employment” and “production,” would have fallen under the auspices of “politics” back then. Plus, the meaning-making of religion served as the umbrella over the entire system and provided a means of interpreting kinship and politics. For the US, this was more the case in the 1950s when church attendance was still a mark of character and good citizenship.

²²⁷ Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, “Religion, Economics, and Politics,” in *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 397–398.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Before exploring the taxation story, the Matthean evangelist provides four situations in succession where Jewish leaders try to discredit Jesus, beginning with the taxation story, then a debate regarding resurrection, next an argument over the greatest commandment, and finally a surprise play on terminology relating to the identity of the Messiah, Son of David (Mt 22:15-46). Common threads weave through each story: 1) each one touches on Torah, that is *teachings*; 2) they all occur *in the Temple*; and 3) in all confrontations, various combinations of Pharisees, Sadducees, and/or Herodians, launch the challenges, as if to portray a unified front of Judaic authority, despite their own dogmatic and political differences.

None of these efforts at discrediting Jesus are successful. Jesus's multiple ripostes win the arguments. These stories, occurring in succession, illuminate the growing frustration Israel's leaders have with Jesus's ability to expose their hypocrisy and trickery and make them look like utter fools in front of the people they work to control. In short, *what they desperately want is to silence this Jesus*.

In this public story, Jesus addresses the two-part system of the day, kinship (occupied Israel) and politics in his response about taxation. While that system and ours can be differentiated in many ways, they share a commonality—we must all balance our relationship to our faith and to our government, and this story has much to teach about that relationship.

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 16 So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?' 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19 Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius. 20 Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?' 21 They answered, 'The

emperor's.' Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' 22 When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away. (Mt 22:15-22)

The Pharisees contrive an opportunity to trap Jesus into speaking heresy from the outset of this public (temple) confrontation. The Matthean evangelist opts for *pagideúō*,²³⁰ instead of the more common *agreúō*²³¹ to expound on their treachery, their intent to snare. The Pharisees do not challenge Jesus directly but rather through their own disciples, and some Herodians²³² who were thought to seek the restoration of a Jewish reign in the tradition of Herod the Great. The Pharisaic disciples first attempt to flatter Jesus by admiring his impartiality and, one might infer, his wisdom.

It is noteworthy that their *set-up for the trap ultimately helps Jesus*. There would have been many people milling around the temple within earshot of this exchange. The elders describe Jesus as a sincere teacher--that he teaches the way of God in accordance with truth. He defers to no one, and exercises impartiality. Using a challenge-riposte analysis, *it is as if the elders already know they are inferior* to Jesus, and therefore do not know their place. They use these honorable descriptors to spring-load the trap but it snaps back on them. Their argument is cut off completely.

In the inquisitors' minds, if their followers, as instigators, can demonstrate their knowledge of Torah is superior, then Jesus would be shamed as an upstart who does not know his place. He would lose face and be discredited. These sycophants fail to fool

²³⁰ Ibid., 262.

²³¹ Danker and Krug, *Lexicon*, 5. They note that the use of *agreúō*, to snare or entrap, also communicates the use of a "beguiling tactic."

²³² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew: A Commentary*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, vol. 2, v. 2- : Hermeneia--a critical and historical commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 62. Controversy continues about who exactly the Herodians were. One theory is the Herodians thought Herod the Great was the Messiah. See fn. 11. See also Harrington, *Matthew*, 309. He notes the unique use of the verb *pagideúō*, too.

Jesus. Their toadyism is merely a ruse to *temporarily place* Jesus in an equal social standing with these community leaders, so that when they win the argument, Jesus will lose face. The four encounters provide an excellent example of the gamesmanship involved in challenge-riposte.

Turning to the text, through their question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?,” the challengers are drawing a parallel between the Passover Seder tradition where the “wise son” asks a prescribed question beginning, “Is it lawful...” Another way of interpreting “Is it lawful,” could be, “Is it in line with Torah [law]?”²³³ Again, the implication is that the cross-examiner knows more about the Torah and its interpretive writings, and he is testing to see if Jesus has a superior or inferior knowledge of same.

B. E. Reid notes the sticky nature of this question,

Since the Roman occupation of Palestine in 63 B.C., Jews were obligated to pay tribute, or a head tax, in Roman coinage, on each man, woman, and slave. If Jesus opposed this payment, he would be advocating revolt against Rome. If he advocates payment, then he would be seen as a collaborator with the enemy. Jesus sees the malice and hypocrisy of his questioners, who have set this trap (v 18). His clever response can be understood in one of three ways: (1) one should pay nothing to Caesar because everything belongs to God (Lev 25:23); (2) one should pay the emperor because he is God’s representative (as Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17); (3) one can pay Caesar but recognize that his authority is relative and that loyalty to God takes precedence. The last is the most likely meaning. As in 17:24-27, Jesus advises paying the tax, but this is not a vote of support for the occupying power. The amazed response (v 22) of the Pharisees’ disciples . . . underscores Jesus’ skill in outwitting his opponents.²³⁴

Malina and Rohrbaugh further elucidate the meaning of possessing Roman coins, stamped with a graven image, while in the temple, and how Jesus sets the

²³³ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social Commentary*, 112.

²³⁴ Reid, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 112.

Herodians and Pharisees at odds.

A Roman denarius which had on it not only Caesar's likeness but also the inscription, "Tiberius Caesar, August, son of divine Augustus" (see v. 20) . . . Jesus' opponents are thus embarrassed by their possession of an unholy Roman coin. If, as it is likely, it was the Herodians who had the incriminating coin, they would immediately have set themselves at odds with the collaborators in challenging Jesus. Followers of the Pharisees avoided all contact with such an idolatrous object. Thus, by the clever strategy of asking that the offensive coin be produced, Jesus has set his two groups of opponents against each other.²³⁵

Jesus has asked them, "Why do you test me, you hypocrites" (v 18)? So, he has already labeled them as two-faced. By punctuating his message further, "and [give] to God what is God's," Jesus changes the tenor of their initial test. He issues his own "challenge to be as careful about one's obligations to God as one is about obligations to Caesar [or, presently, the three branches of the US government]."²³⁶

Harrington also cautions that this passage has been used across the Christian centuries to justify a

[d]octrine of separation of 'Church and State,' often with the conclusion that they are separate spheres and sometimes with the consequence that obedience to the state in its sphere is practically absolute . . . But this text and others like it (Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17; and Mt 17:24-27 should not be pressed into a metaphysics or a political philosophy.²³⁷

Harrington believes Matthew was revealing the treachery of the elders' trap to his audience and was highlighting Jesus's refocus from honoring Caesar to honoring God as the main lesson. This is not primarily a lesson about practicing a separation of Church and State.²³⁸ In essence, Jesus is saying we must be as concerned about tithing to God as in paying Caesar's head tax, as if to further say,

²³⁵ Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social Commentary*, 112.

²³⁶ Harrington, *Matthew*, 310.

²³⁷ Ibid., 311.

²³⁸ Ibid.

for you are made in God's eternal image, and not in the image of Caesar's temporal head.

Historically, Matthean interpreters have recognized that Jesus's ability to elude the leaders' traps was to shut them up by exposing their own trickery, and rightly so. Beyond these lessons, Matthew's evangelist added in and emphasized the need to tithe and to worship God; we are not here to merely pay taxes.

However, the major point proffered here is that Jesus *intended to avoid answering the inherent fundamental question*, "Do we collaborate with Rome and pay the tax, or do we resist, and risk worse treatment by Rome?" Jesus knew that there was not a single answer possible here. In first-century Palestine, as today, we must all navigate our life while located between the spheres of government and our faith practice whatever it may be; it is a give-and-take relationship. Religion and politics cannot be separated completely; to think so is fallacy. There will always be variable overlap, especially within each person.

When Calvin and Zwingli taught that rebellion towards the government was tantamount to rebellion against God, they espoused a government as if it were *equal to God* instead of recognizing church and state as existing fluidly and interacting much like a perpetual *pas de deux*. Further, unchallenged power systems lead to abuse. Jesus also knew that upending injustice required patience and understanding. Nurturing God's people was Jesus's first line of resistance and demonstrated the need for communal resistance by caring for the most vulnerable.

God did not expect Israel to obey Pharaoh blindly. So, too, does the argument apply to us. Biblically, we are not expected to endure abuse; nor are we to suborn the

abuse of others. The African slaves of the antebellum South relied on the Exodus story for faith to survive slavery. They escaped and resisted, and they obtained unwavering support of abolitionists. Justice prevails, but it takes time. Moreover, since we have built-in constitutional protections regarding civic participation, we are doubly charged with speaking truth to power.

Resist Assuming a Government is “Good.” Another primary text relating to how Christians must conduct themselves in relationship to the state comes from Paul.

13 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; ⁴ for it is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer.⁵ Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. ⁶ For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, busy with this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due. (Rom 13:1-8)

Consider that this text comes right after Paul has finished directing followers to answer evil with love (12:17-21). And, immediately following this passage, Paul identifies love as the fulfillment of the law (13:8-10). Without this interruption about governmental relationship to the people, Paul’s message works as two seamless lessons on the essential nature of love for Christians. Accordingly, this jump in themes has caused some scholars to posit it was added to Paul’s writing.²³⁹

Just as Jesus did, it seems Paul was trying to protect a vulnerable Christian

²³⁹ Brendan Byrne, *Romans*, Sacra Pagina series v. 6 (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2007), 385.

community. Roman taxes in the late 50s CE fomented political unrest. Christians were persecuted by Jews, including Saul/Paul, and Romans alike. The text is framed in conventional language for that day's Jewish and Hellenistic communities; it showed that Christians did not believe they were exempted from obeying Caesar and paying tribute taxes.²⁴⁰ "In this sense the instruction, for all its oddity---and for all the hermeneutical issues it has raised and continues to raise (see below)--is nonetheless part of Paul's overall sense of Christian life as involving a delicate balance between the realities of the present age and the demands of the new."²⁴¹

B. J. Malina and J. J. Pilch go further in deeming the text irrelevant because it is naïve to assume that government is always "good," so

[i]t is very important for the contemporary reader that Paul does not envision post-Enlightenment representative democracy. In this system citizens elect representatives to deal with matters of importance to the citizens. Since authorities in this system get their authority from the voting citizenry and not from God, what Paul advises here is irrelevant. Paul envisions a system of aristocratic empire in the control of elites, with ordinary people—the vast majority—being totally powerless unless they have the assistance of a patron.²⁴²

B. Byrne's commentary aptly cautions against the assumption that the authorities are "just;" he grounds his reasons for viewing the passage as irrelevant, too,

The unqualified injunction to be submissive to worldly authority, along with the rationale accompanying it, has been one of the most influential passages of Romans down the ages. Theologies of Church-State relations have been erected upon it, and autocratic governments or those who have supported them have demanded civil obedience in its name. Believers who have found it necessary to resist or seek to overthrow civic power in certain of its historical manifestations have found the passage at best an embarrassment, at worst something to be rejected in the name of the broader claims of the gospel. For some it represents the 'most hateful'

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 386-387.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Letters of Paul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 280.

passage in scripture.

To modern sensibility the extraordinary measure of divine guarantee attributed here to earthly rulers is naïve and simplistic in the extreme. No allowance is made for abuse of power on the part of the human authority; nor is there any thought that on occasion it is the good who feel the brunt of penal sanction through either mistake or overt miscarriage of justice. In such situations, where the conditions of just government which it presupposes, do not obtain, the text loses all relevance.²⁴³

Aside from citing the future issues Paul could not predict, contextually, we must look to what he was thinking, what concerned him. Paul believed the coming of the *parousia* was imminent—a consideration that no doubt influenced him, for in his mind, the community was not in this earthly predicament for the long haul. Paul's concern to protect the fledgling church seems to have had some influence on the Matthean writer, as *Romans* predates the gospel by 20 or more years.

By purposefully leaving the obvious question unanswered, technically, Jesus kept his followers out of immediate danger, so *they might live to fight for justice another day*. It is therefore submitted that both texts, while inapplicable to how our government today is structured and authorized, still instruct us to balance the weight of civic duty with our Christian duty to care for the marginalized—in other words, follow the law to the best of one's ability, but also challenge injustice and unjust leaders. Unbelievably, former US Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, actually used this passage to justify separating Latin@ children from their parents at the southwest border between the US and Mexico.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Byrne, *Romans*, 389.

²⁴⁴ "Sessions Cites Bible in Defense of Breaking up Families, Blames Migrant Parents," *NBC News*, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/immigration/sessions-cites-bible-defense-breaking-families-blames-migrant-parents-n883296>. Sessions stated, "Persons who violate the law of our nation are subject to prosecution ... I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the government for his purposes," Sessions said. "Orderly and lawful processes are good in themselves ... and protect the weak and it protects the lawful." He called on religious leaders to "speak up strongly to urge anyone who would come here to apply lawfully, to wait their turn and not violate the law."

Recognizing Civil Religion and Political Theology: They are not the Same.

For this discussion, Lynerd's definitions will serve as a foundation for contrasting civil religion and political theology.

Political theology and civil religion, for starters, are not simply two terms that mean the same thing. *Civil religion, on the one hand, sanctifies existing political values into a common creed for all of society. Political theology, on the other hand, derives political values from an existing faith tradition.*²⁴⁵(Italics mine.)

In reality, conservatives do not espouse a *decidedly Christian message* in the public square. There is a civil religion. However, they deftly impose their theocratic moral code on American society. Their message purports personal freedom, but only when using the moral code that they alone have proscribed. Conservatives understand their freedom is: 1) "God-given;" 2) to an exceptional people, WASPS, themselves; 4) they alone provide the definition of moral virtue; and therefore, 3) they are duty-bound to impose this theocracy on the whole country, even in contravention of a resistant individual's freedom, and in denial of the increasing religious pluralism in the US.

Problematically, conservatives have successfully cloaked this faith-based code, freedom-exceptionalism-moral virtue-limited government as a *civil religion*, a secular creed-like chant, "USA! USA! USA!" Conservatives are convinced they have cornered the market on virtue. Thus, it is their duty to limit freedom for others, as if they were the "government." Evangelicals cloak their faith as a civil religion for two reasons: 1) the New Right intentionally side-steps the accusation that they are working to establish an Evangelical Protestantism as the supreme religion of the land. They are trying to do exactly that, but it is under the guise of American exceptionalism; 2) Evangelical

²⁴⁵ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 35.

Protestants, like White slave owners of the past, work assiduously to distance themselves from the Gospel message of “love your neighbor” to evade responsibility for the poor, pay little or no taxes to a limited and uncompassionate government, and to hoard wealth.

Their unannounced faith-based code is heavily wired to the control panel of heterosexual, white patriarchy, the regulation of sexuality as procreation and heteronormative, and unbridled capitalism. Conservatives demand a limited federal government only as it relates to their issues and the laissez faire market.

Disturbingly, when Evangelical proselytes lose legal challenges based on equal protection under the law, by the so-called *non-moral majority*, the Right volleys with allegations that the judiciary is rife with “activist judges.” Evangelicals characterize our judicial system as overrun by super-judicial mercenary agents for the Left who exceed their authority when their rulings violate the conservative moral code. It has long been settled in American jurisprudence that SCOTUS is the ultimate interpreter of the federal constitution and determines whether an Act of Congress violates the constitution.²⁴⁶

As the society grows and changes, so too must the interpretive work of the courts expand. SCOTUS is also the final arbiter in reviewing rulings by state high courts only when a federal question is involved.²⁴⁷ Thomas Jefferson, contributing author to the Bill of Rights, viewed the US Constitution as a living document. This idea is carved into the southeast interior wall of monument bearing his name in Washington, D. C.

I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions, but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also

²⁴⁶ *Marbury v. Madison*, 1 Cranch 137 (U. S. Supreme Court 1803).

²⁴⁷ *Martin v. Hunter's Lessee*, 1 Wheat. 304 (U. S. Supreme Court 1816).

to keep pace with the times. We might as well require a man to wear still the coat which fitted him when a boy as civilized society to remain ever under the regimen of their barbarous ancestors.”²⁴⁸

Notwithstanding Jefferson’s recognition of the need to expand the constitution from time to time, when conservatives lose legal challenges in legislating national morality, they repackage these losses as violations of their right of free exercise of religion (as will be discussed in the section of RFRA in Chapter 8). In reality, they are outraged that challenges to their “Christian” definition of American morality are so often successful. Even when they lose such a case, the religious convictions they hold so dear are just as protected as they were before the adverse rulings were issued. What they are really protesting is the fact that they no longer have a firm grasp on *the singular* “moral compass.” This group is comprised of ideologues with nineteenth century, iron-clad values for others and with *silly-putty* values for themselves. It comes down to having a malleable moral code, or put simply, the lack of an ethical code.

Indeed, some religions have their own comprehensive ethical systems of which political theology is just a small part—Roman Catholics have Catholic Social Thought, for instance, and various Muslim sects observe Shari’a. Republican theology, a tradition among evangelical Protestants in America, does not flow out of a comprehensive ethical system (Protestants lack such a system) but instead weds the gospel of individual conversion to the Lockean social contract, yielding a spiritual rationale for limited government and the free market. Republican theology asserts the mutual dependence of individual liberty, moral virtue, and Christian faith to support a civil religion that values all three.²⁴⁹

We are at an ideological crossroads where the path chosen will define the US identity; it remains to be seen as to how permanent this identity will be. Those, religious

²⁴⁸ “Read Jefferson’s Words: The Constitution Is a Living Document,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, accessed March 22, 2019, <https://www.post-gazette.com/opinion/letters/2017/02/03/Read-Jefferson-s-words-The-Constitution-is-a-living-document/stories/201702030049>.

²⁴⁹ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 35.

or not, who proselytize the superiority of straight, white, male privilege, and the Anglo-Saxon myth of exceptionalism, envision a future that is dependent on systemic (overarching) and systematic (pattern and practice) discrimination against those outside of their circle. Those on the other road see a dissolving of the Christian hegemony, and oppose in its various forms, a modern manifest destiny to end and cure both historic and current forms of exploitation. The current federal administration shamelessly works to restore/edify patriarchy, white privilege, classism, etc., for its power base is largely white Evangelicals who are the loudest and most organized.

To highlight the lack of ethical code in Republican civil religion, we look to a recent interview with Jerry Falwell, Jr. by Joe Heim of the *Washington Post*, entitled, “Jerry Falwell Jr. Can’t Imagine Trump ‘Doing Anything That’s Not Good for the Country.’”²⁵⁰ The questions and answers appear here in the same order as the interview transcript. Earlier in this chapter, we explored the rhetorical use of challenge-riposte. Mr. Heim posed challenges through his questions. Mr. Falwell offered ripostes to these challenges. Throughout his responses, the italics are mine. My ripostes appear after Mr. Falwell’s.

Heim: You said recently that conservatives and Christians should stop electing nice guys. Aren’t Christians supposed to be nice guys?

Falwell: Of course, of course. But that’s where people get confused. *I almost laugh out loud when I hear Democrats saying things like, “Jesus*

²⁵⁰ Joe Heim, “Jerry Falwell Jr. Can’t Imagine Trump ‘Doing Anything That’s Not Good for the Country,’” *Washington Post*, January 1, 2019, accessed February 26, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/jerry-falwell-jr-cant-imagine-trump-doing-anything-thats-not-good-for-the-country/2018/12/21/6affc4c4-f19e-11e8-80d0-f7e1948d55f4_story.html. “Joe Heim joined The Washington Post in 1999. He is a staff writer for the Metro section. He also writes Just Asking, a weekly Q&A column in the Sunday magazine. *This interview has been edited and condensed.*” See also an opinion piece published the following day, Elizabeth Breunig, “How Jerry Falwell Jr. Found His MAGA Religion - The Washington Post,” last modified January 2, 2019, accessed March 6, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/01/02/how-jerry-falwell-jr-found-his-maga-religion/?utm_term=.18a9ae1e51a8.

said suffer the little children to come unto me” and try to use that as the reason we should open up our borders.

Here is an influential Christian leader encouraging Christians to believe that American law should not be influenced by Christ, let alone other faith traditions. Every major faith has a cognate to the Golden Rule of Jesus and Torah, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Apparently, Falwell expects all people of faith to ignore suffering despite our respective religious teachings. In his twisted theology, God gives America a permission slip to plunder the world and creation for all it is worth, trampling those on the margins along the way, even as they glean the edges of the field for their very survival.

Falwell continues: It’s such a distortion of the teachings of Jesus to say that what he taught us to do personally — to love our neighbors as ourselves, help the poor — can somehow be imputed on a nation. *Jesus never told Caesar how to run Rome. He went out of his way to say that’s the earthly kingdom, I’m about the heavenly kingdom and I’m here to teach you how to treat others, how to help others, but when it comes to serving your country, you render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s. It’s a distortion of the teaching of Christ to say Jesus taught love and forgiveness and therefore the United States as a nation should be loving and forgiving, and just hand over everything we have to every other part of the world.* That’s not what Jesus taught. You almost have to believe that *this is a theocracy to think that way, to think that public policy should be dictated by the teachings of Jesus.*

In other words, Falwell says that Jesus was not addressing the behavior of sovereignties and, also astonishingly, used “Render unto Caesar” as instruction for exercising *personal* charity only. He also interprets this passage as authorization for a business-driven, capitalist, national self-interest even if it is overtly exploitative. He seems blinded to any sense of community; his sense of rugged individualism serves as his individual ethical code.

Michael Sherrard of the blog, Faithful America, noted that, “Liberty University is the largest Southern Baptist school in the nation, but so far Southern Baptist leaders have been silent in the face of Falwell’s blatant misreading of the Gospel.” J. D. Greear, the convention’s president, and Russell Moore, the president of its public policy arm, have both said they want a more compassionate public image for their denomination. Here was a lost opportunity to dispel this economic incantation as evil.²⁵¹

Heim: So, the government you want is one free of religious association?

Falwell: Yes. The government should be led by somebody who is going *to do what’s in the best interest of the government and its people*. And I believe that’s what Jesus thought, too.

Notice Mr. Falwell lists the best interests of the government before the best interest of its people. He is most concerned about being a part of the power structure. He talks about Jesus as if Jesus had no commentary on justice and politics whatsoever. If we survey all of the times that Jesus challenged either the Jewish or Roman leaders, it is clear that Jesus modeled for us to work within the system, but especially to call out injustice at any opportunity. He did this repeatedly and expects us to do the same.

Heim: You and other white evangelical leaders have strongly supported President Trump. What about him exemplifies Christianity and earns him your support?

Falwell: What earns him my support is his business acumen. Our country was so deep in debt and so mismanaged by career politicians that we needed someone who was not a career politician, but someone who’d been successful in business to run the country like a business. That’s the reason I supported him.

²⁵¹ “About Us | Faithful America,” accessed March 29, 2019, <http://www.faithfulamerica.org/about/>. Faithful America’s website states its purpose: “Our members are sick of sitting by quietly while Jesus’ message of good news is hijacked by the religious right to serve a hateful political agenda. We’re organizing the faithful to challenge such extremism and renew the church’s prophetic role in building a more free and just society.” This quote is from the home page.

Mr. Falwell dodges the question. He has no intention of discussing Mr. Trump's Christian values and Christian acts. Trump has also filed for bankruptcy six times.²⁵² There is ample reason for declining that opportunity. Reporter Jillian Berman presents on the results of a study by

Dacher Keltner, a psychology professor at the University of California–Berkeley. His research has shown that wealthy people are more likely to lie, cheat at games and even take candy from a baby. 'They are more likely to make unethical decisions that maximize their own self-interest at the expense of other people,' Keltner said, adding that wealthy people often use ideology to justify those choices. 'You put a rich person in charge of the economy, and they're going to change the tax structure to benefit them.'²⁵³

Heim: The deficit and debt have increased during his first two years.

Falwell: Yeah, Congress, the spending bill that they forced on him in order to get the military spending up to where it needed to be — he said that would be the last time he signed one of those. But he had no choice because Obama had decimated the military, and it had to be rebuilt.

Why does the military need to be rebuilt? Is it to protect the American economy and to protect access to the world's natural resources and "cheap" labor? In 2016, the US military spending amounted to 611 billion US dollars. The United States is leading the world ranking in military spending by far, with China in second place with military spending of about 215 billion US dollars.²⁵⁴ Military spending peaked during

²⁵² "Fact Check: Has Trump Declared Bankruptcy Four or Six Times?," *Washington Post*, accessed March 28, 2019, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2016/live-updates/general-election/real-time-fact-checking-and-analysis-of-the-first-presidential-debate/fact-check-has-trump-declared-bankruptcy-four-or-six-times/>.

²⁵³ Jillian Berman, "Trump Doesn't Want 'a Poor Person' Running the Economy, but Research Suggests He Should Rethink That," *MarketWatch*, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/president-trump-doesnt-want-a-poor-person-running-the-economy-why-that-could-be-a-mistake-2017-06-22>.

²⁵⁴ "U.S. Military Spending 2000-2017 | Statista," *Statista*, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272473/us-military-spending-from-2000-to-2012/>.

the Obama administration in 2011 with an expenditure of 711 billion dollars. When President Obama left office at the beginning of 2016, military spending for 2015 totaled \$596.02 billion. In the two years that Mr. Trump has been in office, spending increased to \$609.76 billion in 2017, only \$14 billion more. The deficit currently stands at \$1250 billion and is projected to end up at \$1092 for FY2019.²⁵⁵

Heim: Is there anything President Trump could do that would endanger that support from you or other evangelical leaders?

Falwell: No.

Heim: That's the shortest answer we've had so far.

Falwell: Only because I know that he only wants what's best for this country, and I know anything he does, it may not be ideologically "conservative," but it's going to be what's best for this country, and I can't imagine him doing anything that's not good for the country.

Mr. Trump sees the United States as a business to be run by CEO who is answerable to no one or to the US Constitution and our representative form of government. Trump believes he can be successful as an autocrat. He is oblivious to checks and balances. His mantra, "Make American Great Again," while cleverly multivalent, is code to return power to the exclusive domain of heterosexual, white men. What does Mr. Trump think is best for the US? For that matter, what does Mr. Falwell think is best for the US? The answer is simple - unbridled power, and unbridled acquisition of wealth while controlling "morality."

Heim: Is it hypocritical for evangelical leaders to support a leader who has advocated violence and who has committed adultery and lies often? I understand that a person can be forgiven their sins, but should that person be leading the country?

Falwell: When Jesus said we're all sinners, he really meant all of us,

²⁵⁵ "US Federal Deficit by Year - plus Charts and Analysis," accessed March 28, 2019, https://www.usgovernmentpending.com/federal_deficit_chart.html.

everybody. I don't think you can choose a president based on their personal behavior because even if you choose the one that you think is the most decent — let's say you decide Mitt Romney. Nobody could be a more decent human being, better family man. But there might be things that he's done that we just don't know about. *So you don't choose a president based on how good they are; you choose a president based on what their policies are. That's why I don't think it's hypocritical.*

There's two kingdoms. There's the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom. In the heavenly kingdom the responsibility is to treat others as you'd like to be treated. In the earthly kingdom, the responsibility is to choose leaders who will do what's best for your country. Think about it. Why have Americans been able to do more to help people in need around the world than any other country in history? It's because of free enterprise, freedom, ingenuity, entrepreneurism and wealth. A poor person never gave anyone a job. A poor person never gave anybody charity, not of any real volume. It's just common sense to me.

We can readily identify the mantra of the American founders - freedom, limited government, and moral virtue - among White Evangelicals throughout Falwell's interview. Falwell's civil religion mimics the White Christ slavery of the *personal* Christian life, especially influenced by the regulatory epistles, while a nation is free to pursue its best interests outside of gospel imperatives to care for the marginalized. So long as slavers were "saved," they could do whatever they wanted to their slaves. This mindset has carried across the centuries--so long as White capitalists are saved, they can do whatever they want in business and national affairs to acquire power and wealth. There is also a clear separation of heaven as reward for accepting Jesus as personal Savior versus living unethically on earth to get everything one desires.

Falwell pollutes Jesus's context and then tries to pass it off as a pure application to his present-day belief in "do-whatever-the nation-wants-economics" to justify the US White Evangelical nation he so desires. He glaringly fails to acknowledge that all the world is God's anyway. Falwell believes it ludicrous that a nation be "loving and

forgiving” or should “help the poor.”

Heim: You’ve been criticized by some other evangelical leaders about your support for the president. They say you need to demand higher moral and ethical standards. You disagree with them on that?

Falwell: *It may be immoral for them not to support him, because he’s got African American employment to record highs, Hispanic employment to record highs. They need to look at what the president did for the poor. A lot of the people who criticized me, because they had a hard time stomaching supporting someone who owned casinos and strip clubs or whatever, a lot of them have come around and said, ‘Yeah, you were right.’ Some of the most prominent evangelicals in the country have said, ‘Jerry, we thought you were crazy, but now we understand.’*

Mr. Falwell is correct that unemployment for the African American and Hispanic American populations is at record lows. However, it is fascinating to listen to him point to the two groups that have been most vilified by Mr. Trump, groups of people of color. It is as if some supportive information about jobs vindicates Mr. Trump’s distasteful speech and conduct. He has referred to Mexicans as rapists and criminals, and refuses to decry White Supremacists, even when a woman was run down and killed in Charlottesville, South Carolina. There seems to be another stealthy motive in this response. It is as if he is crediting Mr. Trump for getting more minority workers “off of the public dole.”²⁵⁶ Not only does Mr. Falwell believe that Mr. Trump is the right man for the job, he has influenced his friends, too. What he

²⁵⁶ Analysis by Z. Byron Wolf CNN, “Trump Basically Called Mexicans Rapists Again,” *CNN*, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/06/politics/trump-mexico-rapists/index.html>. In June 2015, Trump said, *The US has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems. Thank you. It's true, and these are the best and the finest. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you. They're not sending you. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with [sic] us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.*“ See also James A. Fields Jr. Sentenced to Life in Prison in Charlottesville Car Attack,” *Washington Post*, accessed March 28, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/james-a-fields-jr-sentenced-to-life-in-prison-in-charlottesville-car-attack/2018/12/11/8b205a90-fcc8-11e8-ad40-cdfd0e0dd65a_story.html.

demonstrates in this interview is anything can be rationalized with enough power and money. Surprisingly, he seems willing to drop the compass of moral virtue.

American evangelicals have constructed their own rendering of the Lockean social contract, one that predicates the health of the republic upon the virtue of its citizens. This presents a dilemma—how to promote virtue without undermining individual liberty—that hovers in the background of evangelical politics and generates tensions within the right wing. Nevertheless, evangelicals regularly fuse these values, fighting for the rights of liberty and property even as they seek to reform American culture through moral activism.²⁵⁷

Mr. Falwell seems to echo the opinion of many.

The Henry Institute conducted a survey in 2008, called the *National Survey of Religious and Public Life*. Respondents were asked “whether government is responsible for taking care of those who can’t care for themselves.”

It was found that evangelicals affirmed the statement to a far less degree (53 percent) than Mainline Protestants (62 percent), Roman Catholics (75 percent), and black Protestants (83). The 30-point difference between evangelicals and black Protestants is especially striking in light of the close alignment on matters of theology like biblicism and crucicentrism. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, in their study of racial segregation in the American church, highlight Lockean ethos among white evangelicals. Comparing how evangelicals and Black Protestants account for racial inequality, Emerson and Smith find that evangelicals are far likelier to embrace individualistic rather than structural explanations. Only 27 percent of evangelicals blame racial discrimination, with 62 percent believing that blacks are poor because they lack sufficient motivation to succeed professionally. Black Protestants exhibit nearly the opposite views, with 70 percent blaming racial discrimination and 30 percent blaming a deficit of motivation. . . The belief in limited government is often predicated on a social ethic of individual responsibility.²⁵⁸

Clearly, Falwell is not alone in his Evangelical interpretation of the duty to help the marginalized and seems content to leave “the least of these” to contend for themselves.

Only 27% of Evangelicals recognize the connection between the vestiges of slavery and

²⁵⁷ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 29-33.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 27.

racism and inequality.

Thought [sic] it would decline the title, republican theology is a type of liberation theology in that it regards worldly freedom as a component of its gospel. What sets it apart from the leftist liberation is how it defines the essential threat to liberty: more in step with secular libertarianism, republican theology identifies unrestrained government as the cardinal enemy of the human spirit. Although the sins of exploitation, greed, sloth, and cheating certainly violate the ethic of republican theology, material inequality as such does not constitute a moral problem. To the extent disparities of fortune reflect moral failures, republican theologians are as likely if not likelier to implicate the losers as the winners. The real institutional menace to human liberty—the only relevant source of *systemic* injustice—resides in an overbearing public sphere. In short, republican theology presents a Christian rationale for limited government and free market capitalism, one that has found a wide embrace among white evangelicals in America. The argument of this book, in fact, is that republican theology has supplied the content for civil religion among American evangelicals from the time of the American founding.²⁵⁹

This interview first appeared in The Washington Post, one of the most politically influential newspapers in the world. Undoubtedly, it has been widely distributed through its readership to members of the Southern Baptist Convention. This message will spread exponentially due to its provenance in the Washington Post, thereby adding yet more damage through a misinterpreted and misappropriated gospel imperative to love one another. See chapter 9 for a discussion on the need for progressive broadcast messaging.

The American government and its citizens seem comfortable with continuing our sense of exceptionalism. This exceptionalism leads to our justification in employing a *mercurial theopolitical manifesto*--a capricious use of theology to suit the needs of the nation-state. Jerry Falwell, Jr.'s interpretation of the gospel evidences a manipulative use of the Bible for capitalistic power. Nationally, many politicians support conservative policy positions to pony up to the country's richest constituents, as well as to suit their

²⁵⁹ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 39-40.

personal socioeconomic goals instead of working for broader solutions for all of America. Hoarding wealth and working for global domination through military might to safeguard the market contravenes the Gospel. It is by our being vocal in the public square that we counter this corruptive influence and its attempt to ruin the Gospel message.

The Trump administration aims to build an even bigger “clearing-house for goods and services in which decisions are made between competing interests based on power [and profit], not rational deliberation about shared ends.” The common good is subsumed by nationalism and market, and it becomes its own religion. Marvin argues that “nationalism is the most powerful religion in the United States.” She is correct. Nationalism is “bound up with blood sacrifice to defuse crises of group identity.”²⁶⁰

Recall Cavanagh’s definition of nation-state as first an established, bounded territory, and then as a territory that develops and is dependent upon the construction of “*historical myths of origin stretching back into antiquity*.” The nationalism present in the USA is very much built on the Anglo-Saxon myth of superiority as God-chosen, virtuous, strong, worthy, even anointed. Manifest destiny, the Protestant work ethic, and Divine approval drove us west to found “our territory.”

The dynamics of nation-state are everywhere in the US. The nation-state is especially showcased at men’s professional sporting events. The pomp and circumstance includes displaying the flag (sometimes as big as the playing field), or a military honor

²⁶⁰ Marvin and Ingle, *Blood Sacrifice*, 775. Marvin and Ingle describe what blood sacrifice does for the nation. “After enough bloodletting, the slate of internal hostilities is wiped clean. The group begins again. The external threat is met. Our bad feelings toward one another are purged. Time begins anew, space is re-consecrated. The group basks for a while in the unanimity of its effort, until internal hostilities accumulate once more, and the entire cycle must be repeated. Thus, what constitutes the nation in any moment is the memory of the last successful blood sacrifice that counts for living group members. In the United States this is World War II, fast receding in its effect as a national unifier as those who carry its body memory become a smaller and smaller proportion of the population. Lacking that memory, we must search for new sacrifices, while agonizing over our internal disunity.”

guard presenting the colors, the removing of hats and placing of hands on hearts when the National Anthem is sung, usually in unison, even if performed by a solo vocalist. For many games in outdoor stadia of the National Football League and Major League Baseball, as well as some college sports events, a show of force and national pride is made through a military fly-over. The aircraft are usually of an uneven number and fly in formation as an arrowhead or chevron. The US Air Force recently announced that it would conduct more and larger flyovers at these events as a recruiting tool.

Shorting out the Nation-State Motherboard through Public Theology.

In comparison, we now consider an example of public or political theology rooted in the social gospel rather than American civil religion. As discussed earlier, the definition of public theology derives “political values from an existing faith tradition.”²⁶¹ Lynerd identifies three different protestant political theologies present in American democracy. The first two are liberation theology and social gospel theology.

Liberation theology, with mid-twentieth-century roots across the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere, asserts the identification of the Christian God with the plight of the oppressed, and particularly with victims of economic exploitation. Drawing upon the New Testament promise that Jesus came ‘to preach deliverance to the captives’ (Luke 4:18), this political theology interprets the Christian gospel as a call for human equality, a summons for instance, ‘to all blacks to affirm their full dignity as persons and [to] all whites to surrender their presumptions of superiority and abuses of power.’ Another leftist political theology with Protestantism is the Social Gospel . . . Less revolutionary and more holistic than that of liberation theology, the premise is that the gospel of Jesus Christ has a transformative social dimension. ‘Jesus worked on individuals and through individuals,’ writes Rauschenbusch, ‘but his real end was not individualistic but social . . . It is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into harmony with heaven.’²⁶²

²⁶¹ Lynerd, *Republican Theology*, 35.

²⁶² Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1991), 61–15.

In the following story, we see a convergence of liberation theology and social gospel theology as presented initially by Colin Kaepernick and his teammate, Eric Reid, during a pregame show, and a rejection by proponents of republican theology. Mr. Kaepernick, as the quarterback for the San Francisco NFL franchise in 2016, protested oppression of people of color, specifically in reaction to repeated white on black police brutality. As he knelt, Kaepernick's demonstration rattled the nation-state and its relationship with the First Amendment at its foundations. Following his protest, Kaepernick stated,

'To me, this is something that has to change,' Kaepernick said in an August 2016 interview. 'And when there's significant change and I feel like that flag represents what it's supposed to represent and this country is representing people the way that it's supposed to, I'll stand.' Kaepernick also said he could not 'show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color.' At first, Kaepernick sat during the anthem. Later, he opted instead to kneel to show more respect for men and women who fight for the country. The change came at the suggestion of former NFL player and Green Beret Nate Boyer.²⁶³

Since leaving the San Francisco 49ers, Kaepernick has not worked in the NFL. He and Reid filed suit against the NFL owners for colluding to deny each of them work in the league following the protest and the fallout surrounding it. Reid was signed by the Carolina Panthers prior to entering into a confidential settlement.

The reaction to this demonstration was fast and furious. A Colorado sporting goods store owner lost his business after refusing to sell Nike products based on the company's newly released "Just Do It" advertisement celebrating its 30th anniversary. The ad features a black and white photo of Kaepernick, in a tight close-up of his eyes, with the inscription, "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything."

²⁶³ Amir Vera CNN, "How National Anthem Protests Took Colin Kaepernick from Star QB to Unemployment to a Bold Nike Ad," *CNN*, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/04/us/colin-kaepernick-controversy-q-and-a/index.html>.

While the Kaepernick protest was engaging the first two types of political theology, that of liberation and the social gospel of equality, the third type of political theology was also involved, especially in the aftermath of the initial event, and it is republican theology. This controversy over free expression, in this instance by professional athletes, is just another example of how deeply polarized the USA is when our *civil religion of Nation-State* is publicly threatened—especially in a broadcast forum. The “insidiousness” of the social gospel disrupting anticipated good feelings of sports entertainment was unacceptable to many.

Likewise, liberating young black men is psychically intimidating in this country. Join this with the fact that white people do not want to discuss racism, especially in this venue, because it is *inappropriate* (ugly and unpleasant) to have to “deal” with racism when we are trying to have a good time. This attitude seems to prevail even though white on black police brutality occurs all too often. Many players continued to join in nationwide, game day protests in ensuing weeks. Owners and players held meetings. The US president called for all protesting players to be summarily fired.

Mr. Trump praised the NFL's decision to implement a policy forbidding players from protesting racism and police brutality during the national anthem, going so far as to say that those who violate it should not be able to play.

‘I think that’s good,’ Trump said in a ‘Fox & Friends’ interview that aired Thursday. ‘I don’t think people should be staying in the locker rooms, but still I think it’s good. You have to stand proudly for the national anthem. Or you shouldn’t be playing, you shouldn’t be there. Maybe you shouldn’t be in the country.’²⁶⁴

²⁶⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/EugeneScott202>, “Analysis | President Trump Says NFL Players Who Protest Shouldn’t Be in the Game — and Maybe Not Even in the Country,” *Washington Post*, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/05/23/president-trump-wanted-consequences-for-nfl-players-who-protest-racism-before-games-today-he-got-them/>.

It is clear he rejected any argument that the players were exercising their First Amendment right of free expression and to redress grievances against the government. Trump sought to trump the players and the First Amendment, though he vowed to uphold the constitution at his inauguration. Arguably, the players and franchises may be fined, but their First Amendment rights to speak and redress grievances reign supreme.

The US Empire was challenged over racism. Empires do not like to be embarrassed. Pilate factored in the problematic realities of a mob gone crazy if he did not assent to the demand for Christ on a cross. Fascist empires do not like most anything that is free-spirited: free speech and expression, democracy, government for the people and by the people, dissent, lack of conformity and proscribed order, certain groups deemed to fall short of the norm of respectability, etc. Some concerns are raised regarding the aftermath of the protest.

Little attention has been given to the prayerful manner Kaepernick used to present his view; he self-identifies as a devout Christian. He didn't resort to vulgarity although racism and its attendant violence are truly vulgar. Quite the contrary, he knelt down on one knee, gently, with a reverent, somber countenance. We normally see kneeling as a symbol of many positive things: humility, honor, kindness, vulnerability, and, yes, even prayer. It is suggested here that a major source of national irritation for his detractors was his prayerful countenance.

Mr. Kaepernick did this in a way that is normally understood as a kind offering-- an honorable marriage proposal, tying a small child's shoe laces, a means to help another up off the ground, as with the Good Samaritan. Alarming, despite Kaepernick's gentle and humble posture, it fueled a wildfire. He was accused of disrespecting the flag and the

national anthem. But the upset runs much deeper than a symbol and a song in a pre-game show.

The emotional response occurred because our overwhelmingly Evangelical Protestant nation was heavily forged by the Second Great Awakening some 200 years ago. Faith became a personal conversion, and piety became private, and we do not like to put politics and faith together on the same stage. It has been ingrained in our national DNA; we think politics and faith are separate; they are not. Consequently, many felt threatened by this public display of piety criticizing our God-chosen manifest destiny. Instead, here was an influential, wealthy black man speaking truth to power to that grand, overwhelmingly white audience. He was breaking the unspoken rule of “don’t rock the boat.”

In terms of processing this event, the country experienced an electrifying moment when its so-called-secular, “nation-state wires” were crossed with the highly-charged, ubiquitous, Protestant ethos of freedom, limited government, and confrontation of the national morality (= whiteness). It also violated the notion of private prayer and private piety, a product of the Second Great Awakening.

Mr. Kaepernick prayed for his nation *publicly* and he refused to relegate his sorrow to the privacy of his own room. He did not uphold manifest destiny because he is not included. Instead, he called attention to police killing unarmed black men, Osteen-style in a stadium, in front of the watching world. Kaepernick shorted out our national motherboard, and the sparks did fly. The circuit board overloaded on the current of truth-telling and piety.

Veterans of foreign wars were insulted. The crowd felt robbed of their “Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet waa-ave, o’er the land of the free and home of the bra-a-a-a-ave” moment. Kaepernick was courageous and paid a heavy price; the White NFL owners *black*-balled him, and he has been verbally pilloried and restrained from working. Meeting the standard of proof in a collusion lawsuit is difficult, but Mr. Kaepernick prevailed. The fact that the owners settled speaks volumes about the strength of the allegations.²⁶⁵

Second, why has there been such backlash over an individual expressing his views in the land convinced of its national greatness? Was he not acting as a free man, calling for a limitation on police action? Was this not a moral message? The answer is yes to these questions, except here was a black man criticizing the US on a worldwide stage.

Further, one should not need to complain if one works hard enough. Economic success of the individual is attributed to that person’s ingenuity and hard work. And because America is *so* great, we shouldn’t need to criticize it when we are doing the right things and taking advantage of the opportunities. This assumes, of course, that every opportunity is equally available to everyone. Even more to the point, God forbid we should criticize this great country on a major, public stage. How dare Kaepernick set out to “de-mythify” our “greatness” even though it is shackled by pervasive racism and violence, and the vestiges of chattel slavery.

What Kaepernick did was to counter the “Yankee Doodlism” of “I-pulled-myself-up-by-my-bootstraps” as just White propaganda. The American dogma of individual self-

²⁶⁵ Dave Zirin, “Colin Kaepernick Settles His Collusion Case With the NFL,” last modified February 15, 2019, accessed March 7, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/colin-kaepernick-nfl-settlement-collusion/>.

sufficiency is ingrained through our religion of nation-state. Never mind that we pay taxes to share roads, have clean water, sanitary sewerage systems, share the cost to establish and maintain public utilities, and subsidize health care for the poor through Medicaid. We combine our money to educate most children in public schools. Yet, one of the best ways to empty a crowded room of Americans is to yell “Socialism!” instead of “Fire!”

Our secular sense of community is hard to locate sometimes. That is why our sense of Christian community is so important. We can counter the “fend for yourself” mantra of rugged individualism by being present in the world as the beloved community, the Body of Christ. Returning to the baptismal promises discussed in Chapter 4, the community of the baptized—*the Body of Christ* is not a part of the American ethos of self-determination. The congregation also makes promises to support the baptizand. Likewise, the adult receiving the sacrament of baptism promises to “strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.” In Part III, we explore what salvation means for our earthly existence what our First Amendment rights are, and some ways to follow Christ’s example through Public Theology.

Part III
We are Called to Act for Social Justice.

Chapter 7

A Short History of Migratory Patterns between US-Mexico
An Economy of Pain and Hardship and its Arresting Cost
Earthly Salvation from Mission
and Acting like WE are ONE Body in Christ

Chapter 8

Results from the “Religion and Politics Survey”
A Brief *Brief* on First Amendment Rights
American Public Theology within Pluralism

Chapter 9

Putting it all Together:
Taking the Love of Christ to the Sacramental Streets
of America with Gospel-infused Action
A True story a Persistent Latina Widow
and US as the Unjust Judge

Chapter 7
The Economy of Pain and Hardship and its Arresting Cost
Earthly Salvation from Mission
to Acting like WE ARE One Body in Christ

...salvation is not something that happens only at the end of a person's life. Salvation happens every time someone with a key uses it to open a door he could lock instead.
Barbara Brown Taylor²⁶⁶

In Part II, we processed information relevant to social justice: recognizing the profound damage caused by chattel slavery of African people and postbellum lynching, recognizing the reality of contemporary lynching, and then recognizing and listening to the implications of rising American nationalism and its pervading civil religion. We exercised our reason and experience, (the third and fourth legs of the *five-legged stool*) and examined biblical and contemporary contexts through exegesis and current events.

In Part III, we consider the role of *affectivity, intuition, social context*,²⁶⁷ that is, exercising compassion when engaging in public theology. Our economy is built on hardship for so many. A few of these stories are presented here which describe the painful experiences and motivations of people who make the life-threatening journey across the Sonora Desert.

Amazingly, many people who endure this saga of the postmodern Middle Passage often express great hope for their lives and missionaries must build on this hope.

J. W. Perkinson observes that we must be open to a “hermeneutical reflexivity,” or what sojourners learn and process about survival. By their circumstances, the margined “are

²⁶⁶ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007).

²⁶⁷ Johnson, *Dancing with God*, 28-29.

forced to develop keen powers of perception and anticipation in order to avoid increased abuse.”²⁶⁸

The next section looks to the significant mental trauma our immigration policies cause, especially for children who are often American citizens. The US are creating a whole generation who suffer from post-traumatic distress disorder (PTSD). The reality of the rising number of people experiencing PTSD is at such a high level that it is now studied in multiple academic disciplines. The sobering conclusions from a few of these studies are presented.

Racial and economic discrimination has many causes, one which can be directly tied to the US Treasury and the IRS. We must “out” the taxation double-standard lurking in the dark closet of the federal treasury. Billionaires shift money away from the US. But, undocumented people pay into the Social Security System and are unlikely to enjoy even 10% of the benefits that they have underwritten. The hypocrisy must end.

Finally, two forms of salvation are offered, the doctrine of eternal life through the salvific acts of Jesus Christ. Another form of salvation comes from the spiritual growth that naturally occurs when we stop seeking salvation for ourselves alone. We also work to relieve the suffering of others from marginalization and deprivation, and thereby free ourselves from the loss of wholeness living life as an oppressor. We are called to heal each other, to bind each other’s wounds, and to call out injustice.

It is a good and joyful thing to lift our hearts to God by helping others. In doing so, we experience the gift of salvation via spiritual growth. Our love for the beloved community therefore expands, and we become invested emotionally in the well-being of

²⁶⁸ Perkinson, *White Theology*, 3.

that community. In keeping with the discussion from Freire and his astute observation that oppressors also are in need of salvation from suffering, mission offers a means of healing. It is not only the suffering oppressed who need relief. The oppressors must be freed from the need and sense of entitlement to exploit others.

Historical Relations between the US and Mexico, Migratory Patterns, and US

Immigration Acts of 1924 and 1965. Prior to 1848, Americans and Mexicans freely moved across the expansive western territories.

The Mexican-American War ended with Mexico's capitulation. The signing of the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo ceded half of Mexico's territory to the United States. A surveyor's line was drawn across the sand in an area that, according to archeological evidence, had historically experienced fluid migration. The land transfer comprised 55 percent of Mexico's territory, including present-day Arizona, New Mexico, California, and parts of Colorado, Utah, and Nevada. One immediate consequence of the 1,833-mile border was that the United States acquired gold deposits in California, silver deposits in Nevada, oil in Texas, and all of the natural harbors (except Veracruz) necessary for commerce. Immediately after signing a peace treaty with Mexico, the U.S. government either abrogated or ignored certain provisions of the treaty, including the rights of Mexicans living in that territory to U.S. citizenship and the rights of Mexicans to retain their historic titles to the land, many of which went back for generations.²⁶⁹

Many Mexican Americans were relegated to functioning as a labor reserve.

The US controlled immigration flow by race in the early to mid-twentieth century.

In the US, the idea of the unwanted "illegal" immigrant arose in the last century.

"It dates to the 1924 Immigration Act, when the United States solidified a quota system for immigration, which was explicitly racial," according to Yale historian, Stephen Pitti. "The quotas were based on the census of 1890 to favor immigrants from Northern Europe." European immigrants were classified into three groups:

²⁶⁹ Miguel A De La Torre, *Trails of Hope and Terror: Testimonies on Immigration* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2009), 11.

Teutonic, Alpine or Celtic, and Mediterranean, and the Mediterranean peoples were deemed inferior.²⁷⁰

Picture a sink featuring both cold and hot faucets instead of a combined faucet. The 1924 legislation effectively turned the cold faucet on full blast to allow migration from northern or cold climates, people of Anglo and Germanic lineage to enter the US. The “hot faucet” of immigration flowed at a comparative trickle, as peoples from the hot climates of Mediterranean countries had much stricter limits. Slavic peoples of Eastern Europe and Asians were also expressly excluded. Asians were determined to be “unassimilable.”²⁷¹ “As the population of Spanish speakers along the border grew, so did restrictionist sentiment. ‘There was an escalation of fear-mongering language,’ Pitti said. “‘Illegals’ were stealing jobs, and they were also responsible for a drug epidemic, for bringing in marijuana, for sexual depravity.”²⁷²

The 1924 Immigration Act also relied on antiquated census data from 1890 to favor northern Europeans. Such data failed to reflect migration patterns occurring some 34 years in the future. Importantly, the decision-makers did understand the need to continue to allow labor from Latin American to come to the US, as building the Western frontier was heavily reliant on Latin@ labor, especially from Mexico. It seems nonsensical to have ignored the census data from 1910 and 1920 if striving to be as accurate as possible. Ignoring changing

²⁷⁰ Robert W. Heimbürger, *God and the Illegal Alien: United States Immigration Law and a Theology of Politics, Law and Christianity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 151.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Emily Bazelon, “The Unwelcome Return of ‘Illegals,’” *The New York Times*, December 21, 2017, sec. Magazine, accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/23/magazine/the-unwelcome-return-of-illegals.html>.

migratory patterns, the growing American population, expanding business and economy, set American immigration policy on a path that would mandate major adjustments in future, adjustments that still have yet to establish reasonable and accurate requirements.

While in the US Senate in 1959, JFK wrote a book about the need for immigration reform. He argued that antiquated quotas were irrational and anachronistic and discriminated against applicants simply based on the accident of their birth.²⁷³ His work on this subject, along with LBJ's statesmanship, spurred the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1965. While standing at the base of the Statue of Liberty, LBJ proclaimed, "It does repair a very deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice."²⁷⁴ The new act did level some playing fields.

It provided opportunities for immigration for many Eastern Hemisphere countries, while at the same time establishing a global system of immigration restrictions that would touch countries even in the Western Hemisphere. The Act dislodged national origins quotas, forbidding discrimination in the issuing of visas based on race, sex, or nationality.²⁷⁵

While the 1965 Act did allow priority admittance to "family members of citizens and legal residents, professionals, and desired workers," for the first time, it imposed US quota restrictions on immigration within the Western Hemisphere.²⁷⁶ However, the understandable reversal of the exclusionary policy of the 1924 act had a deleterious effect on Mexican migration. The legislation did not contemplate the need for Latin@ workers on which America had come to rely.

²⁷³ Heimburger, *God and the Illegal Alien*, 158. See also John F. Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants* (New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 1959).

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 158.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 159.

First Southwestern growers, and then employers in other industries, became 'addicted to Mexican workers.' And those who came to America from Mexico were understood primarily as labor or as workers, but not as persons. As testimony from the Great Western Sugar Company indicated, Mexicans provided backs for the breaking and fingers for the skinning to complement American brains.²⁷⁷

Immigrating as contract laborers and increasingly as undocumented workers, these individuals would form an enduring class of those "neither slave nor free," in the words of Aristide Zolberg. This was a direct result of reforms that sought to end discrimination based on nationality while ignoring that the United States and Mexico were neighbors.

For centuries, peoples of the US and Mexico had an established pattern and practice of migration between these contiguous countries that share a 2000-mile border. Mexican labor was allowed steady flow during the World Wars as citizens went off to Europe and the Far East to fight. By allowing Latin@s to be exempted from strict, non-white quota limits, the Immigration Act of 1924 actively ratified a continued and unhampered movement of migrant workers to fuel expansive growth of the US economy. However, due to the duration of WWII, US labor resources continued to decrease. US farmers called for Mexican workers and the FDR Administration responded by creating the *Bracero* Program (*brazos* means arms).

The United States promised fair wages, good living and working conditions, no discriminatory acts, and no military service for *braceros*, and the Mexican government would oversee their recruitment and contracting. The *Bracero* Program brought hundreds of thousands from Mexico to the United States to work over the course of two decades, but neither the federal U.S. administrators nor the employers kept to the terms of the agreement. *Braceros* were regularly paid less than citizens, their living and working conditions were poor, and employers were allowed to

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 172.

recruit *braceros* right at the border. Many more Mexicans circumvented the terms of the *Bracero* Program to immigrate illegally, and those that swam across the Rio Grande earned these migrants the name *mojados* or wetbacks.²⁷⁸

When the 1965 Act came to be,

As farmers and businesspeople came to count on temporary Mexican laborers, both legal contract workers and undocumented workers, the legal route for menial laborers came to a halt. Labor markets had adapted to this source of labor, and a structural demand for migrant labor remained after the *Bracero* Program was gone.²⁷⁹

Inadequate quota allocations of the Immigration Act of 1965 all contributed to substantial increases in Mexican undocumented migration to the US. From the 60s to the 80s, Mexican workers moved fluidly back and forth between the US and Mexico. Many were not documented. However, starting in the 80s workers came to the US and stayed. As a result,

A temporary underclass of migrant workers who would return to Mexico was replaced by a permanent underclass of migrant workers who remained in the United States. By the early twenty-first century, some eleven million of these were present without permission, and they provided unskilled labor in a variety of industries. The citizens and legal residents of the United States continue to be bound up with these women, men, and children. So far as Americans participate in the economy and so far as they depend on bodies to do the hard work they would rather not do, they are tied to those who work on the black market. Americans do not keep slaves anymore, but they have something close. Across town or next door live members of a settled underclass that is neither slave nor free.²⁸⁰

Further, a failing Mexican economy, induced by NAFTA, fueled waves of undocumented migration from Mexico, even doubling from 1990-2000.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). When NAFTA was enacted in 1994, the US Government Accounting Office (GAO) anticipated

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 171-172.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 173-174.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 178.

an increase in undocumented migrants from Mexico to the US due to Mexico's inability "to absorb all of the job seekers that are expected to enter the labor force."²⁸¹ NAFTA decimated Mexican farming and those facing starvation continued to head north to the US.

In looking next at another devastating policy decision, the US sought to make illegal immigration from Mexico much more difficult by redirecting the pathways across some of the roughest terrain on the continent, leading to countless deaths on the journey, many known only to God—*l@s indocumentad@s*.

Enter Operation Gatekeeper and the Resulting *Los Testimonios de Penuría y Dolores* (Testimonies of Hardship and Pain). Operation Gatekeeper was initiated in 1994, the same year that NAFTA was enacted. Migration flow had normally passed through the San Diego area. "Militarizing the border forced migrants away from the popular routes through San Diego and east toward the harsh and desolate areas of the 120,000 square miles of the Sonora Desert or the mountains north of Tecate."²⁸² This strategy caused the GAO to recognize a humanitarian crisis was due to Operation Gatekeeper. "Amnesty International—USA in 2000 noted that the Gatekeeper strategy 'is an abuse of the right to control the border 'in that it maximizes, rather than minimizes, the risk to life.'"²⁸³

M. De La Torre documented many of these risks by collecting the stories of people embarking on the passage North across the border.

²⁸¹ De La Torre, *Trails of Terror*, 16.

²⁸² Ibid., 14.

²⁸³ Ibid., 15.

The unforgiving and harsh terrain toward which Hispanics are presently funneled can have daytime temperatures in excess of 115 degrees Fahrenheit, higher during summer months, and frigid nighttime temperatures that pose the risk of hypothermia. The majority of deaths, almost 60 percent, are caused by exposure to the elements, specifically hyperthermia, hypothermia, and drowning. Most who perish are in the prime of their lives; around one-third are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine, and almost 20 percent are thirty to thirty-nine. Even if death does not claim the life of a border crosser, many still suffer permanent kidney damage caused by dehydration. Women are nearly three times more likely to die of exposure than men, and those women who do not succumb to the cruelty of the desert face the cruelty of sexual assault. It is now common practice for women preparing to make the crossing to use a method of birth control prior to the journey as they are more likely to be sexually assaulted.²⁸⁴

These stark facts are described in Manuel's *testimonio* where he identifies with the suffering and endurance of Job who had lost everything as he had.

My body started doing crazy things. I couldn't hear right and I had this loud, buzzing sound in my head. I felt dizzy and had terrible headaches. Blisters covered my feet, and then my arms and legs began to feel numb. My throat swelled up, and my heart began to beat real slowly, until everything felt like it was moving in slow motion. Everything turned black and white, and, at that moment, all I wanted to do was die, for I felt only death could liberate me from my suffering.²⁸⁵

With risks like these, one wonders why people would attempt to make the crossing. But, it is simple. As one man put it, "The desert is dangerous, but my need is great. The fact is, I'm already dead in Mexico. By crossing the border I have a chance to live, even if I die."²⁸⁶

One of the keys to finding solutions to make US immigration reform effective is to understand the kind of desperation described by this man. To refer to himself as already dead is beyond comprehension for many Americans, and

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 28.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

that is a major part of the problem. This emotional and spiritual disconnect allows Americans to dismiss people escaping starvation and hopelessness with depersonalizing labels such as “illegals” and “wetbacks.” It becomes unthinkable to ignore someone’s story after looking them in the eye while hearing his or her glaring troubles.

He gives several reasons why the testimonials, *los testimonios*, are vital. In giving a *testimonio*, an individual can:

- Voice his or her trials and tribulations to the faith community, thus giving the church the opportunity to be used by God to minister to the needs of the troubled soul;
- Be a witness to how God is moving within the faith community in spite of the struggles voiced;
- Create solidarity with the rest of the faith community, who become fellow sojourners through difficult times;
- Realize that despite the hardships faced, he or she is not alone, for God and the faith community are participants in the immigrant’s disappointments and victories; and
- Enter the reality of the metaphysical presence of the Divine in the everyday, a presence that can lead to deliverance and/or physical or emotional healing.²⁸⁷

Like ancient Israel, we have moved away from God and become distracted with other gods and singularly concerned with our own lives, stories and wealth. As De La Torre notes, we have lost the ability to see the eyes of Christ in the stranger and seeing the stranger with the eyes of Jesus. This is fundamental if we are to call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ.

In a heartbreakingly accurate observation, Ignacio Ellacuría refers to

[I]mmigrants as ‘the crucified peoples of today.’ Many immigrants experience an economic crucifixion as a poor man, a political crucifixion as an illegal alien, a legal crucifixion as a border crosser, a cultural

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 7.

crucifixion in coming to a new country, and, above all, a social crucifixion in piercing loneliness. On of the most difficult parts of immigration is not the physical journey but the feeling that you are no one to anybody.²⁸⁸

Often sojourners will pin their name and photo to their clothes so that their body can be identified if they die alone in the wilderness.

Chiefly because of NAFTA, Mexican farmers could no longer compete with US farmers underwritten by governmental subsidies. Their quandary is mindful of the dire situation of day laborers in the time of Jesus. Latin@ farmers found themselves unable to compete and slipped into the circuitous life of subsistence farmers barely able to feed their families, and often could not. Such is the story of Marco from Honduras.

For generations we have planted corn, along with coffee and beans. In good years we grew enough to feed everyone in the family and had some left over to either barter for goods we lacked or to sell at the local market. We always seemed to survive. But since the mid-1990s, things have become more difficult . . . it became cheaper to buy corn and beans grown in the United States rather than grow it ourselves. Poverty was become more constant for my family. . . Because of the low prices, we were no longer able to grow enough to produce extra to sell at the market, causing our suffering to increase.²⁸⁹

In addition to their austere reality caused by artificially low prices of US crops, Marco's family then had to contend with the aftermath of a hurricane which decimated their farm. As Marco describes, the suffering the family faced made it worth it to attempt to get "up North."

It has been nine months since I left my country, and I still have not achieved my dream of getting to the other side. When I get to the other side, I plan to work hard to make some money so I can eventually come back and expand our land, rebuild the farm. . . Three times I have made it across the border, and three times they caught me and sent me back. The first time I crossed over, I arrived in the morning in the United States, and

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 29.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 45.

by the afternoon they caught me and sent me back. The last time when I was there, we were caught in Tucson and our *coyote* just disappeared. He abandoned us. Now, I am going to have to pay a *coyote* \$2,500 just to get me across to the other side. Because I am poor and I come from poverty, I will have to pay off the debt to the *coyote* by working in the north.²⁹⁰

Once here, so many who made the border crossing for the same reasons as Marco face the fear and humiliation of arrest and deportation even after having lived and worked in the US for years.

This fear is often referred to as living in *las sombras*, living in the shadows. The expression describes a shaded existence for people who “don’t quite belong.” This reality hampers their ability to get a driver’s license, or take a sick child to the doctor, go to a Latin@ market because ICE officers loiter there. Parents are hauled off to detention by ICE agents *in front of their American-born children*.

Elise Martins, a high school teacher of history and government, describes a raid.

Yesterday (May 12, 2008), our town was raided by four hundred FBI agents, ICE agents, state troopers, and a variety of other agencies. Helicopters flew overhead for hours, all the roads coming into and going out of Postville, Iowa, were blocked, media crews and cameras were *everywhere*, and there was mass chaos. The federal government had decided to make Postville an example for the rest of the nation to see our so-called Homeland security at work.²⁹¹

That same afternoon, Martins remembers that they had 150 children without parents. Teachers and staff had to stay at school until the parents or an adult relative could be located to pick the children up. Many children had both parents

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 46.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 95.

placed in detention at the “National Cattle Congress Fairgrounds,” or in Waterloo, Iowa. She said,

I guess I don’t really care how any of you feel about immigration—we all have our opinions. But I will say that as a human being and a parent, I found it disturbing to see little elementary school kids crying for their parents and asking me to take them home, and all I could say was, ‘I’m sorry,’ or ‘we’re looking for them’ . . . I just wanted to go home and hug my own kids.²⁹²

Martins also lamented that school officials received no information from ICE about what families were affected in the raid. They were left to piece it all together in the aftermath. She also noted the potential economic disaster that the entire community faced when the next day the school was half empty. People had fled a community that had been flourishing “on the backs of our immigrant workers.”²⁹³

In concluding, Martins proclaimed,

What frustrates me most is that this raid accomplished nothing positive. It has destroyed families, it will more than likely close some area businesses, some of us will lose our jobs, and the real estate in the area will become worthless overnight—all of this in an already struggling economy.²⁹⁴

Interestingly, she noted her history students drew a direct correlation between what they witnessed the day before, and the Holocaust²⁹⁵—out of the mouths of infants and babes.

Hope and Strength for the Journey. Karen Cotta, an Iliff Master of Divinity student, traveled with De La Torre and other students to help those on the perilous journey northwards through the Sonoran Desert. It was late August.

²⁹² Ibid., 96.

²⁹³ Ibid., 96-97.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 97-98.

Cotta notes that her group encountered snakes and their hatchlings, scorpions, insect bites, and scrapes along the way. They were loaded with provisions for the sojourners fortified with peanut butter, Vienna sausages, fruit cups, crackers, Gatorade, and water to share with the migrants. Sometimes they dropped the provisions off along the trail and other times they met up with people. They offered first aid along with fresh socks as the pilgrims deal with blisters, trench foot as well as sprained ankles. Other groups of Good Samaritans also do food drops and provide basic medical attention.

One such group is called “No More Deaths.”²⁹⁶ Dan Millis, a former Spanish language teacher, quit his job to volunteer full time for the organization. Once on patrol, he found a dead girl, Josseline Hernández, 14-years-old. She had died about a week prior to being found.

In addition to blatant racist and/or inadequate immigration legislation, for a century, American companies went to Mexico, Central and Latin America to build a road infrastructure in order to

[E]xtract, by brute force if necessary, their natural resources and use of cheap labor. Some of the inhabitants of these countries, deprived of their livelihood, followed the same roads as the countries’ resources . . . to escape the violence and terrorism left behind. The social or moral questions we should be asking about the undocumented is not *why* they come, but what responsibilities and obligations exist for the United States in causing the present immigration dilemma.”²⁹⁷

So many factors should be urging Americans to look beyond the flow of undocumented people. We must rend our hearts and confess to our nation’s substantial causative policies that have created the situation in which we now find

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 21-26.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

ourselves. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this is to hear real-life stories of the people who suffer from American foreign and domestic policy.

Those who have successfully made the journey have not forgotten those who travel now. For example, farmers from central California leave water jugs bearing images of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The farmers write down prayers on tags or postcards about how Our Lady delivers the poor. Their messages also include blessings and other words of encouragement. Some travelers affix these tags to their clothing as a talisman or a kind of relic for safe passage. On a route, a shrine to Our Lady stands, and trekkers drop pesos into a jug as if tithing at mass. They also may leave articles of faith like statuettes, rosaries, and candles.²⁹⁸

Some pilgrims talked of their faith in God as the only thing getting them safely across. Postcards along the trail depict saints like Toribio Romo González,

[A] priest martyred by Mexican federal troops during the Cristero Wars and canonized in 2000 by Pope John Paul II. Since canonization, immigrants crossing the Sonoran Desert to get to the United States have claimed that San Toribio has appeared to them, guiding their journey north. As a result, the Shrine of St. Toribio, in Santi Ana de Guadalupe, draws many pilgrims from throughout Mexico who are preparing to make the hazardous crossing into the United States and are in need of spiritual protection. He has quickly become the patron saint of immigrants.²⁹⁹

Such postcards of hope, care, and encouragement certainly contrast the sport-making of American lynching postcards, exchanged like Christmas cards, from postbellum to 1908.

San Toribio's grotto, and those akin to his, serve as a reminder that justice, decency, and kindness can still be offered and shared even by those suffering

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 101-102.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 103.

inestimable deprivation during their own harrowing journeys. With such examples of love and sacrifice, as Christians, we must emulate this amazing sense of community through our faith traditions. Such tenderness and exhortation operate salvifically, both for those struggling, and for those who care for them on the journey. These are wondrous examples of earthly salvation.

Salvation on Earth as in Heaven. We all can experience earthly salvation in hearing *los testimonios*. The storytellers are listened to, and the listeners offer the ministry of presence. This provides the opportunity to process what is happening and how it can be addressed for positive change. We clarify our goals for mission as progressive public theologians with our sisters and brothers caught in this plight. Together we call for the Body of Christ to act like we are one body with Christ as the head. Shoulder to shoulder, we speak publicly about injustice. It is not public speech *on behalf of* the marginalized, *but in support of them*, backing them, where “the underside of history,”³⁰⁰ forges the trail of liberation.

This may include demonstrating outrage, weeping, advocating for justice, along with consoling those who experience injustice. It could be testifying before a legislative fact-finding committee. The work must be in addition to donating necessities and food to satisfy immediate basic needs. Political theology must correct systemic crises through mission that is designed to address the root or source of the social injustice. As to immigration reform, inevitably we must address racism as the root cause—we must find salvific solutions for the oppressed and the oppressors alike. This is hard work and

³⁰⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, “Liberation, Theology, and Proclamation,” in *The Mystical and Political Dimension of the Christian Faith*, ed. Claude Geffré and Gustavo Gutiérrez, Concilium new ser., v. 6, nos. 10 (96), Theology of liberation (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), 61–64. See also Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1988).

sometimes dangerous. It takes courage to stand up for one's beliefs especially when they are not popular. It takes even more courage to stand with those who are deemed as socially dispensable.

Political theology stirs up controversy by challenging others to consider their own erroneous embedded theologies, and to make shifts in longtime cherished paradigms. Often these paradigms have been passed along by multiple generations, that is social diseases like racism, sexism, classism that have known such longevity.³⁰¹ Nevertheless, just because it is difficult to challenge such engrained conventions of hate and discrimination, there is no sufficient excuse to avoid doing it. It is the cost of discipleship in Christ Jesus. Doing public/political theology imparts a duty for us to be humble and clear about what our beliefs are and why, and how to make ourselves available to engage in dialogue after the fact. We must engage in the pursuit of salvation while we live on earth.

The theme of salvation runs through both testaments of the Bible. Much of the saving that occurs in the OT is earthly. God rescues the Israelites repeatedly, and people are healed, and even raised from the dead to continue a life on earth. Jesus is often referred to as Savior. The term "salvation" must be distinguished from "redemption." They are often used interchangeably, but they are different. Redemption is to buy back, or to redeem. Salvation is about rescue from something or someone. Systematic theologian, D. L. Migliore, offers a helpful glossary definition of salvation as having polyvalent applications from the past, in the present, and for the future:

³⁰¹ Stone and Duke, *Thinking Theologically*, see especially Chapter 1, *Faith, Reflection, and Understanding*, 13-27. The authors provide an engaging discussion session at the end of each chapter. This section invites readers to consider deeply from whence their beliefs originated; it is highly recommended for group discussion.

It is significant that the New Testament speaks of salvation in past, present, and future tenses: we “have been saved” (Eph. 2:8); we “are being saved” (1 Cor. 15:2); and we “shall be saved” (Rom. 5:10). Paul Tillich rightly notes that “salvation has as many connotations as there are negativities from which salvation is needed.” In the early centuries of the church, death and error are the perils from which deliverance is sought, and salvation is the gift of knowledge of God and immortality. In classical Protestantism, salvation is forgiveness of sins and rescue from the condemnation of the law. In pietism and revivalism, salvation is the conquest of specific sins and progress toward moral perfection. In the modern period, the ultimate threat, according to Tillich, is meaninglessness and nihilism, and salvation is the gift of meaning, purpose, and wholeness of life.”³⁰²

Migliore does list the term “redemption.” And, his definition does not merge salvation with redemption. P. Tillich suggests the idea of salvation leans toward a profound sense of hopelessness in the twenty-first century world, especially in the Western World. As Tillich noted in the quote above, Americans suffer from a profound sense of meaninglessness. People are parched for spirituality and spiritual expression and seem to lack understanding of our relationship with the Divine.

When our relationship with the Divine is impeded, our earthly relationships are likewise impeded. This speaks directly to humanity’s deep need for meaning-making, particularly in its respective contexts, in order to feel fulfilled in life, and to experience salvation on earth. The position here is that the grace received in salvation has a crucial earthly component that we contribute our time, talent, and tithe as thanksgiving for that salvation. We are called to love one another in community as Jesus did.

³⁰² Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, Third Ed., 3 edition. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2014), 423.

The word “salvation” has also become heavily freighted with the Evangelical dogma of “being born again,” based on Jesus’s conversation with Jewish elder, Nicodemus (Jn 3).³⁰³ For Evangelicals, one must be born again by proclaiming Jesus as one’s personal savior to achieve salvation and, once one is saved, one remains saved. Works are irrelevant to eternal salvation.

Yet salvation involves both the repose of the eternal soul as well as our much-needed work in society to usher in the reign of God. Below is a broadcast form of Evangelical public theology on a billboard in Texas. It is a Christian proclamation advertising the need for salvation. Perhaps it is offered as a faith-based opportunity for social change in response to the nihilism to which Tillich



and Migliore refer. Motivation aside, it is disconcerting; it fails to contribute to social transformation for four reasons:

- 1) It is exclusionary to Christian conversion in an increasingly pluralistic country;
- 2) It is unclear who is in need of healing, or is it the actual real property that needs saving?
- 3) It is unclear as to who makes this designation of who is to be healed; and,

³⁰³ Is “salvation” the proper term for our salvific experiences on earth? The suggestion here is to provide room for people to arrive at their own conclusions about the salvific nature (meaning-making) of their lives. Many people just shut down with words like “salvation” because it is so closely associated with judgmental and exclusive forms of Christianity.

4) It is silent as to how the saving and healing occur.

The American flag has been overlayed onto the letters, “USA.” Then the letters have been joined with “Jes” so that the flag draped “US” letters become part of the spelling of “Jesus.” His name is then crammed next to “Saves,” with a flag-bearing “S.”

This is an overt commingling of Evangelicalism and the American nation-state. The non-secular and secular spheres have been transmogrified into an ideological monster, and frankly it smacks of an attempt to establish this brand of Christianity as supreme in the land. This message claims that Jesus “belongs” to Americans, as if we have “copyrighted” him for ourselves or he has been subsumed in the civil religion. Imagine the sign saying:

1) “JesUSAves[©]” or 2) “JesUS[©]Aves” or 3) “JesUSA[©]ves”

The first example copyrights the whole phrase that Jesus saves or possibly saves the USA. The second phrase works to “copyright” Jesus. The third one seems to “copyright” Jesus “as property of the USA.” Perhaps the logic is: Jesus is legendary, and, we, the American people are legendary, so, legendary Jesus belongs to the legendary US. This is plausible because we have a history, legal precedent even, of using Jesus to appropriate people for our own designs.

The message is doubly arrogant because no entity takes responsibility for the content. It is assumed as dispositive theology for all. And usually when this assumption is rejected, that resulting social climate devolves into an excuse to relegate opponents to an inferior status; sometimes they become targets of violence.

The billboard is silent about ways to care for others. Viewers are expected to know where to go for salvation and how to get it. Below are a few questions to spur discussion:

- 1) Who caused the injuries from which are we to be healed? Islam? Catholicism? (certainly not Evangelical Protestants who likely put up the sign) Judaism? Anglicanism? Total depravity? Free will?
- 2) How will this healing take place?
- 3) Who will do the healing? Jesus only? What about the Great I am? Allah? The Holy Spirit? Brahma? Etc. I must include an Interfaith challenge here because my mission field is near the largest population of Arabs/Muslims in the world outside of the Middle East. Our daily existence in SE Michigan includes interaction with the Abrahamic faiths.
- 4) Who will be healed? “Heathens” and non-believers, Muslims, Catholics, Jews, and PCUSA-Presbyterians and denominations that ordain women and LGBTQ people?
- 5) What will the healing look like? Reparations to First Nation Peoples? Free Communities? Legally quarantining Muslims per the US Constitution (per *Korematsu v. U. S.*)? Limiting the number of new Mosques, Hindu Temples, Jain Temples, Sikh Gurdwaras?
- 6) What does “land” mean? Is it the US/territories only? (The people of Puerto Rico may wish to secede.) Does “land” include the whole world? Just the Western Hemisphere? Just the Northern Hemisphere? Just Texas?
- 7) What are the implications for groups who are excluded from Christianity if they *are not healed*, and if they do not convert to Christianity? Does healing also mean converting to Christianity? *Does healing mean ending racism in the USA through Jesus?*

We can assume that this sign was sponsored by a White person or group. This assumption is probably safe because it is difficult to imagine that an African American person or group would associate with this sign at all. There is an arrogance in its anonymity. It is as if the message is also saying, “The provenance

of this message is unnecessary because the is the absolute truth, and the audience is unworthy to question it.

The sign serves as evidence that many Whites in the US believe that they are a super-special Christian nation-state, heirs of whatever-we-want-manifest-destiny and *armed* with Anglo-Saxon superiority and with the theopolitical backing of Jesus Christ himself. It is a well-established attitude of exclusionary, theological supremacy driving this unhealthy reality—they perceive themselves as the anointed arbiters of the Bible and insinuate that they determine who are saved and who are not. It fails to address Jesus’s call for us to love God and one another. It is only concerned about the individual’s formulaic, heavenly salvation. C. H. Long, historian of religions, has identified this as a *critical culture construct*.³⁰⁴ Perkinson, in citing Long, says, “The central claim of that confrontation focuses on soteriology, arguing *that whiteness has functioned in modernity as a surrogate form of ‘salvation,’ a mythic presumption of wholeness.*”³⁰⁵ (Italics mine)

Our earthly existence has a heavenly component in the form of meaning-making. With right praxis and relationship with God, our neighbors, and creatures of the earth, we can experience heaven on earth. It has a salvific quality and can make us feel that “all is right with the world.” It restores us and provides strength for the journey. It reminds us of God’s love for us and provides that foretaste of the heavenly banquet. We live in the tension between heaven and earth, the here and not quite there yet. We must find ways to

³⁰⁴ Charles H. Long, *Significations Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora Colorado: The Davies Group, 1999), 8.

³⁰⁵ Perkinson, *White Theology*, 3.

balance that breach between heavenly joy and our earthly experience . . . “weeping may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning”³⁰⁶ (Ps. 30:5).

New Research and Results: Ramifications of Parental Detention and Deportation as Mental Health Decline in *their/our* Children. The current immigration crisis, especially at the southwest border between the US and Mexican, is causing incalculable harm to children and their parents, chiefly through separation of families. Of the 69.9 million children in the US at the time of the study, 17.45 million children have immigrant parents, and 4.5 million children have a foreign-born parent.³⁰⁷ The researchers studied “Adverse childhood experiences and immigration status” as “important social determinants of mental disorders.”

In children, potentially traumatic events (PTEs), may lead to the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) . . . PTSD has debilitating effects on child development and functioning and is a costly public health issue. This study examines the intersection of parental immigration status and children’s mental health. Specifically, we examined U.S.-born Latino children’s mental health, including PTSD and psychological distress, following parental detention or deportation.³⁰⁸

Notably, the trauma that separation causes is especially harmful for children who witness the involvement of legal authorities like incarceration or deportation. An established fact is that children with an incarcerated parent exhibit PTEs due to a “unique combination of

³⁰⁶ I am blessed with a comfortable life, engaging work, a loving spouse of 38 years, a nice home, and supportive, loving family. I lose sight of heaven when I cocoon myself at home and cut myself off from the suffering of others, and by operation, from failing to take up the calls to respond by following the Way of Christ.

³⁰⁷ Lisseth Rojas-Flores et al., “Trauma and Psychological Distress in Latino Citizen Children Following Parental Detention and Deportation,” *Psychological Trauma : Theory, Research, Practice and Policy* 9, no. 3 (May 1, 2017): 352.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

trauma, ambiguity, lack of social support, shame, and stigma.”³⁰⁹ Not surprisingly, the study verified what seems to be an obvious outcome of separating children from parents.

Higher levels of parent-reported PTSD symptoms in children of detained and deported parents imply that forced parental separation resulting from immigration enforcement is particularly detrimental to children’s mental health . . . As such, our findings suggest that the current heightened enforcement of immigration laws poses a serious public health challenge to U.S.-born children of undocumented parents. Not only is PTSD recognized as a high priority public health issue, but child PTEs, such as losing a parent, pose serious risks for lifelong mental and medical illnesses.³¹⁰

The authors found that witnessing a parental detainment “may be particularly detrimental.” Detroit ICE agents are known to arrest parents when they pick up their children after school. The degree of trauma inflicted by such conduct is difficult to assess. The researchers also are quite clear about stopping these practices. “A call for action to prevent forced parental separation and constant threat of potential loss of a parent due to immigration enforcement is gravely needed.”³¹¹ Such action as mission will be discussed in chapter nine.

Access to Social Services for Undocumented Residents. Undocumented immigrants arriving in the US after August 1996, face substantial challenges from legal, economic, and social perspectives, per the Personal Responsibility and Work opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) (Public Law 104-193). PRWORA blocks welfare benefits for five years. Two more federal laws enacted in 1996 “radically changed many grounds for exclusion and deportation, and, in

³⁰⁹ Ibid. Participants in the study were U.S.-born children ages 6-12 and without major medical, neurological or mental health disorders. Two comparison groups included 1) families with an immigrant parent who had no contact with ICE; and 2) children of parents with legal permanent residence (LPRs).

³¹⁰ Ibid., 359.

³¹¹ Ibid.

recent years, have led to aggressive deportation practices. Millions of immigrants—both undocumented immigrants and permanent legal residents—are prevented from remaining in the United States.”³¹² The researchers note that PRWORA prevents them from accessing services for their citizen children, and most undocumented parents

[D]o not and will not legalize their status (citizenship or permanent residency) unless current immigration laws change. Not only are they ineligible to receive most public benefits, but researchers have indicated that they also may be way of asking for assistance for their eligible citizen children because of the fears of deportation.³¹³

The study noted that undocumented heads of families utilized social services for their children at a similar rate with documented heads of families. What seems to differ is what supplements are used. Undocumented heads of household use fewer Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits but use Women Infants and Children (WIC) benefits more often. Food stamp usage is at par between the two groups.³¹⁴

Undocumented immigrants are not eligible for federal public benefits such as TANF, Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI), general social security benefits, Medicare and Medicaid. Ironically, undocumented immigrants pay taxes to the social security system for benefits largely unavailable to them (see discussion below).³¹⁵

³¹² Qingwen Xu and Kalina Brabeck, “Service Utilization for Latino Children in Mixed-Status Families,” *Social Work Research* 36, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): 210–211. The additional acts are the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (Public Law 105-208), and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-208).

³¹³ Ibid. TANF provides temporary financial assistance for pregnant women and families with at least one dependent child.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 217.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

The researchers noted something important about Latin@ communities—their resiliency in the face of hardship and a society that prefers they were invisible. Undocumented heads of household find services that are “safe” through their social networks and the Latin@ community. They rely on others who came before them to “vet” friendly, helpful organizations. Their entry point to a particular service likely comes from friends, neighbors, family, community groups, churches, and coworkers. People figure out the system through others that they trust.

The authors note, “the behavior of undocumented Latino parents—navigating legal and social systems and using services regardless of their vulnerability to legal actions, such as deportation—implies a survivor capacity.”³¹⁶

Though undocumented, many have lived and worked in the US for a long time, and this is home. Parents use the services they deem safe enough to see that their children thrive. They gave up a lot to get to the US and start a new life. As stressors increase, they adapt.

An Economic Reality. Undocumented workers pay taxes to the Social Security System. Yet, Mike Huckabee, the former governor of Arkansas, “[C]laimed that the solvency of Social Security and Medicare was under threat from “illegals, prostitutes, pimps, drug dealers, and all the people that are freeloading off the system now.”³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Ibid., 218.

³¹⁷ Bazelon, “The Unwelcome Return of ‘Illegals.’” Bazelon writes, the slight [illegal immigrants] has become a primary-season refrain, brandished like a conservative calling card. “We need to keep illegals out,” Donald Trump said at the Republican presidential debate earlier this month after being reminded of his earlier claims that Mexico is sending rapists and other criminals across the border.

However, De La Torre notes that “so-called ‘illegals’ are contributing to the solvency of Social Security. More than 3.1 million undocumented workers, using fake or expired social security numbers, contribute \$13 billion annually into the system while only receiving \$1 billion in return benefits.”³¹⁸ Looking at a span of time reveals the grand scope of undocumented immigrant contributions.

According to Stephen Goss, chief actuary of the Social Security System, the undocumented paid over \$100 billion into the system between 2005 and 2014. Goss goes on to say, ‘You could say legitimately that had we not received the contributions that we have had in the past from undocumented immigrants . . . that would of course diminish our ability to be paying benefits for as long as we now can.’³¹⁹

De La Torre adds “[A]ccording to a fifty-state analysis by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, 8.1 of the 11.4 million undocumented immigrants contributed more than \$11.8 billion in state and local taxes in 2012.”³²⁰ He rightly wonders if Mike Huckabee is “simply ignorant of how Social Security and Medicare are kept afloat thanks to the undocumented contributions, or, if he is disingenuously lying to create fear and garner votes.”³²¹ The American economy has greatly benefited for centuries from the exploitation of slaves and indentured servants, chiefly from communities of color.

Hard-working undocumented immigrants will likely never see a return on their investment. Therefore, America, via the Congress, and its citizenry who elects it, is engaged in nationwide racketeering³²² by accepting Social Security contributions from

³¹⁸ Miguel A. De La Torre, *The U.S. Immigration Crisis: Toward an Ethics of Place*, Cascade Companions (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2016), 63.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Ibid. De La Torre cites, *Undocumented Immigrant State and Local Tax Contributions. Institute on Taxation & Economics Policy*. April 2015.

³²¹ Ibid., 63-64.

³²² “Racketeering.”

Traditionally, obtaining or extorting money illegally or carrying on illegal business activities,

undocumented workers, and then deeming them ineligible to receive the benefits for which they have paid. Adding insult to injury, these hard-working contributors to the GNP, service, and agricultural industries are then punished through arrest, detention, and deportation. This is a decades-long practice by the US Government, the oversight entity for the Social Security Administration.³²³

A Juxtaposition of those Cheated by Tax and the Tax Cheats. In November of 2018, NPR's Terry Gross did a story on the Panama Papers and the Paradise Papers.³²⁴ Jake Bernstein, author of the new book, *Secrecy World*, discussed his findings as part of an international panel of investigative journalists who revealed this secret world in the *Panama Papers* several years ago. He also talked about the *Paradise Papers*, a new revelation of how not only the rich, but also high-ranking government officials around the world, park their money and assets to avoid taxation. The richest in the country do not want to pay taxes. They already avoid paying substantial taxes by sheltering money off-shore. They "made their money the hard way," the American way, sanctioned by God's prosperity gospel. Because they are so wonderful and successful, they feel entitled to hide their money in a secret world. Players in this group include

usually by Organized Crime--

pattern of illegal activity carried out as part of an enterprise that is owned or controlled by those who are engaged in the illegal activity. The latter definition derives from the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO), a set of laws (18 U.S.C.A. § 1961 et seq. [1970]) specifically designed to punish racketeering by business enterprises."

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ "Journalist Explains How Panama Papers Opened Up The World's Illicit Money Networks," November 20, 2017, accessed February 19, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2017/11/20/565319852/journalist-explains-how-panama-papers-opened-up-the-worlds-illicit-money-network>. Terry Gross interviewed Jake Bernstein on NPR's *Fresh Air* about his new book on how the wealthy hide money from taxation. Jake Bernstein, *Secrecy World: Inside the Panama Papers Investigation of Illicit Money Networks and the Global Elite*, First edition. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2017).

Trump and some cabinet members. Bernstein stated that Vladimir Putin's "fingerprints are also everywhere." Here is an excerpt from the interview:

Bernstein: You know, as Leona Helmsley infamously said, "We don't pay taxes, only the little people pay taxes." This global elite lives by a different set of rules than the rest of us. You know, and they can do so because of the secrecy world. So, most people are largely oblivious to it, and that's by design.

You know, the United States loses something like \$70 billion a year due to the shifting of corporate taxes to tax havens. And that's money that could go to schools that could go to infrastructure. It could go to police. It could go to health care. But it's not. Instead, it's disappearing in the Caymans or the Bahamas or Bermuda or places like that.

The US economy relies on this bifurcation of value vs. valueless. It keeps wages low so the valued can afford more mammon. It also keeps valueless in the fields and factories,³²⁵ farms and jails, and flop houses. If you have enough money, you can buy yourself out of a lot of the misery this system causes in the form of crime, lack of safety and opportunity. One can live in the suburbs and send one's children to virtually all white schools. G. H. Albrecht offers a powerful summation of this reality for oppressors.

[A]nd in so doing we have lost the connections, the intimacies that yield commitments, the sense of goods-in-common that sustain community and unite self-and-other-interests . . . In gaining individual freedom and material wealth, we have lost the social bonds that sustain a secure and meaningful life. We who are part of the dominant, and who may participate as decision makers in institutions with social power, have to learn that we have lost our social grounding and that *we* need to reconnect with others in community building ways. This is the challenge of our own 'fragmentation'³²⁶

³²⁵ "Poultry Workers, Denied Bathroom Breaks, Wear Diapers: Oxfam Report," *NBC News*, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/poultry-workers-denied-bathroom-breaks-wear-diapers-oxfam-report-n572806>. Poultry workers are routinely denied basic needs such as bathroom breaks to the point of being forced to wear diapers while on the line, a [new report](#) claims.

The processing plant workers are mocked or ignored by supervisors when they ask to go to the bathroom, says Oxfam America, the U.S. arm of the global organization dedicated to solving poverty and social injustice.

³²⁶ Albrecht, *Character of our Communities*, 140-141. See also Larry Rasmussen, *Moral Fragments and Moral Community: A Proposal for Church in Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 37.

Albrecht's reference to our spiritual fragmentation echoes Freire's opinion that consumerism and selfishness undo our humanity as we contribute to the collective oppression through unbridled acquisition.

Inherent in the practice of public theology is to study and internalize the role of our relationship with the Holy Spirit as the inspiration, both working and spiritual, with the Holy Spirit. Marion Grau has said that we are called to be Holy Fools for Christ.³²⁷ In doing public theology, we most need the disruptive, unpredictable power of the Holy Spirit, that ability to "turn the world upside down" as the Lukan evangelist so aptly puts it (Acts 17:6). And for most of us, we continually ask, "How?" The answer(s) to that question constitute the great mystery of our working life, both figuring it out and then actually doing it.

The Lukan evangelist provides us with a powerful story where Jesus responds to a woman's utter despair but saying very little, and by acting immediately to offer some earthly salvation. There is no argument with Jewish leaders or questioning lawyers. It is merely about compassionate action in the moment.

Jesus Raises the Widow of Nain's Son from Death

Jesus leaves Capernaum after performing a distance healing for the gentile Centurion's servant because the Centurion's proclamation of great faith impresses Jesus. Upon entering the city of Nain's gate, Jesus next encounters the following scene. He sees a widow and the funeral procession of her son being carried out of

³²⁷Marion Grau, *Of Divine Economy: Refinancing Redemption* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 19–22. A priest friend offered a twist this Pauline phrase by saying that we are called to be "Holy Tools for Christ," and sometimes it does feel that way, and not in a good way. This is hard work.

town, as the dead were not buried within city walls, as burial usually occurred the same day as the death; he was feeling profound loss in those intense moments.

He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, rise!' The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Fear seized all of them; and they glorified God, saying, 'A great prophet has risen among us!' and 'God has looked favorably on his people!' This word about him spread throughout Judea and all the surrounding country. (Lk. 7:12b-17) (Italics mine.)

As the pall bearers pass with the bier on its way to the final resting place, Jesus is moved with empathy. Knowing she is a widow burying her only son, Jesus need not be told anything further; Jesus “recognizes” her, “processes” what her future will be like. He fully comprehends her situation in that instant.

Stirred by her predicament, Jesus “acts” immediately by healing her son. The story gives a sense of spontaneity as Jesus quickly grasps the situation and goes directly to her with calming words that there was no need to weep. The Greek verb, *klaiō*,³²⁸ used here means to cry or to weep aloud, or sob violently, harkening back to God's proclamation at the burning bush that God has heard the cry of the Israelites and will free them through Moses.

Jesus makes no announcement about his intentions but rather goes to the bier and simply commands the son back to life. Society prohibited women from speaking in public. Yet, Jesus heard her silenced words anyway; he listened to her fear that her survival was at stake. He spared her the humiliation of jeopardizing

³²⁸ Danker and Krug, *Lexicon*, 201.

herself by violating the rules of suppression. Jesus gave her son back to her and restored them both to *hesed*, to caring relationship.

In adherence to Torah, Jesus stepped into the shoes of her would-be protective male relatives and advocated for her in the public square when she could not. Jesus utilized his social location so that he could help her reveal her silenced fears and receive compassion.

Jesus's thorough understanding of her context led him to serve and protect her according to God's call. Jesus's extensive genealogy gives him standing to speak with authority. While none of us are Moses or Jesus, we all have calls that vary in time, place, and manner. If we call ourselves Jesus's disciples, we therefore are all called to read situations contextually and theologically, to listen for need, and then act accordingly, and sometimes immediately, just as Jesus modeled so many times.

The Colonization of Christian Ministry. Since the Edict of Milan in 313 when Constantine I and Licinius agreed to allow Christian worship and the return of confiscated property, Christianity has worked its way up the imperial ladder. Some highlights include the creation of the Holy Roman Empire, the Anglican Reformation and birth of the Church of England, and the American experiment in so-called Separation of Church and State.

By the time the American Independence was declared in 1776, the First Great Awakening had already had a colonizing effect on Christianity. American Christianity remains "colonized," especially mainline and progressive forms of it. Evangelical Christianity has served as the source of American civil religion and colludes with occupants in the corridors of national power.

Territories administered as subordinate political units with larger governmental entities, such as empires. A colony may have some autonomy, but in many aspects it is subjugated to the empire or other ruling entity. In the ancient world, empires expanded by conquering nations and cities and turning them into colonies, with the purpose of *extracting labor and wealth from them to fund the imperial bureaucracy*.³²⁹ (Emphasis added)

Starting with a definition of “colony,” the word “empire(s)” is used three times in two lines, and its cognate “imperial bureaucracy,” appears in summation, probably to mix up the vocabulary a bit.

Progressive Christians have allowed its own colonization by Evangelical Christianity. As Progressive Christians, we: 1) are constantly on the defensive; 2) fail to frame our issues independent of the Religious Right’s rhetoric; 3) do not speak out on social justice issues as organized coalitions; 4) are afraid to or do not want to initiate public debate outside of the walls of the parish (mostly out of habit); and 5) we avoid confrontation with the Right.

The Religious Right speaks with strident authority and gives the appearance that it has the “voice of orthodoxy.” It is masterful at working the media to convey it is more “correct” than we are. They are formidable in their rectitude, and we allow ourselves to stay on the defensive, and even worse, to be intimidated.

Instead of engaging in constant arguments, what we as progressive, inclusive Christians, need to frame or reframe the political rhetoric. Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” How do we engage public policy to do that for a more stable community? That is morality. By advocating for more compassionate social support, we are required us to reject the American civil religion of Anglo Saxon exceptionalism and an exclusionary

³²⁹ Jon L. Berquist, “Colony,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Astrid B. Beck, and Allen C. Myers (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 269.

“moral code.” We know Jesus has been hijacked, but we don’t quite know how to proceed after our silence at Christ’s misappropriation. We have allowed the breadth of orthodoxy to be usurped and locked down by fundamentalism.³³⁰

The expression, “there is safety in numbers,” has great relevance to progressive mission. Coalition-building and community organizing efforts are essential to engage in public debate and to effectuate positive change. This is time-consuming difficult work, but many models are available to follow or customize, including the Industrial Area Foundations (IAF) method, and faith-based organizations like the Gamaliel Network. In describing its mission, Gamaliel states,

Our mission is to empower ordinary people to effectively participate in the political, environmental, social and economic decisions affecting their lives. Gamaliel’s diverse members apply their faith and values to the pursuit of equal opportunity for all, shared abundance, and stronger, more prosperous communities.³³¹

Postcolonial theory provides an opportunity to assess how progressive Christianity can wrest itself from fundamentalist and civil religionist colonizers. Kwok Pui-Lan defines postcolonial theory as offering, “[A]n invaluable vantage point on theology, because it interrogates how religious and cultural productions are enmeshed in economic and political domination of colonialism and empire-building.”³³² Although it

³³⁰ Kenneth Leech, *Subversive Orthodoxy: Traditional Faith and Radical Commitment* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), 38.

³³¹ “Gamaliel Network,” accessed April 24, 2019, <https://gamaliel.org/>. “With 44 affiliates and 7 state offices in 17 states, Gamaliel works to build strong metropolitan and statewide organizations. National staff provides consulting, training and support to leaders and staff in local organizations. A survey of organizers and lead staff across the network at year’s end found that Gamaliel’s national staff is majority women: People of color are about 40 percent of organizers, lead organizers, and directors across the network (56% of organizers across the network are women; 26% are women of color).” Gamaliel focuses on leadership training, organizing around policy, immigration reform and job training. See also Salvatierra and Heltzel, *Faith-Rooted Organizing*.

³³² Don H. Compier, Pui-lan Kwok, and Joerg Rieger, eds., “Christian Theology and Empires,” in *Empire and the Christian Tradition: New Readings of Classical Theologians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 17.

seems the Body of Christ has been “hog-tied,” prayerful, strategic, and compassionate mission can unbind us and set us free.

We must understand, teach, think and act to dismantle the enmeshment of colonial politics and economics to get at the roots of injustice through our voices, actions, and active participation in the political process to craft more just legislation. It is a painstakingly slow process at times. It took a long time to get to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but we got there.

Chapter 8

Results from the “Religion and Politics Survey” A Brief *Brief* on First Amendment Case Protections

*But let justice roll down like mighty waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*
Amos 5:24

In Chapter 8, we wrestle with the American mystique of the separation of church and state in order to prove that active public theology is a fundamental civil right. The beginning hypothesis proposed that Christians do not participate in public theology because they have wrongly believed such conduct violated the “separation of church and state.” The founders certainly designed the anti-establishment clause to prohibit the creation of a superior religion. The religious strife in England strongly motivated this effort.

However, while there is a conceptual separation of church and state to prohibit the establishment a supreme faith, *each individual is free to exercise his/her faith based on personal needs, wishes, and beliefs*. For many faithful people, their faith is at the core of their essence. It cannot be teased out and separated from the rest of one’s existence. Faith often serves a litmus test for interpreting the world around us, including how our government responds to unequal treatment under the law. As individuals apply respective faith-based tenets to what is happening in society, they are thinking theologically and have civil rights to speak out.

Unfortunately, in the minds of many Americans, the free speech and free exercise clauses *have been subsumed by the anti-establishment clause*—meaning we do nothing rather than risk violating this quasi-sacred notion of separation of church and state. Consequently, the prohibition to establish a superior faith, has inadvertently had a

chilling effect on how we understand our rights of speech and religious exercise when outside the walls of the church or away from our private piety at home. We are constitutionally protected to express our religious views in public as afforded by the free speech and free exercise clauses. But, we cannot call for one (presumptively our) faith to establish “truth” for the whole country. This is a balancing act in the public square of democracy, and all faith expressions have an equal place in that space.

Protected Speech and Unprotected Speech. American courts will not determine the acceptability of political speech content. There are only five categories of unprotected speech: incitement or “fighting words” likely to result in physical violence; obscenity; misleading or deceptive speech like fraud; speech as part of a conspiracy proposing the commission of crime; and, defamation. Therefore, some of the most detestable speech and expletives are protected by the First Amendment.³³³ The *Brandenburg* Court decision is the most accurate expression of how and when political speech is protected. At a rally, a KKK leader stated, “Personally, I believe the nigger should be returned to Africa, the Jew returned to Israel.” SCOTUS reversed his conviction for violating the Ohio Criminal Syndicalism Statute which prohibited inciting crime or violence to secure industrial or political reform. SCOTUS found no evidence that the speaker was inciting “imminent lawless action,” or that lawlessness was *likely to happen*.

While offensive speech is protected, we must consider the invaluable nature of this American ideology. The courts will not intervene as to content, particularly when it is political speech. This is where the American experiment shines. We can say what we

³³³ *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 395 U.S. 444 (1969).

think, when we vehemently disapprove of our government's actions. Americans are free to engage in the discussion of ideas—this is a cornerstone of our democracy.

Hurtful speech is protected.³³⁴ Fred Phelps is the founder and leader of the Westboro Baptist Church. One of its primary activities is to picket military funerals because the US military is tolerant of homosexuals whom the Church views as immoral and the cause of the fall of the US as God's favored people. Lance Corporal Matthew Snyder was killed in Iraq, and his father was very offended by the placards erected by the Westboro church members. The signs publicized messages like, "God hates fags," and "Thank God for dead soldiers." SCOTUS ruled that the church was protected because the speech addresses a public matter of interest. The pain suffered by Snyder's father *comes from the content of the message*. In both the *Brandenburg* and *Phelps* cases, Christian organizations, namely the KKK and Westboro Baptist Church, are engaging in public, political speech, albeit extreme and distasteful forms of speech. *Because the court looks to the political nature of the speech, such speech is protected*. It seems obvious, that our speech, our message of inclusion, love, and justice has a place in the public square without fear of reprimand for establishing a religion.

In totalitarian regimes, free speech is prohibited, and depending on the leader, public advocacy can result in death for the advocates. We have constitutional protection to openly debate our grievances against the government. And, because the courts will not rule on whether the actual speech is "acceptable," we have the right to voice our opinions. Therefore, our message of fairness and compassion belongs in the public square and indeed enjoys equal access.

³³⁴ *Snyder v. Phelps*, 562 U.S. 443 (2011).

This concept of keeping church and state as separate spheres has obfuscated our understanding of how we are constitutionally protected to speak publicly and theologically about issues that matter to us. Furthermore, we have a vital perspective as voices from the progressive corner of God’s vineyard. Therefore, we must vocalize our Christian message of inclusion, compassion and justice.

Survey Results and Discussion. The next section provides an analysis of the anonymous, random survey of predominantly white, mainline Christians. See the chart below for denominational representation.

Denominational Breakdown of Responders

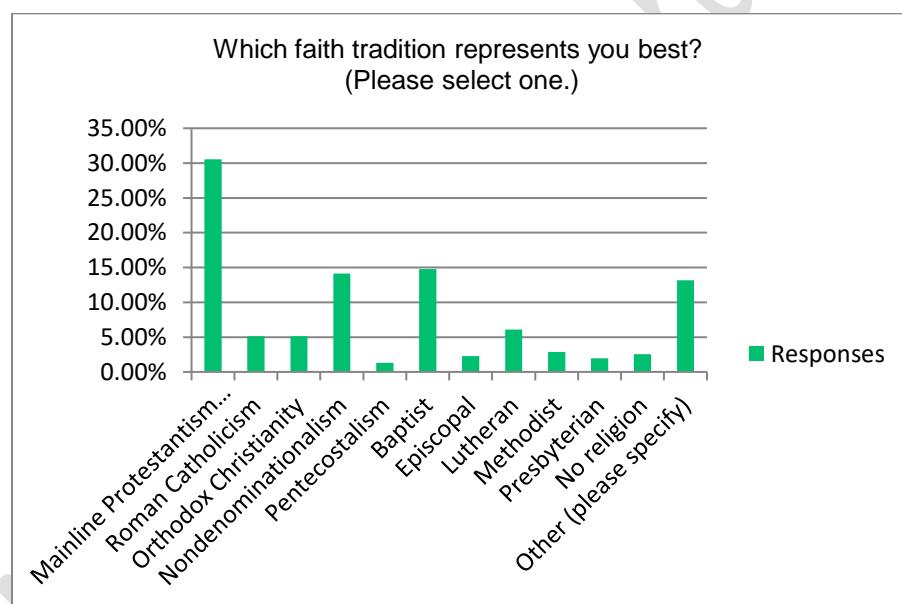


Figure 9. Break-out of various Christian denominations. Excluding Roman Catholicism and Orthodox traditions, approximately 73% identified as Protestant.

The survey was conducted in support of this chapter of the project. Below is a synopsis of the respondents’ basic demographic information, and the description of an amalgam survey-taker. A series of charts demonstrate notable results.

Survey demographic information:

- 61% of the survey group are female; 38% are male; two people identified in the non-

binary category (Question 1, hereinafter “Q”).

- 86% survey identified as white/Caucasian; 25% are between 18-39 years of age (Q2).
- 75% are over 40 years of age; the largest sector in the age category, 37% of respondents, are over 60 (Q3).
- 61% of the survey group are female; 38% are male; two people identified in the non-binary category (Question 1, hereinafter “Q”).
- 23% report having a high school diploma or equivalent; 39% have some community college education or a 4-year degree; 38% have a graduate degree (Q4).
- 95% of respondents report being registered to vote (Q6).
71% indicated they voted in the 2018 primary and general elections in 2018; 12% report they voted only in the general 2018 election; and 14% report they did not vote in either 2018 election (Q7).
- 92% do not have military experience (Q8).
- 80% think that Christians have an ethical duty to challenge injustice (Q20).
- Below shows religious affiliation (Q16).

In section II of the survey, respondents were asked to name their political party and level of satisfaction with the Congress. They were also asked about their views on influencing politics and how they receive news.

- Political identification of respondents is almost equal between the two major political parties with 33.76% Republican and 34.73% Democrat. 25.08% identified as Independent and the remaining 6.0% identified as affiliated with another party. (Q10).
- 49% report being very interested in national politics, and 34% report moderate interest (Q11).
- 65% think that they can only affect what national politicians do a little or not at all (Q9).

The “Amalgam Participant” is a white female, Protestant, over 40 years of age, has some college education, is a registered voter who participated in both elections in 2018. The political affiliation likelihood is either 50%-Republican and 50%-Democrat. S/he believes s/he little or no influence on what politicians do.

Responses to Questions Related to the First Amendment. This survey was created to measure how mainline Christians understand what they can and cannot do to voice their faith and call for justice in the public square. Prior to beginning this doctoral study, my numerous casual conversations with congregants revealed their concern over possibly violating IRS rules that govern the political activity of tax-exempt entities. It is appropriate to ensure tax-exempt organizations retain their status, as they rely on donations from their supporters. Donors are motivated to support nonprofit organizations in order to receive tax deductions. They support causes which are important to them and in return they reduce their tax liability. Losing that tax-exempt status usually spells financial disaster for the nonprofit. However, allowing misguided fear to prevent nonprofit advocacy for the common good is counter-intuitive to our right to free speech. Nine questions in the survey were “graded” like a quiz in order to measure the degree of understanding regarding nonprofit and individual advocacy. The participants answered correctly more often than hypothesized and showed a solid understanding of the First Amendment protections for free speech, etc.

Although Americans understand their free speech protections, the survey demonstrates a low comfort level for doing public or political theology. While congregants understand what religious organizations can do as public, or political theologians, they are reticent to do so. Perhaps the concerns about violating the IRS rules are offered pretextually rather than realistically. People seem more comfortable behind the scenes in preparing for public action versus actually going out and being on the front line.

Most people do not want to provoke or engage in conflict, and generally, many people work to avoid conflict if at all possible, so this answer is not surprising. This echoes what we know about human nature. A result that did surprise has to do with Jesus's ministry. *Respondents do not view Jesus as radical or that his ministry was radical.*

Additionally, not only do people generally want to avoid conflict, it seems people are also very conflicted about working for social justice. The quiz questions are presented with corresponding charts, beginning with the highest percentage of correct answer and descending to the lowest percentage of correct answer. Note the correct answer is labeled with a check mark in each of the next nine charts.

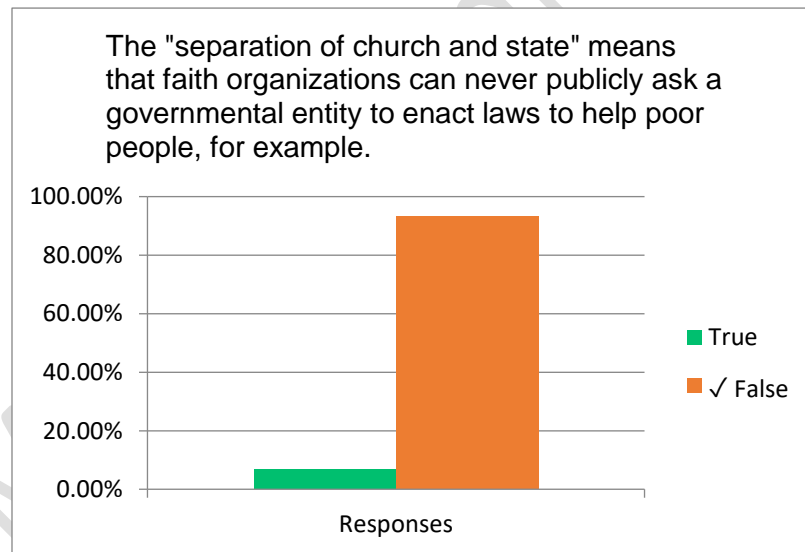


Figure 10 – Ninety-three percent of Respondents answered correctly.

In responding to this question, 93% show a clear understanding that faith-based organizations are constitutionally protected in advocating for social justice according to gospel teachings.

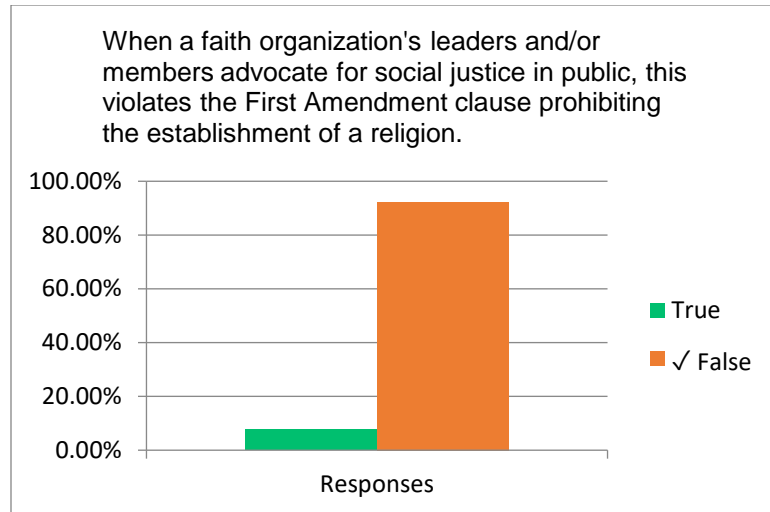


Figure 11 – Ninety-two percent of Respondents answered correctly.

The answer in the chart above also reflects a solid understanding that faith leaders and their members can advocate for social justice without establishing a superior religion, as prohibited by the anti-establishment clause of the First Amendment. For example, a clergy member can wear a clerical garb at a protest without facing allegations of establishing a religion.

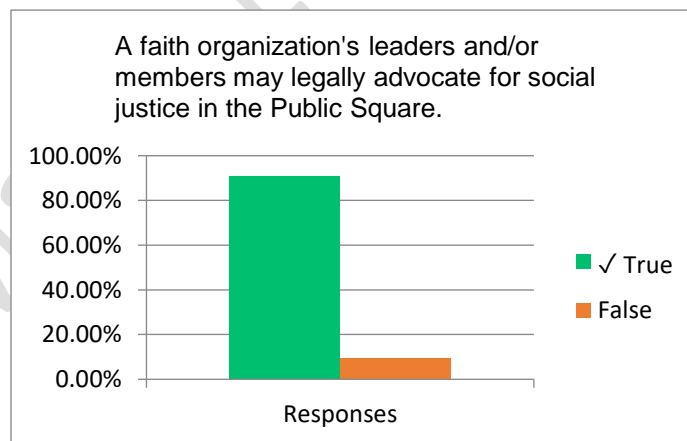


Figure 12 – Ninety percent of Respondents answered correctly.

The wording of this question effectively restates the previous question, and in both instances, over 90% were correct. The questions did not confuse respondents.

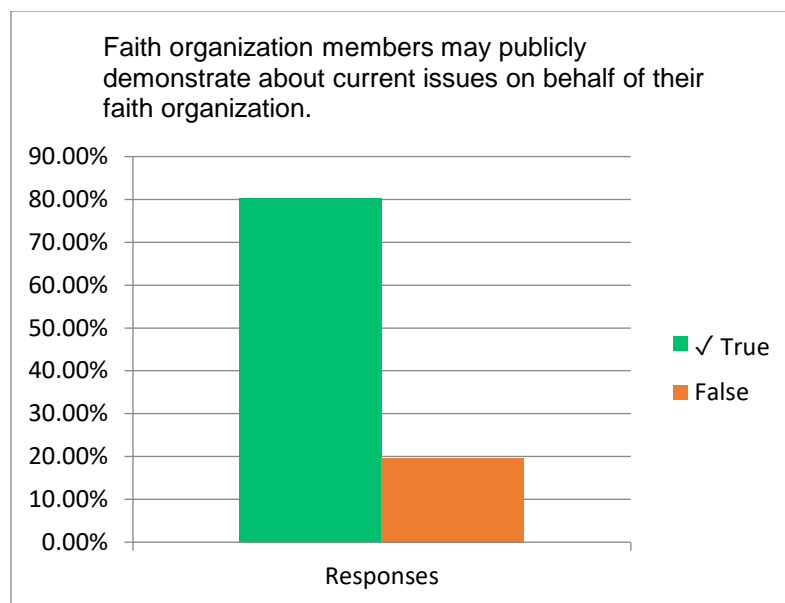


Figure 13 – Eighty percent of Respondents answered correctly.

Respondents understand that religious organizations are protected in assembling to petition the government the redress of grievances.

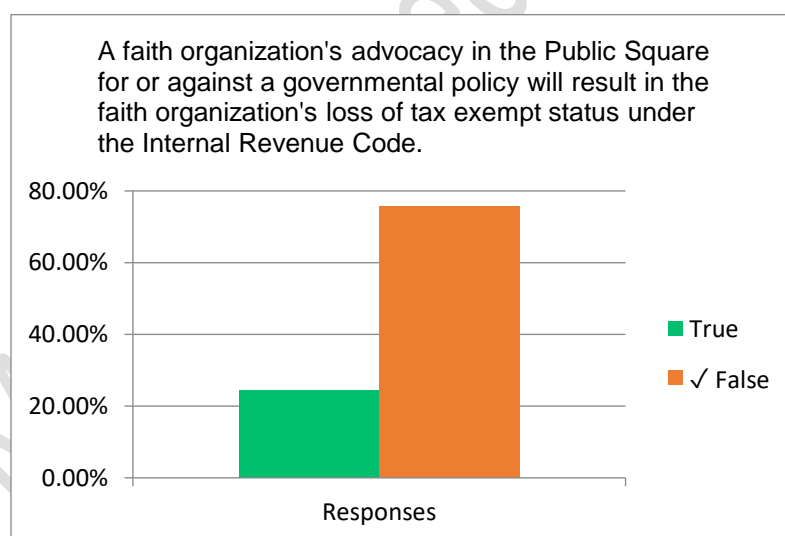


Figure 14 – Seventy-five percent of Respondents answered correctly.

Those surveyed understand that public advocacy is constitutionally protected. However, it is clear that confusion or misunderstanding arises over what tax-exempt organizations can do political campaigns and referenda.

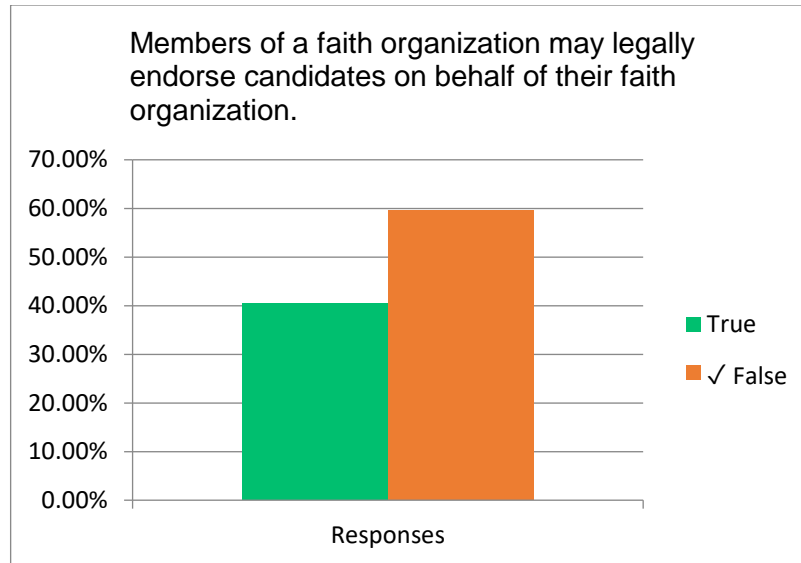


Figure 15 – Sixty percent of Respondents answered correctly.

This answer proved surprising in that the hypothesis projected a much higher percentage for the correct answer. The Johnson Amendment to the IRS Code prohibits this activity. It was established in 1954 and the chief sponsor was then US Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson.³³⁵ Trump has tried to nullify the Johnson Amendment by executive order, but his efforts have left it virtually unchanged.

³³⁵Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, *UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT WESTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN et AL., v. DONALD J. TRUMP, et. AL.* 2 (2017). See also “Opinion | Trump Vowed to Destroy the Johnson Amendment. Thankfully, He Has Failed.” Ibid. Significantly, the court filings prove that Trump did not deliver on his destructive campaign promise, which was solely designed to reward white evangelicals, 81 percent of whom voted for Trump and a group that disproportionately approves of ending the Johnson Amendment. Polls find that 79 percent of Americans support the Johnson Amendment. The Johnson Amendment precludes churches from allowing direct endorsement of candidates and issues from the pulpit or as official church messaging to the public. Other than that, and just as the conservative members of the Church, we can speak our mind in the public square. The motivation to conduct the survey stems directly from confusion about these issues as expressed by congregants.

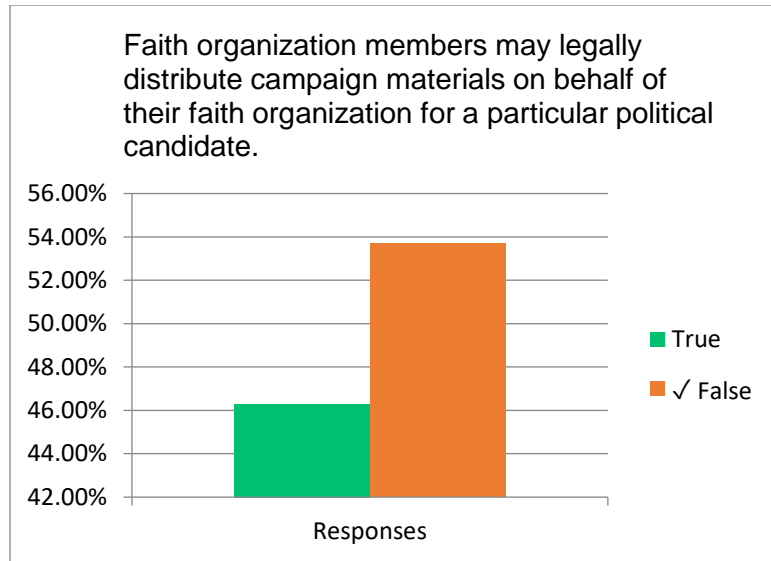


Figure 16 – Fifty-three percent of Respondents answered correctly.

Again, this answer was surprising as a higher percentage of correct answers was expected, and the same holds true for the next chart.

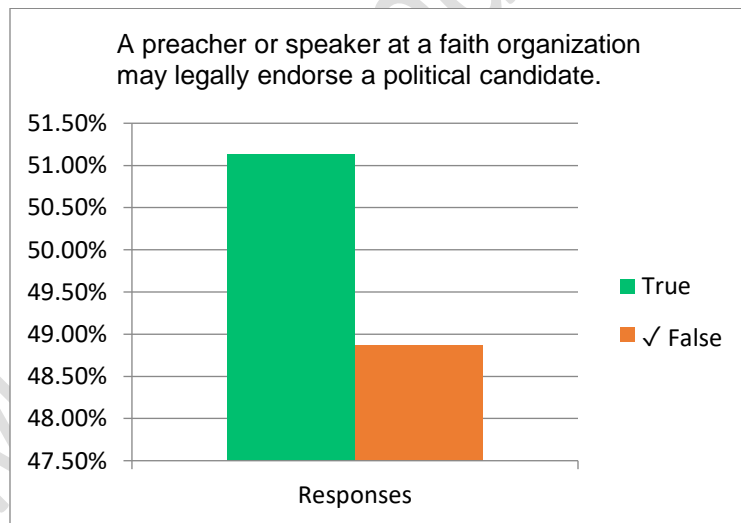


Figure 17 – Fifty-one percent of Respondents answered correctly.

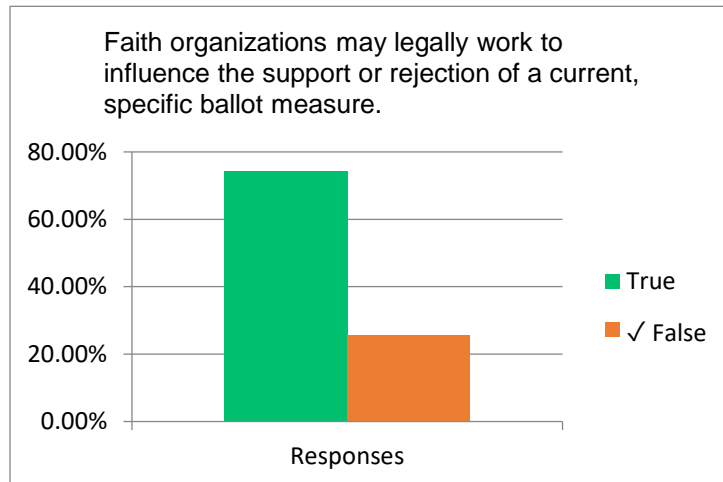


Figure 18 – Twenty-five percent of Respondents answered correctly.

This question had the fewest correct answers. The IRS has specific rules for campaign activities involving candidates and referenda and examines whether the campaign work constitutes a “substantial activity” of the tax-exempt organization. If the activity is substantial, then the IRS can and likely will determine that the organization is engaged in activities outside of its tax-exempt conduct, like operating humane societies for animals, and child welfare organizations, faith organizations and educational institutions. This question did not indicate what degree of election activity was carried out by the faith organizations to test this understanding.

The tax-exempt status can be revoked if the activity does not cease. In advocating for referenda and political candidates, the better organizational vehicle is the political action committee or PAC. The PAC status is also granted by the IRS and has specific requirements for forming a PAC as well as rules for regulating it. The specifics of the PAC are beyond the scope of this dissertation but deserve consideration as a tool for public theology.

The quiz results support the conclusion that most participants have a solid understanding of what faith members and their organizations can and cannot do in the public square. The question then becomes, “If progressive faith members understand the laws governing public, faith-based/political speech, then why is there so little public, progressive Christian advocacy?” One answer may be that an overwhelming 80% agree

that faith members need more information on public advocacy, as indicated in the chart below.

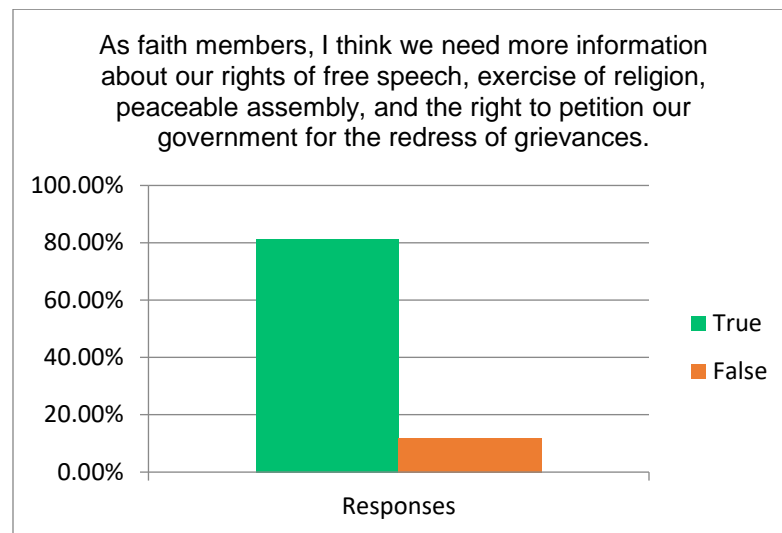


Figure 19 – Eighty-one percent of Respondents answered, “Yes.”

Perhaps this kind of education will need to be developed as a hybrid of teaching about both constitutional fundamentals alongside the scriptural mandates that call us to advocate for justice. The work from this doctoral project will focus on ways to engage the laity in finding constitutionally protected means of speech and action to allow us to answer our call to ensure the marginalized, the poor, the orphan, the outsider, and the widow remain included in the beloved community of God.

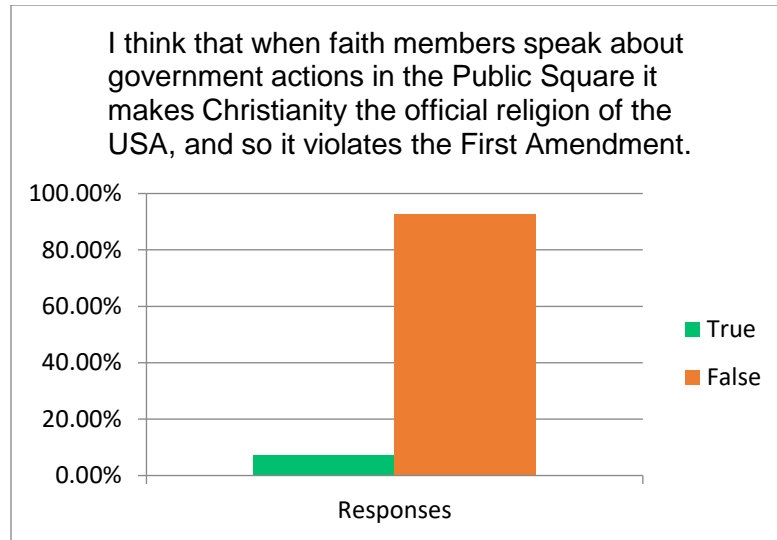


Figure 20 – Ninety-three percent of Respondents answered correctly.

Responses to Questions about Jesus’s Ministry. The scriptural rootedness of our tradition must include an understanding of the profoundly radical nature of Jesus’s ministry. The survey results below depict responses to three specific questions about how Jesus was perceived. First, respondents were asked if Jesus critiqued unjust actions by Jewish leaders of the day. This is not intended as an anti-Semitic question. Its intent is to test whether people recognize that Jesus was challenging a system that allowed or ignored suffering. Not surprisingly, 80% of respondents indicated that Jesus did critique leaders of the occupied Jewish community.

As a Jew, Jesus did not critique other Jews for a set of beliefs as inherently corrupt because the beliefs were Jewish. He critiqued the leaders for falling short of the Torah’s requirements for justice and care for the marginalized. This should be a basic understanding for Christians who have attended church and heard the gospel over a period of time, and the data support this conclusion.

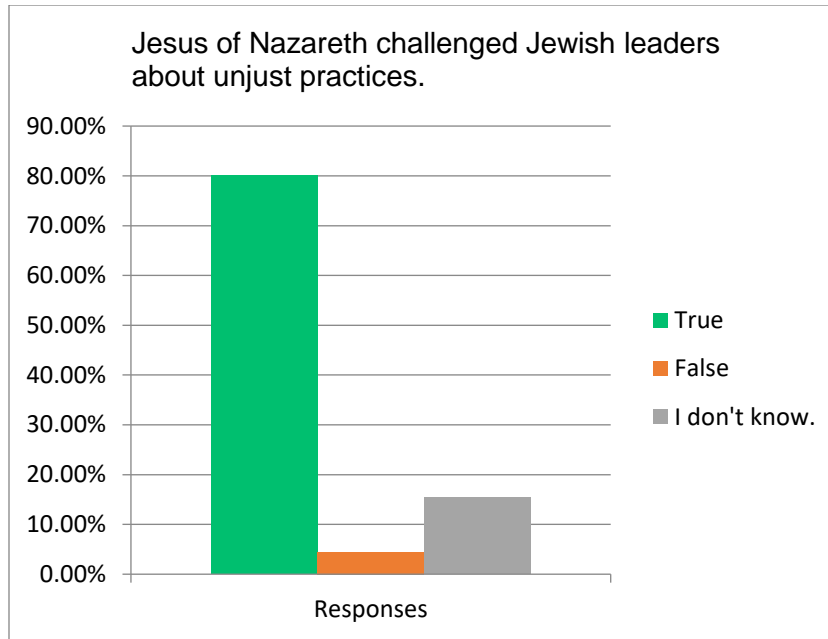


Figure 21 – Eighty percent of Respondents agreed.

However, a major surprise in the data appeared in analyzing next question. A much lower percentage of respondents think that Jesus critiqued the Roman occupiers. Only 52% agreed that Jesus actively criticized Roman laws although the gospels have numerous stories where Jesus does just that. Astonishingly, 28% of respondents answered that Jesus did not critique Rome, and another 20% said they did not know. In combining these categories of responses, they total 48%; basically, half of respondents failed to state that Jesus critiqued the Roman Empire's unjust practices.

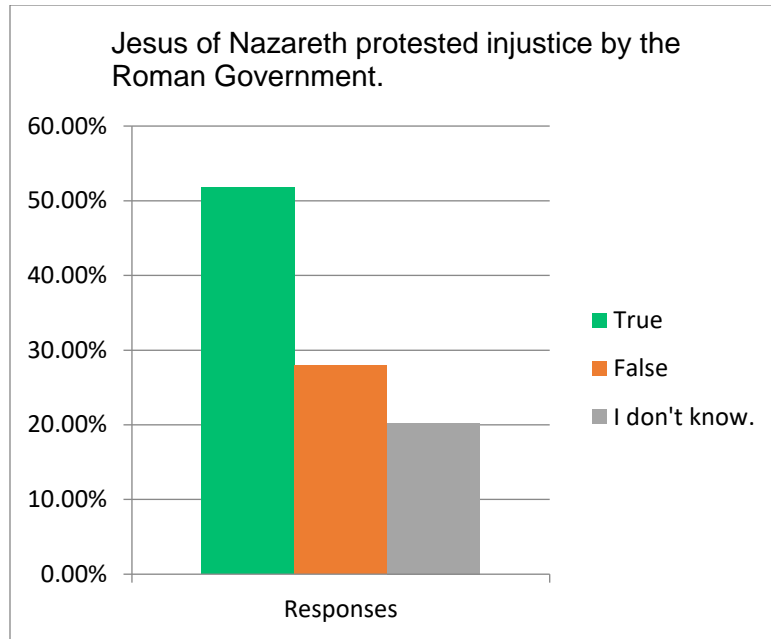


Figure 22 – Fifty-one percent of Respondents agreed.

Questions that naturally arise from this data and require further study include:

- 1) Do American Christians fail to recognize or acknowledge Roman oppression in first century Palestine to avoid acknowledging oppression and colonialism by the US in current times?
- 2) Do American Christians even recognize or understand how economic exploitation and racism cause oppression and continued colonialism in the US today?
- 3) If American Christians are unsure about whether Jesus taught about challenging the injustice of Rome, what teaching and materials are necessary to facilitate greater understanding of Jesus's calls for justice?

The greatest surprise from the survey was the response to the statement that Jesus's ministry was political. Nearly 60% of those surveyed answered that Jesus's ministry was not political! Yet, Jesus's ministry was triply political: 1) Jesus delivered blistering condemnation for injustices as practiced by Israel's leaders; 2) He leveled resounding rebukes against Roman law for its unjust incomes; and 3) Jesus also found the alliance between Jewish and Roman leaders to be reprehensible.

One can reasonably consider that the reticence of American Christians to call Jesus political is because we have been inculcated with the mystique of separation of church and state. We have been taught we can truncate our political self from our pious self. Consequently, it appears we also truncate Jesus's public call for justice as "religious" rather than "political." In doing so we allow ourselves to opt out of a critical component of Jesus's ministry, that being public theology.

Instead, we engage in private conduct such as prayer and spiritual practices when faced with the social crises of the day. All public theology must be grounded in prayer and spirituality—that is a good thing. However, the faithful do not generally make the conversion from private piety to public advocacy.

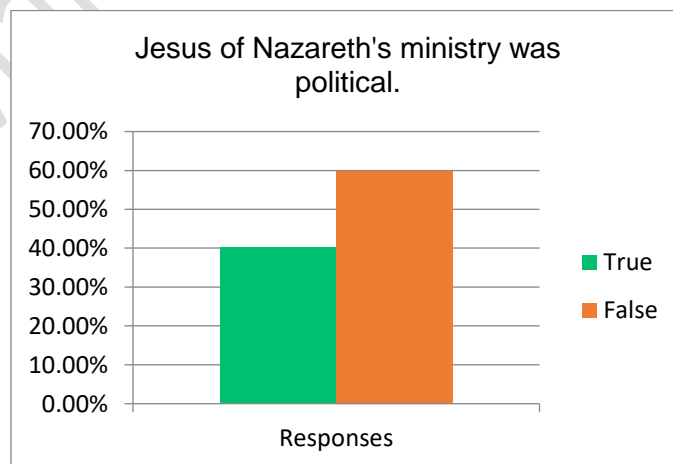


Figure 23 – Forty percent of Respondents agreed.

Interest in Public Theology by Type and Comfort Level. Respondents were given a variety of public theology activities to rate based on comfort level. The charts below show a divergence in interest. Less public, preparatory activities were more acceptable than “front line” public theology like demonstrating, testifying at governmental hearings or lobbying.

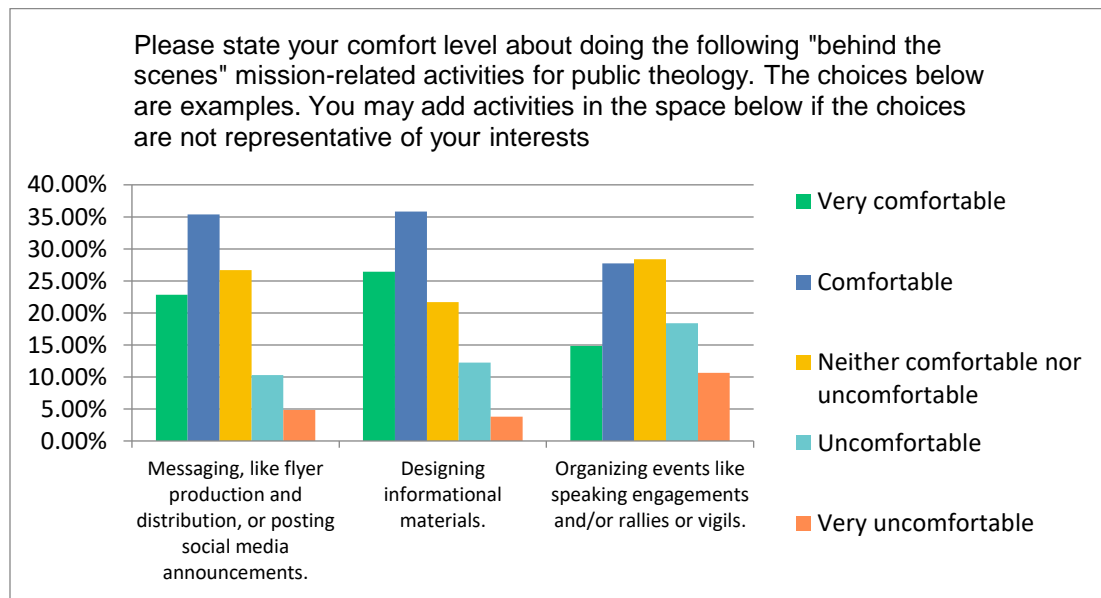


Figure 24 - Respondents report a somewhat higher comfort level for conducting “behind-the-scenes” or preparatory work for public theology (compared to Figure 25 immediately below).

The disconnect between private piety and public advocacy can be demonstrated by comparing the chart above to the following chart. Respondents are more open to doing behind the scenes (private) activities that prepare for public theology—the “less public” aspect of public theology.

In averaging these three activities, 33% of surveyees indicate they would be comfortable versus an average of 25% indicating that would be very comfortable doing these activities. However, combining these two averages indicate that 58% of those surveyed would be very comfortable or comfortable in doing preparatory work.

However, for most people, the survey indicates a sharp drop off in interest when public theology activities are actually conducted in the public square or the halls of government.

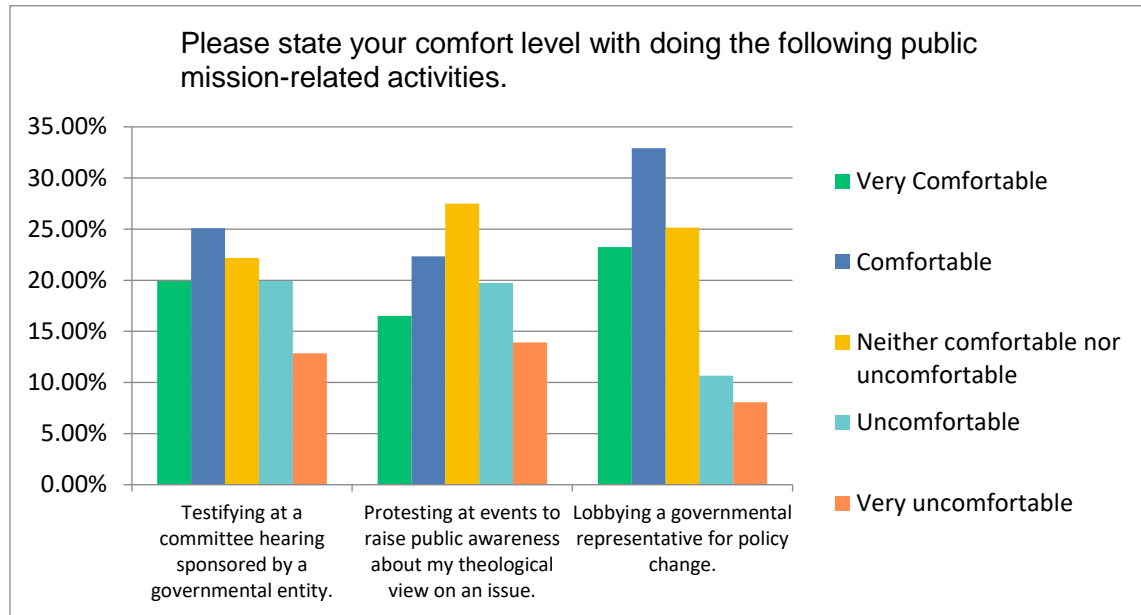


Figure 25 - Respondents report a low rate of comfort level (compared to Figure 24 immediately above) in conducting public theology in the form of protests (17%), testifying at governmental hearings (20%), and lobbying (23%).

The comfort levels are dramatically lower for activities that are clearly more public activities. In the following figure, less than 5% of respondents agreed that public theology is unpatriotic, violates tax-exempt status, will cause repercussions, that it is generally inappropriate, or they would feel intimidated. However, 20% of respondents did indicate very strong or strong agreement that they are not political.

Interestingly, more than one of two respondents voiced strong disagreement with the idea that criticizing the government is unpatriotic. Of the reasons provided not to conduct public theology, this answer has been most soundly rejected by participants in the survey.

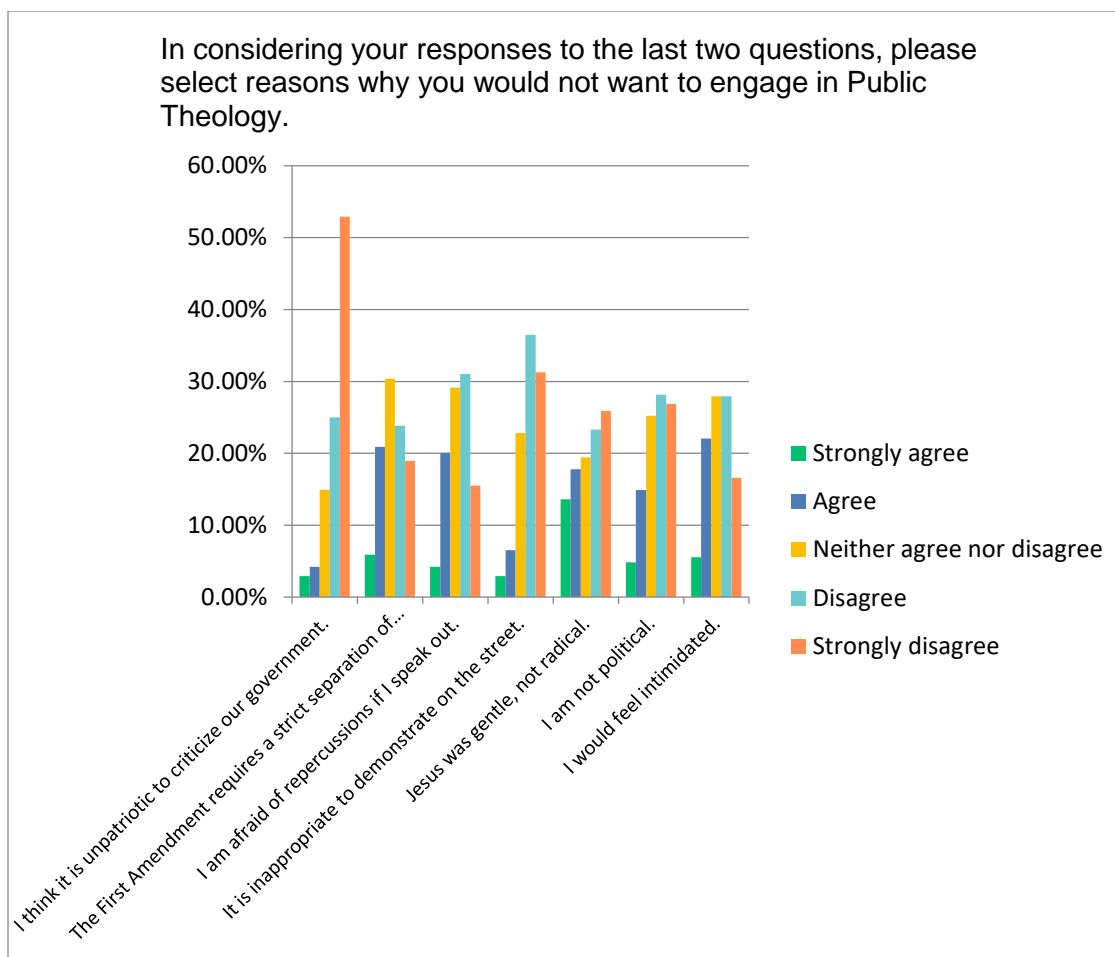


Figure 26 - Respondents consider various reasons not to conduct public theology. Roughly 55% state they either strongly disagree or disagree that they are not political.

The heart-wrenching truth is that most of the public faith-based rhetoric comes from conservative corners of the Christian vineyard, the president's largest constituency. The president *trumpets* their unrepentant white-supremacy vitriol much as the White slavers' Christianity discussed in Chapter 4. This Christian message is divisive and intentionally designed as an apparatus of fear-mongering towards, "the others," people of color. It deflects and distracts our attention from the root causes of our social strife. We need to educate and empower progressive Christians to be powerful political advocates of the gospel in the public square.

Chapter 9

Putting it all Together: Taking the Love of Christ to the Sacramental Streets of America with Gospel-infused Action A True story of a Persistent Latina Widow and US as the Unjust Judge

*When no one speaks and the whole world is silent,
then even one voice becomes powerful.*
Malala Yousafzai³³⁶

We are Called to Resist Silence. In a speech about racial reconciliation, MLK, Jr. spoke about the “silent, good people.” This speech was included in the movie, *Driving Miss Daisy*.³³⁷ Miss Daisy’s black chauffeur, Hoke, drove her to a speaking engagement by Dr. King at her Temple. As a Jew and a widow, she knew all too well about being marginalized. Hoke could not attend the lecture by Dr. King because he was black. He listened to the address on the car radio. The cinematographer deftly showed Hoke and Miss Daisy reacting separately to the expression, “silent, good people,” with a slow camera pan of each of their faces. The slowness of the scene underscored how slowly the wheels of justice move even in the face of pervasive, ongoing injustice. Hoke and Miss Daisy felt the sting of reality from that phrase. Although separated, the message hit them simultaneously as a single blow. They both understood, of course, that Miss Daisy was that good yet silent person, while Hoke was sitting in a collective of black drivers, the group of outsiders for whom Dr. King was advocating.

³³⁶ “Malala Yousafzai,” *Biography*, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.biography.com/people/malala-yousafzai-21362253>. Malala Yousafzai defied the Taliban as a young girl in Pakistan and demanded that girls be allowed to receive an education. For her activism, she was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman in 2012, but survived and went on to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. Malala Yousafzai's book, "I Am Malala," became an international bestseller.

³³⁷ Bruce Beresford, *Driving Miss Daisy*, 1989.

Inaction as Sin, or Separation from God. Our silence, or nonfeasance, is sin. It is especially sinful as such silence allows injustice to worsen. Then our inaction becomes malfeasance, an intentional assent to evil institutions. Feeling there is nothing we can do is not a sufficient reason to do nothing.

These are the folks Grace Lee Boggs had in mind when she observed that we know that things cannot go on like they are, but people are “immobilized.” We are not only immobilized because the problems are so enormous, but also because we do not know where to start, and objecting can be dangerous, violent even. And so, we generally do nothing or refuse to act.³³⁸ Albrecht writes that those who believe in an absolute God use this belief to justify their inaction.³³⁹ She notes that such a belief “justifies the refusal to enter with others into a world of ambiguity and complexity that does not respond to the desire for absolute control that originates in the myth of one truth.”³⁴⁰ As Jesus, God’s Son on earth, did not spend his time doing nothing to improve the society he lived in, this argument fails to persuade.

Sometimes we do not act because evil can be hidden, like the secret world where billions of dollars in taxable assets are hidden (as discussed in chapter 7). In addition to addressing blatant signs of injustice, we also are called to unearth the buried or hidden injustices. Remaining silent in the face of injustice shapes us to be Christians who not only passively agree, but we also, then, endorse the consequences of injustice like poverty, racism, sexism, and heterosexism. It is an oxymoron for a Christian to settle for injustice. So, if we benefit from such a devilish tax cut, we in fact practice idolatry in the

³³⁸ Albrecht, *Character*, 114-115.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

form of worship/devotion to mammon. Instead, we are called to be the embodiment of Christ's vision on earth, to love and to share, and to empower. We are called to be the hands and feet, and the heart of Christ on earth in mission and doing political theology.

We have an opportunity here. Whereas previously, people attended church partly to achieve a degree of respectability in the community, we do not have that artificial motivator any more. Now, people choose to go to church because it feeds them in some way. Mission provides opportunities for profound spiritual growth. There are many out there who hunger and thirst for what the Gospel brings, and these are the pilgrims who will be devoted and clear in their decision to be a Christian.

Christ calls us to enact and oversee the enforcement of just laws. In the preceding 11th chapter of Luke; he issues a withering critique of "woes" to religious leaders and lawyers about their murderous conspiracies against apostles and prophets. Jesus, plainly and publicly, warns the disciples and attending crowd about the consequences of failing to recognize the elders' hypocrisy. Luke uses the second person imperative, "Beware . . ." Jesus is unequivocal.

Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered by the thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he began to speak first to his disciples, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. ² Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ³ Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.' (Lk 12:1-3)

Within this passage is a deeper meaning that has direct application to our plight today. Johnson succinctly puts this text into perspective

The disciples are to 'avoid' the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (12:1). One reason is that for them hypocrisy would not work. In contrast to these well-respected members of the religious elite whose hidden vice could be camouflaged by outward show, the disciples would be tested by

persecution, trials, and threats of death. They will not be able to hide anything. For them, Jesus' sayings make clear, whatever is hidden will be brought to light, whatever is whispered will be shouted from the roofs (12:2-3). It follows then that they must be transparent in their conviction.³⁴¹

In public theology, we must recognize that our transparency is key to effectuating lasting social change. We must communicate the gospel message humbly and sincerely and without ulterior motives for power and influence. Our advocacy for justice cannot be shrill or "preachy," but it must be powerful.³⁴² Power itself is not necessarily bad. However, *power without love is tyranny. Conversely, love without power is just sentimentality.*

Christianity as the Ultimate Survivor. J. Rieger's writes of a Christian "theological surplus." His concept calls attention to an enduring presence of Christ, faith, hope, love, and spiritual gifts, despite the numerous dark periods of human history since his birth. Christianity has always existed either in the shadow of empire or somewhere within its "force field."³⁴³ Rieger notes that Christianity has never been fully absorbed by empire. He writes, "One of the key purposes of the study of Christian theology in the context of empire has to do with a search for that which cannot be co-opted by empire, and which thus inspires alternatives to empire, based on what I have called a 'theological surplus.' The great light of Christ has never been snuffed out, and we need to remind ourselves of this reality every day. God is with us, and through the perichoretic dance of

³⁴¹ Johnson, *Luke*, 194-197. See also Danker and Krug, *Lexicon*, 161. The Greek term *zymē* can be used "in imagery of what can be negatively influential."

³⁴² Johnson, *Luke*, 194. Johnson clarifies how the leavening agent "(zymē) works within dough as a hidden yet powerful force; so, we are to understand, is the hidden vice of the opposition beneath their virtuous veneer." Our leavening must be free of personal selfish ambition.

³⁴³ Compier, Kwok, and Rieger, "Christian Theology and Empires," 1.

the Trinity, God creates opportunities, and Christ's embrace saves us from life's challenges, and the Holy Spirit comforts us in our sojourn.

Recognizing that God's love is unending allows us to keep from losing heart and to recognize that there is more to life than "getting ahead." Paul warns the Galatians to avoid "frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness," "cutthroat competition," "all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants," "small-minded and lopsided pursuits," "the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival," and "ugly parodies of community." (Gal. 5:19-21, *The Message*) This advice holds true now.

E. Padilla identifies that there is a "cleaving together" of God and Cosmos, and an intimate dance of the Godhead, when we are joined together. It is a union of our cosmic essence. The borders between us and our Creator must be permeable and symbiotic. God does feel, understand, and lament over our suffering. The concept of *Paschal joy*, *this living with and acknowledging the pain of life* as an inextricable part of the joys of life, creating a yin/yang that emulates the Trinity's dance.³⁴⁴ By participating in this relationship, we are strengthened for the work and we grow spiritually into what God has intended for us to become.

Moving from Either/Or to Both/And. Process theology seems to be the best choice for me. Padilla has joined Aristotelian Spirit/matter binary categorization with Aquinas' theology. Americans are fully stuck in the quagmire of "either/or" way of navigating life. This dichotomy falls horribly short by squelching creativity, as well as

³⁴⁴ Elaine Padilla, *Divine Enjoyment: A Theology of Passion and Exuberance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 43. For a comprehensive discussion on our cosmic relationship with God, see chapter 2, "Yearning: Traces of Divine Erotic Existence in the Cosmos."

delegating many to the category of other, or as inferior. This frozen, binary mindset situates the US in a permanent state of crisis. We live and breathe “either/or;” sadly, it grossly limits us as we define our world through the funnels of:

Either / *or* (first or second class)

Good / *bad* (relational and situational)

Male / *female* (nonbinary rejected)

White / *black* (mythic superiority)

Rich / *poor* (powerful or powerless in a fixed system)

Straight / *lgbtq* (rooted in misogyny and patriarchy)

Many more binary pairs exist, such as “homeowner/homeless” or “able bodied/disabled,” etc. It is disturbing that this list continues to expand, as we find more ways to “other” people to signify their inferiority.

Unearthing Jesus’s Public Theology. Liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, gets right to the point in *Jesus Christ Liberator* when writing about the two reasons for having Jesus killed; one, he was labeled a *blasphemer*, for unmasking the profound hypocrisy of the Jewish leadership and, two, he was a *guerilla fighter*, one who had a liberative approach.

His preaching and his outlook brought him close to the liberation project of the Zealots. After all, he looked for the imminent arrival of the kingdom; he acted in radical ways; he made inflammatory remarks about the violent bearing away [of] the kingdom; he acted freely vis-à-vis the established imperial authorities; and he clearly exercised leadership over the common people, who wanted to make him their chief. On the other hand Jesus clearly moved away from the spirit and approach of the Zealots. He renounced the religious messianism of a political cast. Messianism grounded on the use of force and power would not succeed in concretizing the kingdom, he felt. *The kingdom entails a more radical*

*liberation, one that goes beyond the breakdown of brotherhood and calls for the creation of new human beings.*³⁴⁵ (Italics mine)

Jesus was a subversive and encouraged subversive behavior in his followers. Jesus's God-talk was incendiary and sought to stir the people into demanding a more just world. Yet, he advocated for justice and peace via non-violence and compassion in healing the suffering world.

Another major liberation theologian, Jon Sobrino, discusses how the understanding of Jesus came to be separated from his ministry with the poor:

In other words, faith in Christ rendered itself theoretical by relating to the *person of God* (which is better expressed in the titles of Son, Lord, Word—those titles that were most frequently used in the Christological councils) and not—in addition—to the *Kingdom of God*. Jesus' most intimate reality came to be seen in terms of *filiation*, sacrament of the Father, historical presence of God in this world, and this (which is good news, to be sure) to the greatest degree possible in history. *But the sequence of this was that even though he is also called Christ (Messiah), the title ceased to express the fact that "Messiah" was the referent of the hope and the salvation of the poor—that which points toward the Kingdom of God. It was being turned into a proper name, in practice, moreover, a merely denotative name. In this sense I have written that the messiah was quickly "de-Messianized."*³⁴⁶ (Italics mine)

Over time, it became more important to worship the Christ than to imitate Jesus in his ministry and his direct focus on lessening the suffering of the poor. He continues, "Christology will go on to delve more deeply into the relation of Jesus to the Father, the reality of the Son, while progressively weakening the relation of Jesus to the Kingdom to the point of ignoring it"³⁴⁷

³⁴⁵ Jeff Astley, David Brown, and Ann Loades, eds., *Christology: Key Readings in Christian Thought*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 82.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 86.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

This succinctly sums up what happens when the Johannine Messiah is preferred to the exclusion of the synoptic Jesus, healer, teacher, and revolutionary. The poor are left behind in the dust. Proponents of reframing Jesus solely in a high Christology seem to gloss over caring for the marginalized and opt instead only for worship of the divine Christ.

D. Ó'Murchú picks up where Sobrino left off in saying that between Jesus' power on the one hand and his holiness on the other, we are experiencing a badly damaged "grounded incarnational connection" with Jesus.³⁴⁸ Jesus the radical revolutionary has been squeezed out of the Christological mix. Ó'Murchú cites Brueggemann and his extensive work on prophetic vision to underscore the importance of our ability to "criticize to energize." Brueggemann states,

This involves speaking truth to power and invoking alternative scenarios characterized by subversive imagination and symbolic reinterpretation . . . It involves confrontation with the numbness of death—a challenge most of us dread—recognizing and naming that which has outlived its usefulness, grieving its loss, ritualizing the letting go, and most formidable of all, laying the dead to rest. Only then has the radically new any hope of emerging from the proverbial empty tomb.³⁴⁹

Brueggemann correctly identifies this work as very difficult, and, it is slow. And, the success of Public Theology depends on the inclusion of polyvalent voices.³⁵⁰ Speaking truth to power is most effective when, together, we clear a performance space for a full chorus of voices signing a varied repertoire. It is a long and striking program.

³⁴⁸ Diarmuid Ó'Murchú, *Christianity's Dangerous Memory: A Rediscovery of the Revolutionary Jesus* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 2011), 2.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 6. See also Brueggemann, *Hope within History*, 16–20.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 8–9.

St. Augustine views the church as a kind of public space all its own that uses the same temporal goods, but differently, and for different reasons.³⁵¹ A relatable insight of Augustine's is the idea of identifying the church *as performance*. It has a spiritual element, a praxis, and a limitless, timeless quality.

Augustine does not simply identify the city of God with the visible church on earth, which is so notoriously filled with both the wheat and the chaff. However, Augustine does identify the church with the city of God in at least one place: he refers to Old Testament figures that 'are to be referred only to Christ and His church, which is the city of God.' Later, Augustine says, 'the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven,' because it contains the righteous within it. As Christ's body, the church is ontologically related to the city of God, *but it is the church not as a visible institution but as a set of practices. The city of God is not so much a space as a performance.** Likewise, the earthly city is a particular tragic performance of the *libido dominandi*. It is true that the city of God and the earthly city are ideal moral communities whose actual performance in time is, for Augustine, the history of Israel and the church, on the one hand, and the history of the Babylonian and Roman empires, on the other. But what we are not given is anything like a theory of church and state, or civil society and state. There is no division of sacred and secular, private and public, no division of labor between the things that are Caesar's and the things that are God's for, as Dorothy Day once commented, if you give to God what is God's there is nothing left for Caesar.³⁵² (* Italics mine.)

Ó'Murchú's notion of demon possession evidenced by the many social ills today is compelling. Ó'Murchú asks if the demon-possessed of the gospels were driven mad by the social "marginalization, brutality, and oppression."³⁵³ He further likens the evil spirits in the gospels as the representation of "unmet needs."³⁵⁴ This is an insightful viewpoint and deserves reflection in developing political theology.

³⁵¹ Cavanagh, *Migrations of the Holy*, 57.

³⁵² Ibid., 59.

³⁵³ Ibid., 13.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 18.

In 2013 and 2014, during the City of Detroit's bankruptcy, a clergy friend wanted to perform an exorcism at the Detroit City-County government buildings to protest the infamous policy of shutting off public water supply for people who could not pay their bills. Many of Detroit's poor and children were greatly affected by the shut-offs and lack of clean water. The fact that the State of Michigan, the Great Lakes State, is surrounded by the "greatest" pooling of fresh water in the world makes this whole debacle all the more sordid.

Frankly, the poisoned water crisis in Flint, Michigan, brought to light in 2017, does not reflect positively on the state's ability to ensure safe water for its citizenry. Beyond that, part of the scheme of the response demonstrated the on-going "othering" of socioeconomically disempowered citizens. Safe water was provided to state employees working in Flint at the same time that residents were told the tap water was safe.³⁵⁵ There is an evil element to these events that we should expose through public theology and connect to the biblical imperative to work for *shalom*.

Imagine the opportunity for public sacramental theology in parking a huge fire truck on Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House. An ecumenical coalition of clerics bless the truck's enormous reservoir of water and then power-wash the whole building with Holy Water as a form of asperges with a fire hose instead of an aspergillum or branch of hyssop.

We are Called to be Holy Fools for Christ. St. Paul refers to being a Holy Fool for Christ—ushering in the reign of God through acts that threaten principalities and

³⁵⁵ "State Workers in Flint Got Bottled Water as Crisis Brewed," accessed April 30, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/flint-water-crisis-state-workers-in-flint-got-bottled-water-as-crisis-brewed/>. "Michigan offered fresh bottled water for state employees in Flint starting in January 2015, although residents were told that tap water was safe to drink until last fall, a state official said."

powers, the evil forces of the day. Advocating for Christ no matter the cost seems foolish to the non-Christian world. Not only is there danger, but this work attempts to motivate us to undo societal injustices, a monumental, if not impossible task. M. Grau expands on this by asking how we can dislodge young men from the (straight white) male economy and

[I]m/proprieties of male economic agency to countereconomic third space of desire, of giving, taking, and keeping that transgresses economic orthodoxies and can flourish in creative reciprocity? From this critical genealogy, a Holy Fool of divine madness, a countereconomic trickster begins to emerge. This figure becomes invested in the ecological relationality about which most of us remain in habitual denial. This ascetic resembles Leontius's 'Holy Fool,' whose antics and tricks expose the greed and exploitation around him and who provides inspiration for contemporary Holy Fools and their satirically mocking, yet hopeful, practices.³⁵⁶

Grau advocates working for economic justice, and she even uses the term "redemption" in her book title--to redeem, or buy back society, by operating as tricksters and shape shifters to morph the economy into a divine wholeness. Jesus of Nazareth can truly be described as a shape shifter or God's Holy Fool. His ministry worked to turn the known world upside-down by advocating to undo classism and economic hegemony that rendered so many former landowners to day laborers working for subsistence wages.

While we belong to a faith that is inherently costly, it also nurtures a relationship with the *perichoretic* Trinity who creates, redeems and comforts us even today. We must break such rituals of silence and raise the scriptures as examples of a better way. Political theology can be done without the need to establish a superior religion. Even people without a faith practice can recognize a call to mercy, justice, and fairness, when they hear it.

³⁵⁶ Grau, *Of Divine Economy*, 44.

Conversion is not necessary to advocate for a more loving and compassionate society. Theology with a political emphasis may even call those back who have fallen away due to disgust. It is a form of evangelism. We must also combat feeling overwhelmed and a malaise with creative and innovative Christian formation, the sharing of the prayers, and in the breaking of the bread. This is the traditional rootedness that needs to be reenergized.

Let Us Turn the World Upside Down. In his recent work, NT theologian, M. L. Skinner writes about the action of God through the Holy Spirit. “Frequently those who announce the gospel of Jesus Christ do things that create or lead to large-scale disturbances. In one instance, a complaint ominously accuses them of ‘turning the world upside down’” (Acts 17:6).³⁵⁷ This is precisely the kind of confidence we need to accomplish more permanent and wide-spread social justice. Poetically, Skinner continues,

The gospel is, in a word, disruptive.

People who live out this gospel say their God is bringing something new into being, something that challenges ‘the world’—the prevailing sense of ‘the way things are.’ As a result, the same word *disruptive* applies equally to God, as Acts tells the story. God intrudes. God breaks in, God interferes. Whether by sending people to declare the good news about Jesus, preserving a shipload of desperate travelers during a violent storm, miraculously liberating persecuted missionaries from imprisonment, or creating communities where people gather together to worship, learn, and care for one another, the intrusive God who inhabits the pages of Acts repeatedly engenders ‘no little disturbance’ in the lives of Jesus’s followers and the wider population.³⁵⁸

Leech defines Christian orthodoxy from three points of entry:

³⁵⁷ Skinner, Matthew A., *Intrusive God, Disruptive Gospel: Encountering the Divine in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2015). See page xi.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

1) Orthodoxy insists that the material world and its structures are the vehicle of the divine, the raw material of sanctification. It cannot therefore abandon the struggle for a transfigured world, or see earthly struggles as separate from spiritual struggles; 2) Christian orthodoxy is rooted in the belief in salvation by grace, not by technique or method. It is God centred, not self centred; 3) Christian orthodoxy stresses that grace is common. It is concerned with the common life of the Body of Christ and cannot be elitist or esoteric.³⁵⁹

This pithy assessment recognizes growth in spirituality in accepting the responsibility to transfigure our part of the world via a faith rooted in salvation by grace and earthly works that are God centered. And further, Leech identifies the need for this beloved community to be sacramentally rooted in baptism and the Holy Supper. Such communities are nourished through Scripture, a strength of Anglicanism, and in the “*anamnesis* of Jesus Christ, the saving history of his death and resurrection.”³⁶⁰

Leech’s call for *communities of rational inquiry* is spot on. Leech defines Christian spirituality “as a spirituality of struggle, of interrogation, a community of debate, a zone of truth seeking.”³⁶¹ Christian communities are called to be inclusive, as centers of expectation and prophetic vision. Leech challenges Christians to frame public dialogue that is rooted in our Christian tradition and centered on the teaching of Jesus to love and serve others and to turn the tables on injustice. It is a sacramentally grounded people that is bold to “call it like they see it,” non-violently, rationally, intelligently, compassionately, and with humility.

³⁵⁹ Leech, *Subversive Orthodoxy*, 34.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 41-42.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

Progressive Christianity's Lack of Organization, Action, and Messaging.

Progressive Christianity has allowed its own colonization by Evangelical Christianity. As Progressive Christians, we: 1) are constantly on the defensive; 2) fail to frame our issues; 3) do not speak out on social justice issues as organized coalitions; 4) are afraid to or do not want to initiate public debate outside of the walls of the parish (mostly out of habit); and 5) we avoid confrontation with the Right. The Religious Right speaks with strident authority and gives the appearance that it has the “voice of orthodoxy.” Evangelical Christians are masterful at working the media to convey it is more “correct” than we are. They are formidable in their rectitude, and we allow ourselves to be intimidated. We know Jesus has been hijacked, but we don’t quite know what to do. We are allowing the breadth of orthodoxy to be usurped and locked down by fundamentalism.

For example, Liberty University, run by Jerry Falwell, Jr., offers master’s degree programs in: Communication, Promo and Video Technology, Social Media Management, Strategic Communication, and Christian Apologetics.³⁶² Liberty University churns out graduates annually to take up these various broadcast communication ministries, progressive Christianity has little to offer to promote our interpretation of the Bible. What are we going to do about this gross inequity? It must be addressed—as soon as possible.

³⁶² LUCMS Team, “M.A. in Christian Apologetics – Thesis Track | Liberty University,” *Liberty University Online*, accessed April 13, 2019, <https://www.liberty.edu/online/divinity/masters/christian-apologetics-thesis/>. Christian apologetics is the study and research of historical, evidential, and reasonable facts to defend Christian theology. In studying Christian apologetics, you will not only look to the Bible, but also strive to find outside sources that reinforce the authenticity of the teachings that are found therein. Liberty University’s Master of Arts in Christian Apologetics strives to uphold this pursuit by ensuring that each apologetics course has a rich foundation in biblical principles. You will have opportunities to grow intellectually and spiritually through the exploration of hermeneutics, studying miracles within the Bible, and the history of Christian apologetics. Follow in the footsteps of great apologists such as Lee Strobel, C.S. Lewis, and our own Gary Habermas to explain and defend the truth found in the Bible.

Faith-Based Community Organizing. Another source of broadcast evangelism comes in the form of conducting community organization “actions” that draw news media attention. Salvaterra and Heltzel offer a helpful definition of community organizing as the “practice of bringing people together to create systemic change in their community. Organizing groups may provide direct services and community development to create change, but they also take on the root causes of problems . . . advocacy, in short, makes democracy real.”³⁶³ Community organizing focuses on advocacy,

[T]he process of calling on leaders (whether corporate or governmental) to make public commitments to use their power in ways that respond accurately and effectively to the needs of those affected by their decisions. Through advocacy, public decision-makers end up sharing their decision-making power with their constituents and communities. When they see a wall, they figure out how to take it down . . .

‘Faith-rooted organizing,’ by comparison, goes a step further. Rather than adapting a secular model, faith-rooted organizing is shaped and guided in every way by faith principles and practices. Faith-rooted organizing is based on the belief that many aspects of spirituality, faith practices and faith communities can contribute in unique and powerful ways to the creation of just communities and societies.³⁶⁴

Three of the most well-known examples of faith-based community actions: The Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King, Jr., the Central American Sanctuary Movement to harbor those facing deportation, and the work of Cesar Chavez in founding the United Farm Workers Association to protect agricultural workers from systemic exploitation.³⁶⁵ Chavez relied on Catholic Social Teaching, papal writings, and mentorship by a priest to develop his message of Christ’s compassion for the poor.

Chavez’s faith-rooted nonviolent strategies had real-world power to change hearts, most memorably in his confrontation with Hollis Roberts,

³⁶³ Salvaterra and Heltzel, *Faith-Rooted Organizing*, 8–9.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, see chapter 1, “The Roots of Faith-Rooted Organizing” for an extensive discussion of the many successful and historic faith-rooted community organizing efforts.

owner of properties where peaches, plums and grapes were grown. Roberts had a reputation as a stalwart and unwavering believer in the free market. He was initially hostile to organized labor and especially to Chavez, labeling him a communist. When Roberts finally decided to negotiate with the United Farm Workers, he claimed that his shift was not merely a result of the economic pressure caused by the strike but more so that he'd come to recognize the error of his own perception and attitude toward the rights of workers in the fields. 'I learned that I was wrong,' he reported. 'I learned that Cesar Chavez is not a communist, that he is a God-fearing, Christian gentleman.'³⁶⁶

In employing love with power, Chavez achieved justice.

Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) Community Action to End Racial

Profiling of Latin@s in Wealthy Marin County, California.³⁶⁷ For decades, authorities in Marin County profiled Latin@s driving through the area and stopped them to check their driver's license and other documents. Without documentation to be in the USA legally, those detained usually had their cars impounded for at least 30 days at a cost of \$50.00 per day. Often, they did not have \$1500.00 to get their cars back. The potential for deportation made these stops scary for everyone in the vehicle.

For 11 years, California voters rejected a referendum that would allow undocumented people a driver's license. However, it finally did pass and was set to become law about a year after the IAF action on January 1, 2015. The face of the license would display a "P" for "Provisional," subject to various conditions.

Our class and this community action occurred 11 months before the new law would take place. The action involved meeting with the police chief and the vehicle

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 24-25.

³⁶⁷ In 2014, I took an Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) community organizing course at CDSP. I wish I'd had that class in my 20s. I learned so much about embracing the power of numbers for the common good. Concepts of public and private power, networking, and organizing inspired our class after participating in an action in Marin County, one of the richest counties in the USA. As part of the course, I attended this organizing action.

impound officer, a representative from the California DMV, community leaders, and members of the Marin Organizing Committee (MOC), an IAF Chapter. The community, police and the DMV needed to work together to prepare for the new law through education, police sensitivity training, and providing driving lessons for some. Here is an excerpt from MOC's website about this action:

Organized to end the San Rafael Police Department's punitive automatic 30-day car impound policy, affecting thousands of local immigrant families. This work led to an ongoing partnership with the Chief of Police aimed at improving neighborhood safety and the relationships between police and immigrant families.³⁶⁸

San Rafael Arcángel Roman Catholic Church, an influential community parish, hosted the event in San Rafael, CA. Public service announcements broadcast invitations to the public to come to the action. Two hundred plus Latin@s attended as guests. The MOC provided headphones for Spanish speakers to have real-time translation of the action's proceedings. Many in the audience wore clerical collars.

At this action, several important goals came to fruition. The people identified and rejected a discriminatory and predatory policy. The community formally checked police harassment. An association of churches, synagogues, non-profit, and civic organizations worked together to stop this practice. The Old and New Testament teachings to "love thy neighbor" were prominently employed that evening. Latin@s spoke passionately and eloquently about what this law will do for the entire community. The hefty revenue stream from unjust impound fines went to the wayside.

The body language of the police chief and her lieutenant were notable. Both were armed with their pistols and billy clubs. The lieutenant, a tall, fit man, stood the entire

³⁶⁸ The Marin Organizing Committee website can be found at <http://www.bayareaiaf.org/who-we-are/history/>, accessed December 30, 2017.

time with his arms folded, exposing big biceps. His countenance showed no emotion and his gaze was fixed on the back of the room. It was disappointing that the two representatives from the police department did not disarm themselves prior to taking the stage with the community leaders. It was as if they could relinquish only so much power even though the community acted civilly and respectfully. That notwithstanding, the paradigm of hopelessness and powerlessness shifted into hope and power that evening. The power in that room was palpable.

Examples of Political Theology and Public Sacramental Theology. The examples below are offered as plausible public acts of sacramental theology. They will hopefully inspire further innovation to bring the Word and Sacrament of Christ out to the people.

- One source of inspiration (from Anglican and other liturgical traditions) is the public reading from the Gospel Book during Sunday service. The deacon, the church's liaison to the people, actually walks the Gospel Book halfway down the center aisle of the church to read the appointed gospel passage in the midst of the people. They, in turn, stand to receive Christ's teaching as read by the Gospeler just before the sermon is preached. A passage from the OT and from an epistle precede the gospel reading, all of which occur in the first half of the worship service known as the Liturgy of the Word. This dramatic presentation of the Word would be a powerful witness or counterpoint on or near government property on a day when social justice legislation is being debated in a governmental proceeding. Including interfaith sacred texts would heighten the profundity of the action.

- The Eucharist is widely counter-cultural as a simple sharing of the sacred supper. It ignores the scandal of how much we make, or how many taxes we pay, or what our political philosophies are. It is holy nourishment from the innocent Lamb that was slain by empire. Anyone can come to the heavenly banquet on earth. Why not hold a Holy Eucharist on a High Holy day by getting a large group to stand in a circle around the White House or on other governmental property? It would be powerful for the people to pass the bread and wine to one another all the way around the circle.
- To address the devastating effects of a deportation, political theologians could stage a kitchen, dining, and family room on the street, along with a religious grotto, to show that a Mexican family once lived here. Signage can explain that undocumented parents were deported. Their American-born children are in non-Spanish speaking foster care. Or, have actors sit at the dining room table and have ICE come in and remove the parents from their terrified children. In other words, bring what happens in private out into the light of day, the public square. Deprivatize this awful “business as usual.” Bring it out in the open like Mamie Till and Beulah Mae Donald did with their sons’ open caskets (see chapter 5), so that these practices can no longer be ignored.
- Or, strew the contents of a family household down a sidewalk or street, with a refrigerator on its side, an oven with its door open, children’s clothes and toys thrown everywhere to dramatize the chaos left behind as well as within the hearts and minds of those so completely humiliated.

Recognizing that some of us are extroverts, and some of us are introverts, we can divide the work as a team, the administrative organizers, the readers and thinkers, the doers and advocates. Each person is a member of the Body of Christ imbued with gifts of the Spirit, and each and every person is needed. Remember the eloquence of St. Paul, “For if the body were all eye, where would the hearing be?” (1 Cor 12:17) We can identify issues that have an impact on the welfare of members of our local community and creatively work out ways to address them.

One of the ways to assess the spiritual gifts and skills of public theologians is to perform an asset-mapping identification exercise. As individual congregants gain more insights into their own abilities and interests, they are able to share these learnings with the congregation. The group can then develop its own customized network by connecting personal networks to form a congregational network.³⁶⁹ Building networks and doing IAF-style power analyses are vital to public advocacy and political theology mission. L. K. Snow has written an intuitive resource for conducting asset-mapping activities.³⁷⁰ Investigating the power brokers who control what impacts people unjustly focuses on how to proceed and often spurs novel approaches to ministry—this is important because it keeps the messages interesting and thus catalyzes theological thinking by the audience. Understanding private sector endorsements and knowing who lobbies for what are especially useful community organizing tools.

Our work life is a rich source for contributing to the enactment of more just and compassionate laws—we can testify before governmental bodies in our areas of expertise

³⁶⁹ Watching this process, as congregants begin to see the power in sharing resources, is dynamic and exciting, even for smaller congregations. Our resources are vast if we learn to tap into them together.

³⁷⁰ Luther K. Snow, *The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts* (Herndon, Va: Alban Institute, 2004).

to foster the development of sound policy. We can lobby legislators about the potential effects of a pending bill as private citizens who are also members of a faith tradition. Why cannot our houses of worship constantly hold vigil and fling our doors open wide as houses of prayer for all, all of the time?

Leech refers these practices as earmarks of the “baptismal community.” He calls on Christian congregations to “take seriously and seek to live out the renunciation of the world, the turning to Christ, and the cleansing and sanctifying power of the Spirit which are at the heart of the baptismal liberty. A baptismal spirituality stresses the continuing conflict with the structures of oppression and injustice, the continuing call to conversion, to metanoia, and the continuing availability of God’s grace.”³⁷¹ Leech notes that eucharistic communities experience awe and point to orthodoxy, or right glory, and that they are “biblical people.” As a result, such communities engage in rational inquiry—“a zone of truth seeking.” They are *inclusive*, and regularly ask, “Who is left out?” Leech concludes this part of his description by calling such gatherings of the faithful as communities of expectation and vision and prophetic imagination.³⁷²

We can be engaged in faith-based community organizing, again, sharing roles based on the skill sets of the individuals in the community. Sometimes this involves attending protests, especially against the government. This is not everyone’s cup of tea because the potential for confrontation, but it is a way to get the church into the public

³⁷¹ Leech, *Radical Orthodoxy*, 41-42.

³⁷² Ibid., 43.

square. Deportation protests underscore that these actions are really happening, and they rip families apart.³⁷³

In his blog, “Engaging the World Through Faith,” Shannon Blosser outlines his local and global approach to evangelical and transformative engagement.³⁷⁴ He also encourages the de-privatization of faith at the local congregation and points to the Industrial Revolution that scattered people and fractured the sense of the common good and communal living and relationships.

Blosser calls us to redefine mission so it is indeed relevant in the 21st century US by being the embodiment of the Gospel in the world. Blosser’s two-part exhortation for the local congregation is helpful. First, it must challenge government’s basic positions and actions through Biblical perspective to avoid the unfortunate assumption that the *“home country is the embodiment of moral good.”* This echoes the discussion in chapter 6 and the examination of Romans 13:1-8. Governments are human constructs and, while capable of good, often lose track of mission and become singularly focused on self-preservation.

Secondly, the congregation is charged with *testing whether the government is working for the welfare of all people*. This reflects the congregation’s true call to speak for the vulnerable, the least of these. He goes so far as to condemn the church’s silence as assent to the workings of misplaced governmental acts and those motivated by greed.

Banks, and schools, technology, athletics, etc., also come under the careful, critical eye of

³⁷³ Just showing up with my clerical collar on and representing Christ’s church, whether I speak or not, is a powerful symbol. It is a performance of faith not bound by municipal sphere or territory, but a presence free of space and time in honor of those on the margins. I stand with them shoulder to shoulder.

³⁷⁴ Shannon Blosser, “Does Public Theology Have a Place in the Local Church?,” *Engaging the World through Faith*, May 18, 2011, www.shannonblosser.com.

the church, as do all aspects of life, *not for power but to embody the Gospel wherever needed.*

A Real-Life Anti-Deportation Demonstration through the Eyes of the Latina Widow against US, the Unjust Judge. Public theology must not be done *only* with messages of love—there must also be power. Otherwise the message is merely sentimental. Faith-based community organizing often involves hard-scrabble, clear-eyed, difficult conversations and actions. There is a place for righteous indignation in especially egregious situations. The need to end detentions and deportations qualifies as a collective egregious situation.

We now revisit the discussion of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge. In this telling, the parable comes alive by juxtaposing it to a true story through Latina eyes. Palma has effectively become a widow because she has been deprived of husband Miguel's shared life and comfort for over a year through his immigration detention. Palma publicly pleads to halt her husband's deportation.

The deportation demonstration, as a faith-rooted community organizing action, occurs in front of the Detroit-based Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office, ironically housed in a building named for African-American civil rights leader, Rosa Parks. Palma steps to the microphone to speak her truth, haltingly, as she looks down at her notes. Her big tears fall and form rivulets pulsing off the smeared page. She pleads for mercy and justice,

Thank you all for being here to support my husband, Miguel. He has been detained for over a year now. If he is deported, his life is in danger. He is my loving husband and I miss him so much. I lost our baby because of the stress. *But I know that when God reunites us, we will have children, a bright happy family.* I ask the ICE Regional Director, Rebecca Aducci, to exercise her

prosecutorial discretion by releasing my husband. Please pray for us and all of those who suffer over deportation. Thank you. (Italics mine.)

In making her public plea, or biblically-rooted cry, Palma climbs out of the land of exile and crosses the border of white privilege to challenge racial discrimination in public.

Palma exercises her prophetic imagination and speaks truth to power through her profound faith. The US Congress operates in the very same way as the unjust judge by seeking to erase both the aggregate Latinx@ contributions ³⁷⁵ to society as well as erasing their personhood. Though emotionally and spiritually naked, Palma's tiny frame grows larger than life as she echoes the Israelite cry of oppression across so many human centuries. Palma defies a socioeconomic assumption that she would allow herself to be silenced, and she stares down the Congress and its citizens.

Palma makes this demand for justice according to Torah, by adoption through Abraham and Sarah, Mary, and Jesus. She throws down the challenge to preserve Miguel's honor as well as her own. She draws strength from God, makes bold statements of faith, and requests intercessory prayers from the community, the place of transformation.

Palma speaks her truth about what how wrathful law criminalizes unjustly and consequently debases human beings. As I stand beside her, she breathes new life into the Parable of the Persistent Widow and the Unjust Judge and brings it into her reality, and into ours.

Latinas' lives are self-descriptive, that is, Latinas are aware that their lives happen within a certain context, a given social reality constituted by a historical-political situation, economics, religious-cultural background,

³⁷⁵ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2004).

and personal decisions. *Their telling of their stories shows how their struggle to survive includes praxis, reflective action.*³⁷⁶ (Italics mine.)

Palma offers three important actions that draw attention to the trauma of her husband's detention and impending deportation. She demonstrates how actions like this result in further faith formation, not just for herself but for the witnesses. First, Palma critiques the American ideology that would have her and people of color contribute to the point of physical and psychological depletion and then the privileged class discards or "disappears" them via deportation, as is most convenient.

Second, Palma gives her pain and vulnerability as an oblation, publicly, and stalwartly. In the words of Old Testament Professor, Walter Brueggemann, "All the way from the cry in Egypt to a theology of the cross, this tradition has affirmed that fresh and mature faith has been strangely given the disjunctions which are [so] costly."³⁷⁷ Transformation, like Palma calls for, does not happen in a state of peace and equilibrium, but rather in the fracture of space and time when injustice is fully acknowledged and restoration to *shalom* occurs. Palma advocates for that very acknowledgement of perfidy and the restoration to Shalom.

Finally, Palma prophesizes for the future in a "practice of social imagination, authorized and energized by the public processing of pain, [as] an act of dangerous subversion but also an act of concrete hope."³⁷⁸ Palma stands with allies against the empire, she intervenes for the "lowly ones," and calls for a new

³⁷⁶ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha/ In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology*, Spanish and English. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 176–180.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 16-20.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 24.

future based on her faith. She describes and bids for the coming of the Reign of God on earth.

Palma knew her story would fall on deaf ears that day, as it had for the persistent widow many times. Yet, she saw injustice, she reflected, and she acted by publicly demanding justice. As described by Ada María Isasi-Días, Palma engaged in a liberative praxis to wrest herself and her community from this oppressive system. Praxis is not something that she just went out and did. Rather, praxis is part of her life; it is about living out her conscience. Like the widow, Palma relied on faith to reorder her reality dynamically.

Palma is a public theologian.

Miguel was deported a few weeks later. Yet, we will continue in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers, in acts of mercy and justice until the Reign of God arrives.

Conclusion

Does it matter to ask “what would Jesus do?” in today’s public policy debates? It absolutely matters to ask what Jesus would do. We, as disciples of Christ and the Way, must constantly ask this question privately in our personal devotions, at worship, in the prayers of the people, during the Holy Eucharist, and in public. There are many Americans who have had a least a rudimentary introduction to Christianity. It seems to me that compassionate, non-judgmental, organized calls to follow the Way of Jesus, based on a solid scriptural foundation, will be relevant to a great many of these same folks.

I debated about phrasing this popular question, “what would Jesus do?” It became trendy and people started wearing “WWJD” on wristbands. But it became trite and a target of mocking. But what if people wore or saw those wristbands and they truly evoked a sense of mission? We would soon experience a more just society, because those hands attached to the wristbands would find their ways to helping others. We can reclaim the Gospel, and we can tap into the power of the Holy Spirit.

My future work will be to develop a curriculum for public theology and hopefully it will call others to turn the world upside down. Through it we will improve our biblical literacy and acknowledge that we each are called to work for social justice as a function of facilitating the arrival of the Reign of God. We will learn how important Jesus’s gynocentric lineage of strangers informed his ministry and models for us how important the stranger is in our faith tradition and in our world.

Through this curriculum, we will grow confident in our roles as theologians in the public square by learning to think deeply and intentionally and process history and

contemporary realities. We will explore ways to speak truth to the principalities and powers, often evil spirits, who must be resisted in their mission to corrupt us all. We will learn American history without the white-wash of our ugly heritage of slavery and racism and recognize how that legacy inculcated in us a habit of marginalizing people of color and to actively or passively participate in their continued exploitation and dehumanization. We will also consider our society's continued tendency to lynch or "other" people out of sense of fear and wondering how our seemingly insignificant selves can ever make a difference in this suffering world.

Through movies and various resources, we will learn to identify American civil religion for what it is, an empire to maintain the status quo of straight, white, male patriarchy and economic hegemony. This will equip us for reaching the public by exhorting to work for an America where justice prevails people thrive.

We will hear stories of pain and hardship because once we now understand the plight of the those who suffer, especially unnecessarily, in the Way of Jesus, we will not be able to turn a blind eye or stand idly by. We will learn to think about the marvelous protection of the First Amendment and no long be cowed into remaining silent out of some misplaced loyalty to the American mystique of the separation of church and state. The laws governing our rights as individuals and members of faith-rooted organizations will become second nature to us, as we pursue political theology as a spiritual practice.

And finally, equipped for political theological we mission we will take to the streets to help bring shalom to our American home. Peace be with you.

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