

Religion and Race

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Bosco B. Bae*

Christianity and Implicit Racism in the U.S. Moral and Human Economy

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Abstract: The relationship between Christianity and racism in the United States has a long history. In an age of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘colour-blind’ ideology, explicit forms of racism have become less conspicuous. Still, disparities arise across the country’s human economy, and explicit statements of egalitarianism are incongruent with practices of discrimination in U.S. Christian churches. This article explores this incongruence and the relationship between Christianity and implicit forms of racism. By discussing theological individualism and the principle of ‘homophily’, the article contributes to discussions about the relationship between the moral and human economy. Through this, a Christian morality of salvific aspiration is translated into a morality of personal economic responsibility and duty.

Keywords: Religion, Racism, Multiculturalism, Theological Individualism, Paradox of Faith, Economic Salvation

Introduction

The history of religion and racism in the U.S. extends back to the first encounters between European immigrants and the indigenous people of America. According to historian Howard Zinn, Christopher Columbus reported that the inhabitants were ‘so naïve and so free with their possessions that no one who has witnessed them would believe it. When you ask for something they have, they never say no. To the contrary, they offer to share with anyone ...’. Columbus, in return for a little help from his sponsoring Majesties, stated he would provide ‘as much gold ... and as many slaves as they ask’ and signed off with: ‘thus the eternal God, our Lord, gives victory to those who follow His way over apparent impossibilities’.¹ Again, while in Haiti, Columbus proclaimed: ‘Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold’.² Despite such episodes, Columbus has been elevated in status, and the negative consequences of his actions were overshadowed by his faith in an exclusive Christianity.³ In some respects, the birth of racism in the U.S. begins with religiously justified exploitation, massacre and war with the Native Americans – although an explicit racist ideology in the U.S. did not fully develop until after the abolition of slavery.⁴ When the Puritans arrived in New England, they wanted the Indigenous people ‘out

1 Zinn, *A People’s History*, 3.

2 Ibid., 4.

3 Harvard historian, Samuel Eliot Morison states: ‘He had his faults and his defects, but they were largely defects of the qualities that made him great – his indomitable will, his superb faith in God and his own mission as the Christ-bearer to lands beyond the seas, his stubborn persistence despite neglect, poverty and discouragement. But there was no flaw, no dark side to the most outstanding and essential of all his qualities – his seamanship’. (Zinn, *A People’s History*, 7)

4 Vorster, “Christian Theology and Racist Ideology”; Marx, *Making race and nation*.

*Corresponding author: **Bosco B. Bae**, University of Pretoria, South Africa; E-mail: Bosco.Bae@up.ac.za

of the way [and] wanted their land'.⁵ They 'appealed to the Bible, Psalm 2:8: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee, the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." And to justify their use of force to take the land, they cited Romans 13:2: "Whatsoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation"'.⁶ Columbus and the early Puritans set a precedent and established the trajectory for a moral economy that revolves around the intersectional axis of religion, economy, and race. In other words, the history of religion and racism is embedded in America's economic history.

This history was also highlighted by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during his speech at the end of the march from Selma to Montgomery on March 25, 1965. He spoke of how segregation was a political economic stratagem 'to keep the southern masses divided and southern labor the cheapest in the world'.⁷ This stratagem was designed to placate 'the poor white masses' and suppress a 19th century populist movement. The aristocracy made it a crime for white and black 'to come together as equals at any level' and while the 'southern aristocracy took the world', they gave 'the poor white man Jim Crow'.⁸ Such divisive strategies were not new in the U.S. During the 17th century, when 'black and white worked together, fraternized together', laws were enacted to forbid such relations.⁹ Again, during the early 18th century, after proclaiming that 'all white men were superior to black', a number of previously denied benefits were provided to white servants.¹⁰ In exchange for psychological and material gifts, i.e. symbols of status, the aristocracy gained a degree of complicity from whites. By using the legal system as an extension of power, the aristocrats cultivated in-group/out-group divisions premised on race, privilege, and entitlement.

The historical precedent of racial separation – engineered specifically for economic gain and complicity of the poor – is an important strand within the broader trajectory of various moral economies in the U.S. For the purposes of this article, I draw on anthropologist Didier Fassin's definition of the moral economy as 'the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, norms and obligations in social space'.¹¹ The emphasis on modes of producing and reproducing a moral climate allows us to use the 'moral economy' as a concept to examine the various intersections between persons as well as their relations to various institutions and social structures. In this regard, the 'moral economy' provides an avenue to engage implicit forms of racism as constituent elements that highlight the relationship between people and the economy. This extends the concept beyond its original application in discussing a society's subjugated people in a particular historical context,¹² so that it becomes applicable to a broader range of groups and demographics across a variety of social spheres and activities. In other words, Fassin's use of 'moral economy' is intimately tied to the multi-faceted

⁵ Zinn, *A People's History*, 14.

⁶ Ibid. In 1610, a Catholic priest in the Americas wrote to Europe inquiring whether the 'capture, transport, and enslavement of African blacks was legal by church doctrine.' He received a reply that the issue had been considered by 'the Board of Conscience in Lisbon' with 'all its learned and conscientious men' as well as 'learned and virtuous' bishops but none of them considered the trade as illicit: 'Therefore we and the Fathers of Brazil buy these slaves for our service without any scruple'. (Zinn, *A People's History*, 29)

⁷ King Jr, *Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March*; citing historian C. Vann Woodward.

⁸ '...And when his wrinkled stomach cried out for the food that his empty pockets could not provide, he ate Jim Crow, a psychological bird that told him that no matter how bad off he was, at least he was a white man, better than the black man. And he ate Jim Crow. And when his undernourished children cried out for the necessities that his low wages could not provide, he showed them the Jim Crow signs on the buses and in the stores, on the streets and in the public buildings. And his children, too, learned to feed upon Jim Crow, their last outpost of psychological oblivion'. (King Jr, *Address at the Conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March*)

⁹ In 1661, the state of Virginia passed a law that punished any whites for running away with any blacks; 'he would have to give special service for extra years to the master of the runaway'. In 1691, Virginia banished any 'white man or woman being free who shall intermarry with a [black], mulatto (sic), or Indian man or woman bond or free'. (Zinn, *A People's History*, 31)

¹⁰ For example, in Virginia, 1705, 'a law was passed requiring masters to provide white servants whose indenture time was up with ten bushels of corn, thirty shillings, and a gun...'. Even before the days of Jim Crow, laws were passed to prevent white servants and black slaves to socialize and commiserate in, what they saw as, 'sharing the same predicament'. (Zinn, *A People's History*, 37; citing Morgan, *American Slavery*)

¹¹ Fassin, "Les économies morales revisitées", 37.

¹² As done by E.P. Thompson in *Customs in Common*, which discussed the 18th century bread-riots in England.

dimensions of the ‘human economy’,¹³ which refers to ‘human needs – not just those that can be met through private market transactions, but also the need for public goods, such as education, security and a healthy environment, and intangible qualities such as dignity that cannot be reduced to dollars spent per capita’.¹⁴ In the U.S., one intersection between the moral and human economy lies in the role of race and the functions of social institutions in perpetuating structural inequalities: mass incarceration,¹⁵ property rights and ownership,¹⁶ housing,¹⁷ employment,¹⁸ judicial prejudice,¹⁹ healthcare discrimination,²⁰ predatory lending and foreclosure practices,²¹ and among many other things, the recent hypervisibility of police brutality. There is an urgent need to identify the trends of thought and action that perpetuate the socio-economic and racial inequalities that exist across lived realities, epistemologies, and the social ethos, as well as the compounded effect of multiple cultures that direct U.S. social institutions.

This article will focus particularly on the institution of Christianity and its contribution to implicit forms of racism within the contemporary context of U.S. multiculturalism and ‘colour blind’ ideology. The article begins by considering the principle of ‘homophily’ and the discriminatory reception practices of Christian churches against non-white newcomers. This opens up a discrepancy between explicit declarations of egalitarianism and practices of discrimination. In order to investigate this further, the article considers three forms of implicit racism and argues that Christianity contributes to the reproduction of implicit racisms by way of in-group/out-group dynamics and the cultivation of theological individualism. The article further argues that such theological individualism translates to an economic individualism that negates history in the context of multiculturalism and colour-blindness.

Discriminating Reception in Christian Churches

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population of the U.S. is estimated to be 77% white,²² and according to the Pew Forum approximately 70% of whites are Christian.²³ Much like a study of race in the U.S. job market,²⁴ Bradley Wright and associates recently conducted a study of race in U.S. Christian churches. Taking on the persona of a newcomer looking for a new church to attend (‘church shopping’), the researchers constructed a generic email and sent it to Christian churches across the United States. While the content of the email remained the same, the name of the newcomer was manipulated: white (‘Scott Taylor, Greg Murphy’), black (‘Jamal Washington, Tyrone Jefferson’), Hispanic (‘Carlos Garcia, Jose Hernandez’), and Asian (‘Wen-Lang Li, Jong Soo Kim’). Controlling for geographical variation,²⁵ emails were sent to 3,120 churches of ‘12 major, organized Christian denominations’:

¹³ Hart, Laville & Cattani, *The Human Economy*.

¹⁴ Hann & Hart, *Economic Anthropology*, 8.

¹⁵ Alexander, *New Jim Crow*.

¹⁶ Harris, “Whiteness as Property”.

¹⁷ Pager & Shepherd, “The sociology of discrimination”.

¹⁸ Bertrand & Mullainathan “Are Emily and Greg More Employable”; Pager & Shepherd, “The sociology of discrimination”.

¹⁹ Eberhart et al., “Looking Deathworthy”; Kang, “Implicit Bias”.

²⁰ Malat & Ryn, “African-American preference for Same-Race Healthcare Providers”; Smedley, Stith & Nelson, *Unequal Treatment*.

²¹ Rugh & Massey, “Racial Segregation and the American Foreclosure Crisis”; Pager & Shepherd, “The sociology of discrimination”.

²² U.S. Census, “People Quick Facts”.

²³ 29% Evangelical Protestant, 19% Mainline Protestant, 19% Catholic, 2% Mormon, 1% Orthodox, <1% Jehovah’s Witness, <1% Other Christian; Pew, “Religious Composition of Whites”.

²⁴ Bertrand & Mullainathan, “Are Emily and Greg”.

²⁵ ‘To achieve geographical representation, we obtained a list of 436 congressional districts (including the District of Columbia) and arrayed them in inverse order according to population density of the districts. Congressional districts have the advantage of containing approximately equal numbers of people, and give churches a roughly similar chance of being selected for the study. We then used interval sampling to select 65 districts (1 in 7) for inclusion in the sample. This procedure not only ensured that the districts were geographically dispersed, but also that they encompassed a range of settings including rural, urban central city, suburban, and small town locations’ (Wright et al., “Religion, Race and Discrimination”, 193).

1. Mainline Protestant: United Methodist Church, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Presbyterian Church, and the American Baptist Churches
2. Evangelical Protestant: churches in the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), Church of Christ, congregations affiliated with the Willow Creek Association, and churches self-identifying as Pentecostal
3. and Catholic.²⁶

The researchers then measured the response rate and the length of response. Notably, mainline Protestant churches displayed the most variation according to race. They responded ‘most frequently and most welcomingly to emails with white-sounding names, followed by black and Hispanic names, followed by Asian names’. By contrast, ‘Evangelical Protestant and Catholic churches showed little to no variation in their response rates and moderate variation in the quality of their responses’²⁷ – a finding that contrasts with studies illustrating that Protestant Evangelical attitudes and ideas are dependent on anti-black sentiments.²⁸ The researchers interpreted their findings in terms of ‘homophily’, a principle which holds that people prefer to associate with those similar to them, particularly for socially-salient characteristics such as age, sex, geographic location, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and race.²⁹ However, ‘homophily’ cannot be the only explanation for such a phenomenon. The results of this study and the argument for ‘homophily’ lend further support to a broader argument regarding in-group and out-group dynamics of prejudice in religion,³⁰ which I will return to later.

At this juncture, what is interesting about such discriminatory practices in Christian churches is their inconsistency: mainline Christians report holding ideological commitments to justice and equality³¹ (an espousal of ‘liberal, egalitarian attitudes toward race relations’³²) as well as to the values of love and tolerance.³³ In other words, the self-reported attitudes of whites about racial and ethnic groups are incongruent with their behaviour.³⁴ In a review of studies in the U.S. between 1940 and 1990 (most of which were before 1970), 37 of 47 studies showed a positive relationship between ‘religiousness’ and prejudice.³⁵ As social psychologist Gordon Allport proclaimed: ‘The role of religion is paradoxical... While the creeds of the great religions are universalistic, all stressing brotherhood; the practices of these creeds are frequently divisive and brutal’.³⁶ The incongruence between belief and practice indicates a covert/overt or an implicit/explicit distinction, which is also to say that both forms are simultaneously possible.³⁷ Persons are capable

²⁶ Wright et al., “Religion, Race and Discrimination”, 193; the researchers do not specify whether they drew from Roman Catholic or from Old Catholic churches. However, given the prominence of Roman Catholicism in the U.S., my assumption is that they did indeed sample from that denomination.

²⁷ Ibid., 199.

²⁸ Calfano & Paolino, “An Alan Keyes effect?”; Hall, Matz & Wood, “Why don’t we practice what we preach?”; Tranby & Hartman, “Critical Whiteness Theories”; Emerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

²⁹ Wright et al., “Religion, Race and Discrimination”, 200; Emerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*; Blau & Schwartz, *Crosscutting social circles*; Verbugge, “The structure of adult friendship choices.”

³⁰ Brandt & Van Tongeren, “People Both High and Low”; Hall, Matz & Wood, “Why don’t we practice what we preach?”; Allport & Ross, “Personal Religious Orientation”; Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*.

³¹ Emerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

³² Wright et al., “Religion, Race and Discrimination”, 200.

³³ Coward, “Intolerance in the world’s religions”; U.S. Evangelical leaders from the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, World Relief, the Wesleyan Church and more than 50 Christian groups produced a statement, “Caring for Refugees: A Declaration of Evangelical Response” (2015) in pleading for solidarity with Syrian refugees. However, faith-based agencies involved in resettlement have developed a stream of revenue as collection agencies for refugees who must repay travel loans.

³⁴ Pager & Shepherd, “The sociology of discrimination”; Pager & Quillian, “Walking the talk?”

³⁵ Hunsberger & Jackson, “Religion, Meaning, and Prejudice”, citing Batson et al., *Religion and the Individual*.

³⁶ Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 444; Hunsberger & Jackson, “Religion, Meaning, and Prejudice”.

³⁷ Stuart Hall (“The New Ethnicities”) noted that research conducted on the era between 1945-1965 in Britain, which was characterized by the ‘West Indian Migrant,’ exhibited a gap between ‘public ideology and private views’. This gap consisted of a publicly ‘favorable attitude towards Black people’ with a politically recognized extension of ‘equality,’ but in private there was an ‘antipathy and prejudice’ by which Black people ‘were not accepted on equal terms in relationship where there was a possibility of social and physical contact’. Toulis, *Believing Identity*, 4-5.

of holding explicit, overt, and conscious racist attitudes while concealing them in survey or interview responses, just as it is possible for individuals to have implicit or unconscious attitudes of racism that are also concealed in such data. While explicit and overt forms of racism were freely displayed in the past, declarations of egalitarianism and ‘multiculturalism’ have today made these practices more likely to be covert or implicit. This raises the question of whether religion does indeed contribute to the formation and reproduction of implicit or covert racism. If so, how does religion contribute to racism, and what does this entail for the U.S. moral and human economy? Before proceeding to these questions it is useful to consider what is meant by implicit racism.

Three Forms of Implicit Racism

According to Hart Blanton and James Jaccard,³⁸ there are three discernible forms of implicit racism which illustrate the ways that people can be complicit in systemic racial inequalities and injustice. The first is the ‘lack of awareness of the effects of one’s own actions on other persons and social institutions, and so on’.³⁹ That is, persons are unaware/ignorant that their actions and speech patterns can promote racial disparities and perpetuate systematic forms of racism⁴⁰; they ‘fail to see how their adherence to accepted social norms inadvertently reinforces existing inequalities’.⁴¹ A prime example is the view that the justice system is ‘fair and balanced’ or that the police are necessarily positive social forces. When the #BlackLivesMatter movement was on full display in the public eye, and soon after the death of John Gray in New York, the media also reported on the death of two police officers in New York. This initiated a #BlueLivesMatter meme advocating for the lives of police officers and an appreciation of their sacrifice in ‘the line of duty’. Apologetic arguments began to emerge: civilians are targeting police and police officers are dying more frequently in the line of duty; critics of the police (it was argued) could not possibly understand the situations officers find themselves in or the split-second decisions they must make. This line of reasoning, despite visual evidence to the contrary, further justified the hasty, unnecessary, and even radically excessive use of force and violence against black individuals.

Joshua Correll and associates designed a study to test the quick decisions police officers had to make in scenarios with black or white suspects.⁴² Using video game simulation, participants were placed in situations where immediate decisions had to be made on whether to shoot the suspect. The study found that participants were quicker to shoot at armed black suspects than armed white suspects. The same trend also emerged when the suspect was only holding a cell phone. According to the National Law Enforcement Memorial Fund, the average number of police officer shootings from 2005 to 2015 was 54. In 2015, the year after Michael Brown’s death, 43 police officers were shot and killed. The average number of police officer deaths has, in fact, decreased from 1970 to 2014.⁴³ In contrast, in 2015 a total of 578 non-Hispanic whites, 301 blacks, 193 Hispanic/Latino, 24 Asian/Pacific Islander, 13 Native Americans and 4 Arab Americans were killed by the police; this is according to an analysis by the *Guardian*.⁴⁴ According to the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, among minorities, Native Americans are the most likely to be killed by police officers (which hardly ever gets any press) followed by blacks and Latinos.⁴⁵

Angela Davis notes how much the U.S. population seems to ‘believe in what the law says’ as if it were a religion; she notes how little the general public is informed of the judicial-penal system.⁴⁶ A. Leon Higginbotham Jr. has illustrated how the legislative and judicial system has played a considerable role in

³⁸ Blanton & Jaccard, “Unconscious Racism”.

³⁹ Ibid., 279.

⁴⁰ Pager & Shepherd, “The sociology of discrimination”.

⁴¹ Blanton & Jaccard, “Unconscious Racism”, 279.

⁴² Correll et al., “The Police Officers Dilemma”.

⁴³ Major, “Media spin on violence”.

⁴⁴ Beer, “Police killing of blacks”.

⁴⁵ Males, “Who Are Police Killing?”

⁴⁶ Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom*, 126.

substantiating and legitimizing the precept of black inferiority⁴⁷ while Reginald Horsman has documented the construction of Anglo-Saxon superiority and subsequent racial ideology.⁴⁸ The 1992 verdict against four police officers in the brutal beating of Rodney King and the subsequent cases which have drawn considerable attention from the media in the 2010s – e.g. Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Laquan McDonald, and more – indicate that neither the police nor the legal system has progressed in addressing the unequal treatment of black persons and minorities. In other words, continuing to hold the view that police officers are inherently ‘good’, or holding a kind of faith in the law as fair and unbiased, reinforces and enables the discriminatory treatment of non-whites. Furthermore, police killings have financial implications for many black and non-white families. For example, in Sacramento, the mother of Dazion Flenaugh told the press that she was unable ‘to afford a funeral for more than three months’ until the mayor donated funds.⁴⁹ This financial strain on families, in addition to the increasing inequality of income and systemic discrimination noted above, is further accentuated when the victim is the primary source of income for a family. By contrast, Ethan Couch, a white teenager, who killed four people and injured nine in an episode of drunk driving on a suspended licence, was *not* shot and killed nor was he placed in jail. Instead, he was sentenced to ten years of probation because his attorneys managed to persuade the judge of a condition called ‘affluenza’. That is, Couch’s irresponsibility and horrendous killing of four persons was merely a consequence of his financial privilege. Such stark differences between the treatment of black and white persons further illustrates how non-white bodies can be considered to be without value, invisible, or not worth defending.⁵⁰

The second form of implicit racism is constituted by the lack of consciousness of ‘racist leanings’ and a failure ‘to perceive the factors that cause them to exhibit racial preferences’.⁵¹ For example, a shove may appear aggressive when the actor is black but seem playful when the actor is white.⁵² When the shove is clearly aggressive or clearly playful, however, race does not play a factor in the interpretation. In other words, race is significant during the interpretation of ambiguous scenarios and many are unaware of this influence.⁵³ Researchers have suggested ‘that social stereotypes fill gaps in meaning when the implications of an action or event are unclear, thereby causing reactions to seem objective, rational, and justified’.⁵⁴ This was also exhibited in children when they were asked to construct a narrative of an ambiguous picture illustrating a black child standing next to a crying white child beside a swing, which was then compared to the same picture with the skin colour reversed. Positive character traits were attributed to the white child standing next to the crying black child (i.e. ‘he is trying to help’) while negative traits were attributed to the black child (i.e. ‘he pushed the child off the swing’).⁵⁵ This form of implicit racism in its application of negative social stereotypes plays a significant role in ambiguous situations within many of the discriminatory practices of the human economy mentioned above.

The third form is exhibited by the use of rationalization and deferment to preserve one’s self-image, self-concept or sense of integrity. That is, a person may hold an attitude of racism without acknowledging it

47 Higginbotham Jr., *Shades of Freedom*.

48 Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*.

49 Brenna, “Sacramento mayor helps”.

50 Kelly Brown Douglas illustrates this specifically for black bodies in her book *Stand Your Ground*.

51 Blanton & Jaccard, “Unconscious Racism”, 280.

52 Duncan, “Differential social perception”.

53 Blanton & Jaccard, “Unconscious Racism”, 280.

54 Blanton & Jaccard, “Unconscious Racism”, 280, citing Kunda & Thagard, “Forming impressions”.

55 This was part of a broader study that re-visited and expanded upon the work of Clark and Clark. Kenneth and Mamie Clark conducted their famous ‘Doll Test’ to investigate the development of ‘racial identification as a function of ego development and self-awareness’ in 253 black children between the ages of 3 to 7. The study looked into children’s attitudes to colour by asking them questions about the character of four identical dolls – two with white skin colour and yellow hair and two with brown skin and black hair. Among other insights, the study overwhelmingly found that the children selected the white doll as the ‘nice doll’ and the one they would ‘like to play with’. By contrast, the black doll was the one that ‘looked bad’ or was ‘ugly’ (Clark & Clark, “Racial Identification”). This research would go on to influence *Brown v. Board of Education* and contributed to the end of segregation in U.S. schools. Led by Margaret Beal Spencer, the Clark and Clark study was expanded, reproduced, and broadcasted on CNN in an AC360 episode entitled ‘Black or White: Kids on Race’ (2010).

as such and attribute their actions to other causes. When white persons are alone in a situation and either a white or a black person is in need of help (when the individual alone is in a position to help), the majority (over 85%) will help that person in need. However, when white individuals are in a situation with multiple persons and all of them are nonresponsive to the person in need of help, a race effect emerges. While the majority still helped the white person in need (75%), only a minority helped the black person (38%). In the case of the latter, rationalization took place: ‘no one else was helping and so I did not think it was an emergency’.⁵⁶ A similar result was reported by David Frey and Samuel Gaertner. Their study showed that white students, when faced with another student who had not worked hard enough at the task, were more likely to refuse a black student’s request for help than a white student’s request.⁵⁷ Social psychologist Elliot Aronson suggests that subtle racism tends to emerge when the action can be easily rationalized by appealing to a character trait. This enables people to act in prejudiced ways while protecting and maintaining their self-image: ‘Justification undoes suppression, it provides cover, and it protects a sense of egalitarianism and a non-prejudiced self-image’.⁵⁸ The reduction of dissonance through methods of justification and rationalization unconsciously serves to protect one’s self-image, self-concept and sense of integrity.⁵⁹

These three forms of implicit racism are *not* illustrated here to argue for an essentialization of white persons, nor is it to argue for a ‘white culture’ that stands in contrast to ‘non-white cultures’. But the findings indicate that ‘people may sometimes lack knowledge of and control over the causes and consequences of their actions’.⁶⁰ In this regard, the social scientific literature has excavated patterns of thought and action in the United States that cultivate an environment of complicity and, directly or indirectly, reproduce systemic forms of racism. The above analysis of implicit racism is an indictment of the U.S. moral and human economy on issues of race. That is, the U.S. fosters a form of ignorance regarding the causes and effects of one’s actions that contribute to the country’s racialization and the systemic inequalities bound up in that racialization.

Christianity and Implicit Racism

The issue of implicit racism and ignorance raises the question of the role of various institutions, among them Christian churches. Congruent with the findings above, the following questions may be raised: How do Christian institutions propagate 1) an ignorance of the effects of individual actions; 2) an ignorance of the causes that motivate the use of stereotypes to interpret ambiguous scenarios; and 3) the use of justification and rationalization that fosters a sense of being ‘good’ while perpetuating forms of racism?

In response, two interrelated dynamics can be discussed. The first pertains to the effect of in-group/out-group dynamics and the desire for homogeneity. A study by Wright and colleagues⁶¹ illustrates the principle of ‘homophily’ by which Christian churches discriminate against minority newcomers. This phenomenon also appears in opinions about inter-racial marriages⁶²: the desire to pass on one’s religious heritage was found to be positively correlated with the preference of descendants to be white and further correlated with disapproval of marriages with black, Latinos and Asians. After controlling for multiple variables, the greatest difference was not between theologically conservative or liberal religious persons but rather between religious and non-religious persons. In other words, for many white U.S. Americans,

⁵⁶ Blanton & Jaccard, “Unconscious Racism,” citing Gaertner & Dovidio, “The subtlety of white racism”; see also Aberson & Etlin, “The aversive racism paradigm”; Saucier, Miller & Doucet, “Differences in helping whites and blacks”.

⁵⁷ Frey & Gaertner, “Helping and the avoidance of inappropriate”.

⁵⁸ Aronson, *The Social Animal*, 308-310; Crandall & Eshleman, “A justification-suppression model”; Also see Uhlman et al., “The motives underlying”.

⁵⁹ Bae, “Believing Selves and Cognitive Dissonance”.

⁶⁰ Blanton & Jaccard, “Unconscious Racism”, 277.

⁶¹ Wright et al., “Religion, Race and Discrimination”.

⁶² Perry, “Hoping for a Godly (White) Family”.

religious heritage was equated with ‘whiteness’.⁶³ The aspiration to maintain consistency and preserve a white religious heritage subsequently creates an opposition and implicit discrimination against out-group minorities at various intersections. That is, the affirmation of one value is the negation of another. In this case, the negation manifests in a form of discrimination against the ‘other’ of which persons may or may not be aware. Moreover, while ‘homophily’ accounts for in-group homogeneity and discrimination against minority newcomers and spouses, it does not explain findings showing that white Christians, despite considering inequality to be a negative aspect of society, consistently oppose attempts to resolve such issues by government programs.⁶⁴ Not only does such opposition to government programs and the desire to maintain homogeneity relate to in-group/out-group dynamics, in which ‘homophily’ is only one-side of the argument,⁶⁵ but the examples also pertain to a greater operative value of individualism that promotes implicit racism.

The second dynamic, associated with the first, introduces the value of individualism as it pertains to the three forms of implicit racism. Individualism within Christianity has been characterized by its emphasis on sin and salvation, both of which function as a consequence of free will and personal choice,⁶⁶ which may, at times, be coupled with the belief in an active Satan.⁶⁷ This fosters a tendency to blame the victim for their victimization: ‘If the Jews have been victimized throughout their history, they must have been doing *something* wrong’ or ‘If those people [African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, gay people] don’t *want* to get into trouble, why don’t they just ... [stay out of the headlines, keep their mouths shut, don’t go where they’re not wanted]’.⁶⁸ The unequal social conditions in which people find themselves are interpreted to be the result of individual actions – for which they must take responsibility – rather than arising from any systemic and structural basis.⁶⁹ In a study of conservative white Protestant Christians in the U.S. regarding socioeconomic gaps and inequalities, researchers found that this demographic:

1. does not see social structures contributing to the inequality, except where they are viewed as undermining accountable individuals;
2. believes the United States affords equal opportunity to its citizens;
3. explains inequality as the result of contemporary problems with African American individuals and their relationships (i.e. they lack motivation; familial problems; avoid responsibility, etc);
4. understands the solution to social problems as changing individuals; and therefore
5. view government efforts to achieve racial inequality as naïve, wasteful, misguided, sinful, and often counteracting real solutions.⁷⁰

The prevailing view holds that the conditions of opportunity in the U.S. are equal and that socio-economic discrepancies are due to the misgivings of the individual and their relational failings.

Furthermore, individualism plays a factor in the preservation of one’s self-concept (noted above). The tendency to perceive one’s self as egalitarian and non-prejudiced can motivate a form of ‘reverse

⁶³ Quite often, the notion of ‘whiteness’ has been equated with U.S. civic identity wherein white persons hold normative cultural status thereby constituting the ‘mainstream’ (Doanne, “Dominant group identity”; Crenshaw “Colorblind dreams”; Frankenberg, “Whiteness and Americanness”).

⁶⁴ Brown, “Denominational Differences”; Hinojosa & Park, “Religion and the paradox”; Sears et al., *Racialized Politics*; Kluegel, “Trends in whites’ explanations”; Schuman et al., *Racial attitudes in America*; Emerson & Smith note an economic component: Evangelicals are reluctant to entertain government programmes that may cause ‘extensive discomfort or change their economic and cultural lives’. (Emerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 130)

⁶⁵ Hall, Matz & Wood, “Why don’t we practice what we preach?”

⁶⁶ Hearn, “Color-blind racism”; Emerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

⁶⁷ Wilson & Huff, “Scaling Satan”; Pagels, *The origin of Satan*.

⁶⁸ Aronson, *The Social Animal*, 323.

⁶⁹ Wright et al., “Religion, Race and Discrimination”; Brown, “Denominational Differences”; Tranby & Hartman, “Critical Whiteness Theories”; Hinojosa & Park “Religion and the paradox”; Hunt, “Religion, Race/Ethnicity”; Emerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*; Emerson, Smith & Sikkink, “Equal in Christ”.

⁷⁰ Emerson, Smith & Sikkink, “Equal in Christ”, 414; Emerson & Smith, *Divided by Faith*; also see Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without racists* and Gallagher, “Color-blind privilege”, both of which note the role of colour-blindness in perpetuating this form of individualism.

discrimination', that is, overly favouring minorities in order to avoid appearing prejudiced.⁷¹ Over the decades, the U.S. has been engrossed in forms of political correctness and attempts to enforce non-racist norms. However, when whites are 'emotionally aroused, stressed, angered, or insulted' they can revert to an 'older, traditional pattern of discrimination', a phenomenon identified as 'regressive racism'.⁷² Even without emotional arousal, paternalistic attitudes to underprivileged groups often justify and reproduce inequalities.⁷³ All of these findings further support the model of justification and the maintenance of a positive self-concept and image for one's self and in appearance to others. The displays of racism noted above further justify an individualistic 'white innocence' while their derogatory actions born out of anger, or some form of emotional arousal, are diverted by blaming the provocation. This excuses individuals from responsibility for systemic injustices while simultaneously contributing to them. In other words, white Protestant Christianity contributes to the reproduction of moral sentiments, emotions and values – the moral economy – that impact the human economy of non-white persons.

Justification and rationalization also occurs through the discourse of 'multiculturalism' and the notion of being 'colour-blind'. In multi-racial Christian establishments, such as Christian Greek Letter Organizations, parties and jokes centred around race perpetuate implicit forms of racism and reproduce racial stereotypes, boundaries and disparities that can be excused, rationalized and justified as benign or light-hearted.⁷⁴ The view of 'colour-blindness', at the individual and group level, is further enforced by the proposition that 'God does not see race' because 'He sees everybody the same... for who they are and not what they look like – who you are on the inside'.⁷⁵ Christian fraternity members emphasize such theological individualism by highlighting that the primary distinction between their own organization and others is 'your purpose is living for Christ and his gospel', 'being Christian and liv[ing] like God', rather than any distinctions based on class or race or 'some of these other cultural differences'.⁷⁶ This overarching mantra of 'colour-blindness' preserves a self-concept centred on being a 'good Christian' while enabling racism as benign and light-hearted. In this regard, the discourse of 'multiculturalism' contributes to the development of implicit forms of racism while advocating for a 'colour-blind' God and 'colour-blind' constituents. At a theological level, such findings beg the question of 'God's character', its conceptualization, and subsequent relationship to humanity.⁷⁷ While such theological reflection is beyond the scope of this article, the findings that emerge from social scientific research on Christianity in the U.S. are important for theologians to further consider such questions in relation to their respective theological frameworks, issues of social justice, and their responsibility and duty to congregations.⁷⁸ Sociologically, the issue of multiculturalism has had a significant impact on child-rearing practices.

Commenting on the Clark and Clark study at a W.E.B. Du Bois Institute Colloquium, Robin Bernstein argued that black children were 'agential experts in children's culture' cognizant of media representations. She argued that children were aware of 'the negative portrayals of black dolls in theatrical scenes of servitude and comic violence ... as unfeeling to pain'.⁷⁹ During the 19th and 20th century, while black dolls were regularly treated with violence, children were punished for doing the same against white dolls. The selection and positive attribution of character to white dolls were reflections of popular media and cultural

71 Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, "Deindividuation and Anger-Mediated Interracial" Cf. Dutton, "Tokenism, reverse discrimination".

72 Crandall & Eshleman, "A justification-suppression model"; Rogers & Prentice-Dunn, "Deindividuation and Anger-Mediated Interracial".

73 Glick & Fiske, "An ambivalent alliance"; Jackman, *The velvet glove*.

74 Gurrentz, "God is 'color-blind'"; Meyers 2005.

75 Gurrentz, "God is 'color-blind'", 255.

76 Ibid., 254.

77 William R. Jones, in his 1973 text of the same name, posed the question: "Is God a white racist?"

78 Soong-Chan Rah proposes and draws on the discourse of lamentation to provide a counter-narrative and critique of present evangelical practices (Rah, *Prophetic Lament*). Elaine A. Robinson in *Race and Theology* proposes a three-part strategy that involves inclusion, ethical theological reflection, and identification.

79 U.S. adults, both black and white, assume that black people feel less pain than white people do (Trawalter et al., "Racial bias"). Dore et al. ("Children's racial bias") investigated when this bias begins to appear in development. They find that a weak bias appears at age 7 and a strong racial bias by age 10. The researchers argue that the bias is not moderated by race-related attitudes or interracial contact.

performance.⁸⁰ According to Bernstein, the Clark and Clark study reflected the knowledge of black children about black and white dolls. That is, ‘African-Americans are “involuntary minorities” who are painfully aware of their disadvantaged status’ in comparison to the white majority.⁸¹ In a reproduction of the 1947 study,⁸² Margaret Beal Spencer noted:

What’s really significant here is that white children are learning or maintaining those stereotypes much more strongly than the African-American children. Therefore, the white youngsters are even more stereotypic in their responses concerning attitudes, beliefs and attitudes and preferences than the African-American children. ... [Spencer further posits that this may be happening because] parents of color in particular had the extra burden of helping to function as an interpretative wedge for their children. Parents have to reframe what children experience ... and the fact that white children and families don’t have to engage in that level of parenting, I think, does suggest a level of entitlement. You can spend more time on spelling, math and reading, because you don’t have that extra task of basically reframing messages that children get from society.⁸³

Not only has ‘multiculturalism’ failed in its attempts at integration, but it has fostered an absence of concern on the part of white parents in educating their children about racism; this unwittingly enables the development of its implicit forms. As Davis states: ‘The principle of color blindness has so saturated our ideas about race that we now tend to believe – at least those who voted to eliminate affirmative action... – that the only way to achieve racial justice is to become blind to the work that race does, which means that racism itself gets ignored’.⁸⁴

The two inter-related dynamics illustrate the ways in which Christianity continues to influence the social reproduction of racism and highlights the view of ‘aversive racism’,⁸⁵ by which implicit racism is cultivated from ‘(a) prejudice that develops from historical and culturally racist contexts, and cognitive mechanisms that promote the development of stereotypes, and (b) an egalitarian value system’.⁸⁶ The former notes the principle of ‘homophily’ and the aspiration to preserve a ‘religious heritage’, which contributes to a containment and insulation of historical and cultural contexts that effectively brackets history while perpetuating certain in-group/out-group dynamics. The latter is noted in the combination of theological individualism and the purported view of holding an egalitarian value system.

Moreover, these dynamics indicate how Christianity continues to influence the moral and human economy of the U.S. The discourse of being ‘colour-blind’ and living in a ‘multicultural society’ has negated past racial inequalities.⁸⁷ The work ethic and values derived from religious conviction⁸⁸ – included within the concept of the moral economy – extend into the myriad of exchanges throughout society and has a direct impact on American lives. Economically, it enables the view that ‘race’ plays no role in one’s socio-economic position while legitimating the present conditions that insulate ‘white privilege’. According to Charles Gallagher, colour-blindness allows whites to identify as ‘politically progressive and racially tolerant’ because of their adherence to a system that does not see or judge by colour.⁸⁹ Yet multiculturalism and colour-blindness have created an additional layer of terminology that individuals can use to shield themselves from accusations of racism; this is in turn given theological significance when discussed with Christianity’s individualism and the notion that ‘God is colour-blind’: ‘God rewards those who live a good life’.⁹⁰ In other words, theological individualism translates into an economic individualism and a morality of personal responsibility by which systemic and institutional factors are discounted: the individual’s

⁸⁰ Proulx, “Professor Revisits”.

⁸¹ Marti, “The Religious Racial Integration”, citing Massey et al., *The source of the river*; Kao & Tienda “Educational aspirations”; Ogbu, *Minority education and caste*.

⁸² Billante & Hadad, “Study: White and black children”; a copy of the methods and results can be found on the website.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom*, 121.

⁸⁵ Gaertner & Dovidio, “The aversive form of racism”.

⁸⁶ Crandall & Eshleman, “A justification-suppression model”, 416.

⁸⁷ Gallagher, “Color-blind privilege”.

⁸⁸ Hann, “Moral Economy”.

⁸⁹ Gallagher, “Color-blind privilege”.

⁹⁰ Hunsberger & Jackson, “Religion, Meaning, and Prejudice”.

predicament is the result of one's personal actions. As discussed, this creates an *absence* of history that effectively dismisses colonialism, its residual effects, and the struggle of minorities in the United States.⁹¹ By contrast, the issues of multiculturalism and individualism, as in the set of questions raised above, invite further inquiry into how non-white Christians and their institutions draw on their faith in response to structural racisms that pervade the U.S. moral and human economy. Undoubtedly, the degree of awareness, action and theological methods of thought will vary within and between various minority Christian churches along with their respective histories in the U.S. In other words, African-American churches⁹² will not only have subtle variations among themselves but will also differ from Latin-American, Asian-American, and Native-American churches in that their response will reflect the forms of discrimination and severity of racism they experience. This is also to note the expanding diversity of minority Christian churches, the potential shedding of white hegemonic norms, and their increasing role in shaping the Christian landscape of the U.S.⁹³

Conclusion

The terms 'white' and 'black' can be provocative. They invoke concepts of 'race', 'ethnicity', 'culture' and 'identity' as well as, more importantly, their respective historical contexts and discursive practices. These concepts have been dutifully deconstructed and de-essentialized in the field of anthropology and are taught as historic social constructions and fictive concepts.⁹⁴ And yet, this important and highly relevant scholarship has not facilitated the eradication of the term nor has it dismantled the embedded systemic practices of racism; the 'relativizing, deconstructionist exercise seemed irrelevant to the material history of oppressed and oppressor'.⁹⁵ According to anthropologist Keith Hart, the world's poor are 'the outcome of western expansion over the last 500 years' and more specifically of 19th century imperialism driven by an ideology of racism. And 'although racism is nowhere officially sanctioned today, it still plays a major part in organizing cultural responses to global inequality'.⁹⁶ In the U.S., during the Ronald Reagan administration, a 'New Racism' emerged which 'devalued civil rights, encouraged resentment against affirmative action, and fostered racial polarization by cutting back on social programs'.⁹⁷ The social reproduction of institutional racism, much like the morality of exchange involved with money,⁹⁸ is tied up with a morality of freedom by which the short-term cycles of individual actions contribute to the long-term reproduction of social orders.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz⁹⁹ argued that the province of religion is where models *of* the world and models *for* living in that world are brought together in a complementary fashion. Drawing on a system of symbols, which go on to establish powerful and long-lasting moods and motivations, religion makes the model *of* and the model *for* 'seem realistic and reasonable'.¹⁰⁰ Religion thus holds a reflexive tension. While the professed views of egalitarianism and 'equality before God' is arguably a model *for* the world, the model *of* the world that Christianity propagates in practice directly contradicts the former. Tanya Luhrmann, anthropologist, states,

⁹¹ One consequence of this absence is a *carte blanche* of re-appropriation; all cultures are free to adopt in the name of individualism and originality. 'Multiculturalism' has thereby contributed to the ignorance of effects, provided additional stereotypical heuristics, and drove once-explicit attitudes of racism into covert forms insulating the development of implicit bias.

⁹² For a richer historical account of the development and establishment of African-American churches see L. H. Whelchel Jr.'s *History and Heritage of African-American Churches*.

⁹³ Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*.

⁹⁴ Scheper-Hughes, "The Primacy of the Ethical"; Boonzaier & Sharp, *South African Keywords*.

⁹⁵ Scheper-Hughes, "The Primacy of the Ethical", 415.

⁹⁶ Hart, *World Society as Old Regime*, 8.

⁹⁷ Shanklin, "Representations of Race and Racism"; citing Harris, *Cultural anthropology*.

⁹⁸ Parry & Bloch, *Money and the morality of exchange*.

⁹⁹ Geertz, "Religion as a cultural system".

¹⁰⁰ Lambek, "Living as if it mattered".

...to a person of faith, the tension between the world as it is and the world of God is the point. Faith is about seeing the world as it is and experiencing it – to some extent – as the world as it should be. Faith is about having trust that the world is good, safe and beautiful – a world in which justice is triumphant, enemies thwarted and you can thrill to the delicate beauty of the day.¹⁰¹

The relationship between implicit forms of racism and Christianity hangs on this paradox of ‘faith.’ For Luhrmann, faith and ‘belief in a just, fair, good world’ is not a ‘mistake’ or some ‘deluded misconception’ but rather it is the ‘nature of the faith commitment’.¹⁰² Drawing on her own research of evangelical Christianity, she claims that ‘faith is the management of the contradiction rather than the blind ignorance about the contradiction.’ This begs the question raised at the beginning of this article: To what extent are these implicit forms of racism held unconsciously? Are they the causes or the effects of ignorance? Irrespective of whether Christians are indeed managing this contradiction, the issue highlights the tension between what *ought* to be the case in this world and how its practice is carried out in a model *of* the world (i.e. what is the case) which simultaneously contradicts and creates a discrepancy with the former by contributing to the concerns it wishes to dispel.

The disparities in belief and practice have been represented in homophilial aspirations of white homogeneity in Christian churches. This article argued that ‘homophily’ is only one side of a larger phenomenon of voluntary segregation and exclusion that contributes to in-group/out-group dynamics along racial lines (although such exclusion is certainly not limited to race; religious group identity may also coincide with opposition to views of sexuality, non-Christian religions, political views e.g. communism, immigrants, or any combination of views). This is not to say that ‘multicultural’ Christian churches do not exist. They certainly do and much research has been conducted on them.¹⁰³ However, much of the debate has revolved around the relationship between religious and ethnic identity, which is underpinned by debates regarding ‘the relationship between the process of ethnic *reinforcement* and ethnic *transcendence* within congregational structures’¹⁰⁴ – a discussion that is also beyond the scope of this article but nevertheless germane. Michael Emerson¹⁰⁵ and Korie Edwards¹⁰⁶ have both argued for the centrality of ‘race’ in such churches. For Emerson, this was construed in terms of whites failing to acknowledge their ‘dominant structural position’ and using ‘their power to insist that churches operate in ways preferred to them’ while Edwards noted how African-Americans had to adopt ‘white-dominant cultural norms and practices in order to fit’ into an integrated church.¹⁰⁷

The disparities noted above in Christianity and the theological individualism which various traditions espouse have been argued to construct a morality of individual salvific aspiration that translates into a morality of personal economic responsibility and duty. Not only is access to heaven in the afterlife dependent upon who you are and what you have done, but your economic salvation is also your responsibility and a function of your agency. By adopting a ‘colour-blind’ ideology and the view of ‘multiculturalism’, race has no bearing on one’s theological salvation and no consequence on one’s economic salvation. The model *for* the world is conflated with a model *of* the world by which the former presumes the existence of equality in the latter. The idealization of what the world *should* be, and the practice of religion in accordance with that romance, negates and dismisses past racial inequalities – effectively creating an absence of history. The social and historical residue shrouded in present discourses of multiculturalism and colour-blindness further cultivate and reproduce implicit forms of racism that permeate throughout the fabric of the U.S. moral and human economy.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰¹ Luhrmann, “The Slain God”.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Marti, “The Religious Racial Integration”; Dougherty & Huyser, “Racially diverse congregations”; Edwards, *The elusive dream*; Yancey, *One body one spirit*.

¹⁰⁴ Marti, “The Religious Racial Integration”, emphasis original.

¹⁰⁵ Emerson, *People of the dream*.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, *The elusive dream*.

¹⁰⁷ Marti, “The Religious Racial Integration”.

¹⁰⁸ Mass Incarceration; Property; Housing; Employment; Judiciary; Healthcare; Predatory lending and foreclosure; School district zones; and Police brutality, among many more. See above for references.

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