

**Race, Racism, and Why Black Lives Matter: An Evangelical Sociologist and Pastor
Responds to the Deception and Falsehoods of *Fault Lines* by Voddie Baucham**

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Preface

In May, 2020 I began a podcast entitled “A Church Dismantled—A Kingdom Restored,” in which I suggested that God was dismantling or taking apart or unmasking the Church because we had so failed God’s mission of good news to a world that “God so loved” and so loves still. The strong response to this podcast led to the publishing of four books in a series by the same name as the podcast. Each of the books takes a different tact to the question of why God is dismantling the Church.

But as I have finished this series, I recognize that nowhere have I brought together in one place the episodes and essays and sermons on racism. My recent discovery of Voddie Baucham’s *Fault Lines* gave me just the foil I needed to pull these together and to present an evangelical alternative by one who has been a sociologist more than three decades and a credential pastor since 2000.

I have been teaching courses on race as well as social theory for as long as I have been at Elizabethtown College—arriving in 1993. Until this year, I had no idea that I had been teaching Critical Race Theory for decades. As sociologists, we have made much less of this newly coined term than have politicized evangelicals.

In reality, CRT is a description of the more 300 years of oppression against Black Americans at the hands of the dominant culture. This is not theoretical or debatable, and one of many problems with latching onto CRT as the culprit of societal and church upheaval is that we can then deny the tragic history of Black Americans.

Voddie Baucham’s book is an anomaly as far as efforts by Black individuals to describe America’s history of racism and slavery and Jim Crow and mass incarceration. It is an anomaly as far as scholarly efforts to address this sordid history.

The problem is that for too many folks, it only takes the voice of a Voddie Baucham to cause them to dig in evenly more deeply and to set themselves even further against the transformation that God’s Spirit is seeking to bring about in the Grand Excavation Project of Isaiah 40 when every mountain will be taken down, the valleys lifted up, the rough places made a plain and the crooked places straight.

My goal is not to critique Voddie Baucham’s work for more than a few chapters here at the beginning. His scholarship is sloppy and his conclusions lack sufficient support. Rather, once setting the record straight regarding his critique of sociology I will offer eight essays (Chapters 3-10) that do not appear together in print anywhere else but were written during the protests for racial justice in 2020-21.

As I have time, however, I will offer additional reflections to this document given the increasing support I am hearing for Baucham’s overt deception and his denial of the demonic darkness that

has entered the Church and that continues to support the sin of dehumanization that has been embedded in our country since its very origins.

Chapter One

“Will We Read Voddie Baucham?”

I had never heard the name "Voddie Baucham" until the Fall of 2021, when it was included as a question posed to the denominational leadership team I serve as a staff consultant. "Will we read Voddie Baucham?" someone asked in a written response to our efforts to create an anti-racism strategy. "Ever hear of him?" a staff member asked those of us at the table? None of us had, and the conversation about confronting racism continued.

But in the weeks that followed, I began to pick up on language in conversations that sounded surprisingly similar—language that connected the racial justice movement or "wokeness" of 2020-21 with socialism and Marxism. Language that suggested the devil was sneaking into our congregations through evangelical writers I had read and appreciated. Language that spoke in derogatory ways about a new social justice. I began to wonder, "Does this rhetoric all connect back to that unknown name of Voddie Baucham?"

Over the past year, I developed a podcast entitled "A Church Dismantled—A Kingdom Restored" and authored four books that came out of that podcast. The gist of the project was the question: "Has the Church so failed to offer the Good News to the world that the Spirit of God is dismantling the Church?" This question emerged for me fifteen years ago as I conducted research on the American Church and discovered what I had long known as a sociologist of religion—that the Church in the West was in deep trouble.

Over the past fifteen years, the evidence of this deep trouble has become more and more apparent with each passing moment. But what Voddie Baucham offers as the source of the problem and what I see from my perspective as an evangelical pastor and sociologist are remarkably different for two individuals who claim the same rich Gospel heritage.

Losing my patience with all that I heard from the saints that so contradicted my Christian convictions, I purchased a copy of *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe*.¹ I'm not sure what I expected when I began to read, but indeed not what I found.

Baucham begins his critique of the Church by laying blame at the feet of my own discipline of sociology—a field and a home in which I've found peace with God and a perspective that has strengthened my prophetic voice since social scientists and prophets are so often up to the same thing. Our task is to reveal the truth. To speak the truth. To "dismantle" the barriers that stand in the way of the truth. To unmask the truth.

In fact, my journey of podcasting and writing over the past eighteen months has reflected both the prophetic and the social scientist. And in these months, I have experienced the love of God

¹ Voddie T. Baucham Jr. *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021).

like never before and have heard day after day a still small voice offering a word of truth for that day. This has been no less than a pentecostal season for me.

So it was a shock to find sociology to be the source of what Voddie calls the "cult of anti-racism." And in doing so, he indicts one Christian leader after another and one, as well as Christian evangelical scholars, evangelical magazines, evangelical denominations, and more. For one who professes Christ, his hit list of Christian evangelicals is substantial. While Baucham blames the new "social justice movement" for the "looming catastrophe" that he believes awaits the Church, it is clear that he is doing his part to make sure that fault lines continue to divide one saint from another.

Aside from the first two chapters, I am not going to take on Voddie Baucham directly in this little book you are reading, but I will offer a different perspective drawn from the many podcast episodes that I wrote over the past year. These episodes came out of decades of a personal life with God, twenty-five years of teaching Race and Ethnic Relations at Elizabethtown College (PA), twenty years of local congregational ministry as an ordained Mennonite minister, and nearly four decades within the social sciences—decades in which I did not abandon my faith in God but found that he strengthened it, decades in which I became not less vocal about Jesus with my students but more vocal, and decades in which I came to cherish and to feel safer in the space offered by the academy than I did so in the Church. I understand why Jesus abandoned the "church" of his day to hang out with the downtrodden and oppressed, why he crossed the "fault" line between Samaritan and Jew and a woman at the well and a rabbi who needed a drink. And why his disciples could not figure out why he was doing what he was doing.

On one thing, Voddie Baucham and I agree—that the fault lines in the Church are real and that the future of the Western Church, at least in the near-term, is likely to be devastation and upheaval and desolation. But unlike Baucham, I don't lay the blame on one side of the Church or the other, nor do I feel a need to be pessimistic or disparaging of the future. I am confident that everything we are experiencing is just part of the Grand Excavation Project of Isaiah 40, where the Spirit invites you and me to tear down mountains, build up valleys, and make rough places a plain and crooked places straight so that all humankind can experience the glory of the Creator.

It may only be in this Grand Excavation Project of the Spirit in these last days, that racism is finally dismantled, not because we deny its existence as does Baucham, but because we finally come to fulfill Jesus' prayer of oneness for the Church, a oneness illustrated by the early Church as it shared all things in common and where resources were redistributed from those who had to those who had not. "Socialism," says Voddie Baucham. "No, the Gospel," is my response. Perhaps the dismantling of racism will only come within a dismantled Church.

Will anything like the evangelical Church continue into the future? Who knows. What I am counting on is that God's freedom and justice project will prevail and that lion will lay down with lamb and that a "little child shall lead them." The way Home folks is Love. Only it will heal us. Only Love will bring the fault lines back together. Only God is the Source of that healing and restorative love.

I hope you enjoy and learn from the following short chapters and that you will check out my other books in the "A Church Dismantled—A Kingdom Restored" from which a few of these chapters are taken

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09CWSD92F/ref=cm_sw_em_r_mt_dp_FZPCH21P73JH75B92

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Chapter Two

What Vonnie Baucham Got Wrong about Sociology

At the outset of his book, Baucham argues that sociology is to blame for being the root of Critical Social Justice, a term he uses as a broader context for Critical Race Theory. His target is Karl Marx, who he charges with "viewing society as a group of different social classes all competing for a limited pool of resources..."² Baucham is correct in naming Marx's writings as foundational to Conflict Theory, a description of the world in which Marx saw significant inequalities, differences in power between social classes and believed that society was inherently in conflict. But who can disagree with Marx's assessment of the world, whether it was the 6th century B.C. in Israel and Judah or the mid-19th century in Germany or the early 21st nearly anywhere around the globe?

And here is where Baucham makes one of many errors about sociology. He assumes that the description of the world by sociologists somehow makes them responsible for creating or constructing that world. If this were the case, the prophets of the Old Testament would have been responsible for the injustice they called out in their society, and Jesus would have been responsible for the injustice of the Pharisees whom he so regularly identified with abandoning God's intentions.

No, first and foremost, sociologists identify what they see in the world. Sociology is a science, and like all sciences, dependent upon the empirical method--or the use of our five senses--to understand the social landscape around us.

Baucham quickly moves from his short critique of Marx to that of Italian Antonio Gramsci, who posited the idea of hegemony as a description of how dominant groups develop power and hold onto power. Again, Gramsci's is a description of reality that Gramsci observed in society that gives us important insights into the sources of inequality and the injustice that inequality brings. Power and oppression and inequality do exist in the world. Structures that keep these in place also exist. Stratification by class is real—just ask those in the bottom rungs of our society. We do not begin our lives at the same place—the playing field is not level.

Interestingly, Baucham fails to note that Karl Marx looked to the early Church in the book of Acts as his inspiration for what society might be capable of creating—where individuals and groups share mutually and redistribute their resources equitably so that all benefit, so that all thrive, and so that all can live into their God-given potential. Perhaps Marx's view of human nature was too high for such a world outside the Church to actually exist. Still, the Church of all institutions should be the last to reject what the Bible models and teaches—regardless of whether that smacks of "socialism" or "capitalism" or any other economic "ism."

Baucham makes no mention of Marx's justified fears of capitalism's dark side and the alienation of the modern-industrial world—fears that both would lead to a society where individuals were alienated from one another by their need to compete for resources and where individuals were

² *Fault Lines*, xii.

alienated from their own work. In other words, people whose identity was no longer in a God-given calling or vocation but for economic reasons found themselves in meaningless factory jobs in which there was little pride or self-worth and where productivity and value were measured against the performance of their peers.

While Marx's vision for society was a massive failure when parts of it were implemented in the U.S.S.R., North Korea, and just about everywhere, his assumptions were based upon a vision for society in which there is ample Biblical evidence that God shares these assumptions. For example, the Old Testament Year of Jubilee, largely abandoned by God's people, was intended to correct the kind of economic injustice that Baucham gives little evidence of seeing or being empathetic with.

In his final jab at sociology, Baucham cites the mid-20th century group of Critical Theorists as just one more step toward creating Critical Race Theory. These scholars were predominantly German sociologists who were deeply concerned about the impact of the modern world on individuals, of the way capitalism had created a society in which everything became a commodity, and in which individuals lost any sense of mystery or creativity because of their servitude to a world in which they were consumers of mass production, commercialism, entertainment, the sex industry, and more. For good reason, given their experience in Germany, these scholars were deeply concerned with a state and economic system that used its power to subjugate the masses. In response, these theorists created the "Authoritarian" or "Adorno" scale to measure the degree to which one had abandoned their own free will and individual agency and had given themselves over to the power of the state and nation and authoritarian leaders.

Again, the Critical Theorists were not responsible for the world they lived in but rather for naming the realities they saw, even if they saw imperfectly. The dilemma for both prophet and sociologist is that people like Baucham insist on seeing the world through glasses that deny inequality, power differences, and ultimately social injustice.

This brings me to my final critique of Baucham, though I have much more I am tempted to offer but will not do so because I do not believe it would be helpful. Baucham is just one of many who live in denial today of the realities of our world and of the Church. I would prefer to offer the reader my own perspective written before I learned of *Fault Lines*.

But this final critique has to do with how Baucham understands what social theory is. Like all scientific theories, social theories are descriptions of the social reality as seen by the social scientist. They are an accumulation of ideas or concepts that are then tested through sociological research and found through empirical evidence to be supported or not supported. Theories in their most accurate forms are sets of ideas about the world created to be tested. Whether we like the results or not is immaterial—the data must be able to speak for themselves.

Since Baucham begins with a critique of my discipline, I will do so as well with a series of essays written over the past eighteen months, first as podcast episodes for the project entitled "A Church Dismantled—A Kingdom Restored."

Chapter Three

Why I Continue to Teach Sociology, the "Dark Side" of Society, and that Grand Excavation Project of Isaiah

In 2006 I began a research project for Mennonite Church USA, a project that was intended to be a follow-up to two other significant studies from 1972 and 1989 of Anabaptist-related denominations. I'm not sure what denominational leaders expected to learn, but to their credit, they took the risks that come with looking at themselves long and hard in the mirror. If they knew anything about sociology, they knew that we have a knack for looking under the floorboards of society, through the windows of homes, and in the basements and attics of whatever and whomever we are studying. We are never satisfied to read the propaganda from a congregation's website, its weekly bulletin, or some sanitized statement of centennial history.

No, sociologists know that where there are people, there is dirt, and where there is dirt, there are treasures to be found. And so like the character who grabs his metal detector and heads out to the playground, park, or beach to find what no one else can see on the surface, so the sociologist insists on looking underneath what we call the "taken for granted reality," that stuff deep in the back of our brains that accumulates over time as we are socialized, and we never even think about it being there. If we did stop and think about it, we would assume that what is in the back of our brains we arrived at in some rational way. However, as Peter Berger and one of my favorite sociologists argues, "the first wisdom of sociology is this—things are not what they seem."³

As I began the denominational project, I took a day retreat to Big Valley, up in the mountains by what we always called Uncle Jake's shanty—a somewhat by now deteriorated hunting cabin in need of repair but all the more mysterious because it is so. Just below that cabin, at some point in the day, as I was praying for direction for the project, I distinctly heard what I believed then and believe now was God's voice, somehow pointing me to the book of Jeremiah, the 31st chapter. I don't remember how it happened, but I found verse 21: "Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take...."

I knew before too long that this verse, this command to the people of God as they returned from exile, was also the lens through which I was to interpret the data of the congregational profile I was leading. By the findings, that somehow, this project was to offer a set of road signs to the Church. And so I read prolifically the various authors who had written about the prophet Jeremiah and what he was up to. And as it turns out, he and I were up to similar things—trying to figure out what God was saying to God's people and what God wanted all of us to know about the mess we were in.

Because God's people then and God's people now were in severe and similar messes—abandonment of the poor and marginalized and widows and orphans, of even sacrificing their children as the pagans did, of spending their money on their wealth and well-being, of abandoning the Year of Jubilee when the land was redistributed to its original owners and slaves were set free.

I analyzed the data that we received through the lens of the prophetic words of Jeremiah. I began to understand that Jeremiah was at least as much a sociologist as I was, and just perhaps a bit of the prophetic was getting under my skin as well. Because both sociologists and prophets perform similar functions: We look where others refuse to look, ask questions others refuse to ask, give answers that are usually unpopular, challenge the status quo, and are both seen as irreverent and

³ Peter Berger. *Invitation to Sociology* (New York: Doubleday: 1963), 23.

sometimes sacrilegious. We often call what some consider sacred as profane (or ordinary, every day) and what is deemed profane as sacred. We are rarely appreciated in their lifetimes, and only so once it appears that perhaps we knew what we were talking about after all.

Christian Smith, an evangelical Christian and well-known sociologist of religion from Notre Dame who has done substantial work related to evangelical youth culture, argues that the role of the sociologist is to examine the dark side of society, the underbelly of the worlds that we live in—those social realities that we deny, ignore, and cover-up until the next generation has no idea those parts ever existed. Perhaps if we refuse, ignore and cover up the truth about our families, churches, universities, and other institutions, the truth will never come back to haunt us. But sociologists are the unveilers of that which is denied, ignored, and covered up. And for that, we are rarely appreciated.⁴

The prophetic role of sociology was clear from its beginnings. Karl Marx, writing in Germany in the mid-19th century, predicted that the modern world and the industrial revolution would evolve so that human beings would become alienated from one another, from their work, and even from themselves. He was wrong about many things but not about that. Max Weber, writing in Germany about half a century later, argued that modernity would create an iron cage that would trap human beings within it—that the rationalization of society would eliminate mystery and humanity and the appreciation for that which is nonrational emotions. Weber predicted that the only thing that would set human beings free was the arrival of charismatic prophets or discovering ancient ideals.

Sociology and its prophets arose because the social world was changing rapidly, and the ground shifted under their feet. This shaking created space for sociological questions to emerge as the Church and state lost their traditional authority. Similarly, I've told my students that this period of Covid-19 is the richest moment I have experienced in three decades to be a sociologist. Why? Because there is room now to ask questions, we would not have even thought about asking a year ago? This is a time for creativity and imagination to emerge because the old ways of doing things are going out the window, and we get to create and imagine in ways we never even thought of before.

In some ways, I told them, the pandemic has taken most of us out of our taken-for-granted realities and, as a result, has given us new eyes for seeing the world and discovering new things about it and the world.

The same is precisely true for the Church. God made it clear to Jeremiah that he was to do two things—tear down and build up, for that is the prophetic calling. Tear down those things that get in the way of God's highway to the new heaven and new earth and build up what is needed so that folks can access that highway.

The profile of Mennonite Church USA in 2006 revealed a church that was aging rapidly and losing its youth and young adults; a church that had become highly politicized since the early 1980s, a church that continued to struggle with racism both at individual levels and institutional and aggregate levels and so on.

⁴ Christian Smith. *Lost in Transition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

As I wrote, these findings became the road signs for the project and the Church. But as I looked at what was the dark side of the Church, I remember the moment when I asked myself: "What if the Spirit is dismantling the church?" That was nearly 15 years ago, and from my perspective, what has occurred since then has only accelerated this dismantling—the scandal of abuse in Roman Catholicism, the embrace of Donald Trump and politics as the way to reform society by many white evangelicals, the running away from the Church of our youth, the fall from grace of many evangelical leaders over issues of morality and integrity, and on and on. In so many ways, what we knew as the Church is simply revealing ever more fully its dark side that we thought was sufficiently covered up. But the bones in the closet never lie, nor do they go away, and if we don't excavate them, we live under their power and deception forever.

In this way, while the sociological perspective seems frightening to some, and is not as Berger says for those who prefer the "taken for granted reality" of what they learned in Sunday school or elementary school. But for those who are willing to take it on even for a brief spin—sociology has the power to show us the puppet strings by which we are being controlled and constrained. And that knowledge, says Berger, may be enough to set us on the path toward freedom.

In other words, both the prophet and the sociologist understand that we are always better off having our eyes open than closed—even when the news from the doctor is grim and tells us, we have three weeks left to live. It is always better to live with open eyes, which is the promise of both the prophet and the sociologist.

And so, if the Spirit is dismantling the Church, I want to be among the first to help the Spirit. But when the Spirit turns to the building up, let me be there as well—for both are the work of the prophet and both the work of the sociologist. And that is why I continue to teach sociology.

Chapter Four

What Sociologists Are and What We Are Not--Keeping Our Eyes Wide Open, Knowing that Ignorance Is Not All It's Cracked Up to Be

There is no way I can teach a course in sociology anymore without mentioning Peter Berger, a longtime sociologist, now deceased. More than any other has helped me understand society, my discipline, and myself. I tell my students that Berger has a way of writing that occurred in a day when students actually read books. Or perhaps Berger just couldn't resist long sentences, long paragraphs, and long chapters, doing everything that good writers these days say we shouldn't do. Getting a bit rambling and lost in his pursuit of what he called the "doings of men."

This week, my students read the first and last chapters of Peter Berger's little book, *Invitation to Sociology*. He attempts to help the person on the street, the average person, the layperson, understand what sociologists do and who we are.

Berger makes the point that the sociologist is not a social worker or psychologist, but more a philosopher or historian, who is mainly interested in what people are doing over there and why in the world they're doing it. He notes that there are no good jokes about sociologists, not because we fail to make idiots of ourselves; looking in those places, we should keep our nose out or speak out of turn to people who yield big sticks. But because so few people on this planet even know we exist, it's hard to laugh about something you don't remember and harder to joke about someone you've never heard of.

And the sociologist is not one who, when those questions start to percolate in their head, readily gives up and goes home and turns on the TV. No, the sociologist watches, observes and listens. What are they saying? Who is saying it? How are they saying it? Who are they talking about? What will happen if they actually do what they say? Where are they going? The work of the sociologist comes down to investigative work driven by curiosity and a belief that things are not what they appear to be. The sociologist gets that, and in what Berger says is wisdom. But all of this gawking around at the world requires a few personal qualities that are not readily present in any of us. And particularly not among us who have such big egos in academia.

The first of these qualities is patience, patience to wait until something happens. Patience to listen to what is happening. Patience to test one hypothesis and then another and then another. For this is what science is really all about--nothing other than the debunking of one idea after another, rather like peeling back an onion, one layer at a time. A willingness to debunk what we assumed to be real and true and sound is the second value or quality of the sociologist, but once again that is something that most of us don't do readily. The sociologist lives for that moment when they can gleefully say to the folks in power, "I told you so. I knew none of you were wearing any clothes in that parade. I knew the emperor was as naked as a jaybird. What was wrong with you people that you believed him when you all knew that all along he was lying through his teeth?"

If someone were to come up to the sociologist and he asked them, "How did you know the emperor had no clothes on?" They are likely to say something like this, "Besides the fact that my eyes told me, so I asked those little kids over there, and they told me the same thing. Because the sociologist bases their conclusions on empirical realities, on what our five senses tell us about what is true and real in the world, and not what I wish was true in the world or not what I dream is real or true in the world.

As my friend and fellow sociologist Mike Schwartz likes to say, human beings have a kind of built-in rubber band that stretches for a time but usually pulls us back into what we've always believed to be real and true. And they depend not only on their own senses but also systematically ask what others see, often using surveys, focus groups, and interviews. But the sociologist knows that convincing folks that what they're looking at is a mirage or that what they're listening to is actually a lie or deception is not an easy task. In other words, it might be possible to convince a few folks that the king is naked. But sooner or later, even those who saw a naked king will quickly begin to see him with his clothes on once again, not because he found his britches, but because they once again found their rose-colored eyeglasses through which they and everyone else looks at the world.

The sociologist finds time and again that revealing the truth is usually an uphill battle because most of society is so invested in burying the truth, even if it means they get buried in the process. This is why Berger asks rather whimsically whether we harm undergraduates by feeding them the "poison" of a sociological perspective. But he quickly says not really, because students who spend a semester learning sociology and end up debunking much of what they learned in Sunday School or elementary school will, once the semester is over, be pulled by that rubber band back into position. Instead, they will remember that cute boy or girl who worked with them on a class project. And the truth they learned in a semester of undergrad sociology will go down the tubes.

In fact, Berger is so cynical about the interests of pursuing truth among undergrads that he claims they could care less what he does in class--whether or not he simply reads a phone book out loud

not. I often suggest that if they could get their degree for the same price at Turkey Hill, which is a convenience store down the street, but without going to class, they would jump at the chance. And usually, nobody argues with me.

While Berger is cynical about the likelihood that a semester in the sea of sociology will cause will the shipwreck of undergrads, he is much less pessimistic about the potential within sociology for those who stick with it. The teaching and studying of sociology are justified, says Berger, among those who believe that it is "better to be conscious than unconscious and that consciousness is a condition of freedom."⁵ In other words, sociology is a discipline that values living with our eyes open rather than closed. And sociologists believe that open eyes are more likely to lead us to freedom at the end of the day than are closed eyes.

I often tell my students at this point about my experience with cancer when I was 35 years old. I wanted to know the truth. "Doc, tell me the truth. How long do I have? Am I gonna make it? Is this treatment going to work? Is this surgery going to find what we need to find?" Three years ago, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease, and I still feel the same way. I want to know how many good years I've got. I want to know how long I'm likely to keep teaching. Tell me what my increased tremors mean this year.

And yet, there is more than just information or data that sociology offers us by encouraging us to live with our eyes open. In part because there is so much we as human beings don't know, including about diseases like the one I have. What I really need to know is that I will be okay. I really need to know that my friends and family will walk this journey with me until that last final breath. But if I keep my eyes close to what lies ahead, I will also miss all the beauty of their company as I walk there. I will miss all of the beauty of creation that always looks brighter when we know we've got fewer days to live than more days. Keeping our eyes open touches the deepest parts of our hearts and causes us to make peace with whatever we see when they are open. But for those with their eyes closed, too often, they are drinking or drugging themselves into oblivion.

I used to wonder what it must feel like to get old. I remember looking at my elderly grandfather, who I loved dearly, and wondering how in the world he lived with the knowledge that he would not live to see his grandchildren grow up or that at age 85, his days were seriously numbered. But at 56 years of age with Parkinson's Disease, I am more than ever aware of my horizon. And especially when my family doctor says something like this, "Conrad, you have an all-encompassing disease, and you don't want that disease." As if I can close my eyes and make it all go away. Wishing it out will never heal me and will only make me more miserable to live with.

But this diagnosis, because my eyes, by God's grace, are open as much as possible, has given me a view of the horizon of my life that I would never have gotten without this disease. And keeping my eyes on that horizon has caused not dread but joy. I now know what I want to do with my life and what I don't want to do. I'm not going to spend time on committees that do nothing. I'm not going to say yes to going out to lunch with people who just want to flatter me or who want to flatten me with criticism.

⁵ Invitation to Sociology, 175.

Now I'm going to spend my days the days I have left with my dear wife and my best friend with my son and daughter-in-law and grandsons, with my students who I still enjoy so much, with traveling, and by enjoying the good gifts of a loving God. This disease and seeing the horizon have clarified my focus and what I really want to do with the rest of my life.

Keeping my eyes open to the diseases that I have and are likely to contribute to my death will not make the condition disappear. But keeping my eyes open will show me what I need to do to live the best life possible with the good days I have left. And for that reason, I would not close my eyes for the life of me, for the life of me is lived most nobly in its quality rather than its quantity.

So if you would rather live with your eyes closed, believing that ignorance is bliss, the table of sociology is not for you. But if you want to figure out the truth with others who want to live with their eyes open, sit down and join me.

Chapter Five

How Sociology Helped to Save My Soul—Sort of

A friend who follows my podcast recently noted that I certainly have absorbed the sociological perspective. My immediate response was something to the effect that "I think that it was always embedded within me--that I found sociology because I had always questioned the reality of the cultural context within which I grew up." I added, "In fact, I think that is how I survived."

What I meant was that the sociological perspective, which refuses to accept the "taken for granted reality" of one's world, helped me to negotiate and find my way through a cultural map with signs that often tended to point "this way to hell" than "this way to heaven." I have no doubt that my experience of that culture was in some ways unique to who I was and the religious preoccupation I've mentioned earlier. But I've also heard from enough others to know that I was not alone in perceiving reality as such.

My students are reading Ira Wagler's second book entitled *Broken Roads: Returning to my Amish Father*.⁶ Ira grew up in the Old Order Amish church and finally left that culture at the age of 27, after years of torment and coming and going, but finally recognizing that he could not survive within it. In this most recent memoir, Ira describes the reconnection he makes with his father, himself an Amish writer and founder of numerous publications, as well as Pathway Publishers--a publisher of Amish materials.

In reflecting back on his childhood, Ira notes and then asks: "...I have always felt that the fictional writings and op-eds...were less than honest. Too much gooey mush. Too didactic. Too pat. Too formulaic and predictable. All the same answers, all the time. All the loose ends are neatly tied up in a little package...Over the years, I have wondered many times if my father and his contemporaries ever questioned the path they chose. The God they served. Did they ever despair that He exists? Question their faith? Or was it always cut and dried?"⁷

These are sociological questions, but they are also deeply spiritual questions. For sociology as an enterprise, in some ways, is nothing more than creating space to ask questions that others have

⁶ Ira Wagler, *Broken Roads: Returning to My Amish Father* (Tennessee: FaithWords, 2020).

⁷ *Broken Roads*, 1

been afraid to ask, that others have been punished for asking, that others have forgotten are even questions anymore.

As one of my students noted, for folks like Ira, the Amish "formula" just didn't work. The formula or equation or recipe meant to bring order and community, for folks like Ira brought confusion, torment, and alienation instead. And when the discomfort of the latter exceeds the comfort and promise of the former, stepping out, even if it is into an abyss, might just be the step towards home, towards salvation, towards grace, towards our Lord.

This is why I resist running too quickly from the thesis of "A Church Dismantled." One reader noted that such a thesis is just part of the current "spirit of the age." I would beg to differ--this deconstruction of darkness began the moment we sinned and separated from God in Eden; it continued at the Tower of Babel; it was the origins of the Protestant Reformation, and I would argue there is always the precursor to any genuine renewal movement of the Spirit.

No, the dismantling of a church that too often brought darkness rather than light to those of us peering through the darkness for the light is holy work. It is ongoing work. It is the excavation work of the Spirit in Isaiah 40--removing mountains, raising valleys, making crooked places plain and rough places straight.

And in the culture I grew up in, it should also include the dismantling of billboards with Scriptures that remind passerby of darkness rather than the Light, which kept kids like me awake at night peering through that darkness, believing beyond belief that Light must be out there somewhere.

It must have been one of those nights when I distinctly remember my mother teaching me Psalm 56:3, the "Psalm of the Week" for me this week: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in Thee." Despite my chronic belief that the One to be most feared was God himself, it was his grace alone that caused me to doubt that the darkness was the only reality or even the greatest reality, and that out there somewhere and someday, the Light would show up for me.

And thanks be to God, it did and has.

Chapter Six

"Perilous Preaching in a Sundown Town...but 'One Little Word...'"

The following essay is adapted from a chapter in Book 2: *Ministry in A Church Dismantled: To Build Up or Tear Down?* This chapter reflects the anxiety I experienced in preaching a sermon on racial justice in the Summer, 2020 in a town that was a "Sundown Town" into the 1960s, where African Americans who worked in Elizabethtown had to live in the local borough of Mt. Joy.

I preached the sermon outside in the parking lot because of Covid-19. At the height of my anxiety, while preaching and trembling, I heard a local church's bell tower ringing out, "A Mighty Fortress is our God." At that moment, I remembered that "One Word" will "fell" the demonic forces that continue to perpetuate racism in our community and in our churches. And no wonder--they were given such free reign

for so long. But that "One Little Word" who is "The Word" will have the last word on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized. So here goes:

The lines between podcasting and preaching blur for me as I become more honest in all the places God has called me to, about who I am and what exactly is my story and my song. As I do so, I am much less anxious at Elizabethtown College about speaking the truth of my life with God and its implications for my view of the world than I am in the Church these days doing the same. This is not a critique of my own congregation but an awareness of my understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. During this pandemic, the political polarization that divides us and the fires of efforts to bring racial reconciliation and justice do not align with what so many others believe in the broader Church.

And so yesterday, as always these days, when I tremor on the inside, it becomes apparent on the outside. I shared with the congregation that I have primarily focused on nurturing our life with God over my years of preaching—and this is true. I believe that all we do and say and how we live flows out of the degree to which we have a life with God and have an intimate connection to him. I also believe that any concerns we have about justice in the world must flow from that life with God, or we will eventually tire of the fight, lose heart, and abandon the cross. As we live life with the Author and Perfecter of our faith, we endure the cross and keep in sight the "joy set before" us.

But when I look at the Church, what I see is that either we have no life with God, or we have such a thin life with God that it makes no difference in our ethic or how we live our lives, or we simply don't see the connection between life with God and the life to be lived in the world that God so loved and so loves still.

I preached from Ephesians 2 and 3, where the apostle Paul declares that Christ has come to dismantle the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, that the two are now one body in Christ Jesus. That Christ is our peace in making the two who were hostile toward one another one through the cross. This, says Paul, is the mystery of Christ. The mystery of Christ is that his death and resurrection destroyed barriers between God and humankind and barriers between humanity and humanity. The division and wall between white and Black in this country began with the forced enslavement of West African men, women, and children—who were forced at gunpoint onto ships to endure conditions that none of us today would even consider acceptable for livestock.

But that was the point: These human beings from the beginning were seen as nothing besides property, property to be used for economic gain by white Europeans in the New World's plantations, plantations owned and operated by the founders of this nation. Thousands upon thousands of these men, women, and children died during their transport across the Atlantic, and when they arrived upon the shores of the "land of the free and home of the brave," they had already been stripped of their human dignity and freedom. If anyone were brave, it was certainly they. And yet, like our Lord, both at his birth and during his ministry, they found no home when they got here.

The word "race" doesn't show up in the English language until the slave trade, and its emergence is directly tied to being a Black slave. Thinking of oneself as white was a new thing also up to that point, but suddenly the color of one's skin, or what W.E.B. Dubois calls "the color line,"

became written into the fabric of this nation.⁸ The sin of declaring one group of God's children as less than human and treating them as such for the last four hundred years is sin that this country is paying for now and will continue to do so for decades to come.

Stepping into the message yesterday, I was trembling extraordinarily, aware that I was stepping into the middle of this war against the mystery of Christ that is being fought in the heavenlies. As African American Bishop Al Motley once told me, "the work of anti-racism" is spiritual warfare. As I expressed in my message yesterday, if we who are white had experienced the enslavement, lynchings, family separations, rape, assaults and beatings, separate but not equal facilities, police brutality, and mass incarceration of Black men—we too would have no trouble seeing the demonic in this history. We who are pastors know that if it is safety and security we seek as preachers, and if that becomes our point of reference, we will never be part of lowering the mountains and raising the valleys of Isaiah 40, of making rough places plain and crooked places straight. No, every excavation project has enormous risks to those who enter it—some will lose their lives there, as did Martin Luther King, Jr. He had an uncanny sense just before his assassination that he had gotten to the top of the mountain like Moses, but that he just might not get to enjoy the fruit of the uphill struggle that had brought him there.

Pastors, the author of Ecclesiastes (9:12) warned us about this day: "Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come. As fish are caught in a cruel net, or birds are taken in a snare, so individuals are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them" (NIV). Evil times that fall unexpectedly are upon us, pastors. If you are paying any attention at all, these times are here. Times not unlike what Martin Luther found himself within, times not unlike what Dietrich Bonhoeffer found himself in during the Third Reich, not unlike what Martin Luther King, Jr., John Lewis, Ralph Abernathy, and so many other saints throughout history have found themselves in.

As I was trembling and preaching outside in our parking lot yesterday, suddenly, the bells of a neighboring church began to peal to the tune of "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." As the bells rang out, I found I could not compete with the sound, so I just stopped, and we listened. At that moment, I recalled my favorite stanza from that hymn. This stanza reminds us that Luther knew the battle that he had been dropped into in his generation, but that he also knew that the One who had unexpectedly called him to that battle was more than sufficient to ensure that the Truth of

⁸ W.E.B. Dubois. *The Souls of Black Folk*. (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1909).

God would overcome the Prince of Darkness with just one little word—that word above all earthly powers—the One made flesh, who came to a planet where all hell was breaking out then just as it is now.

"And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us. The Prince of Darkness grim—We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, For lo! His doom is sure—One little word shall fell him." That Word who came not to fell the political powers of that world or to conquer that world or to raise up an army against the Roman Empire, but to sneak quietly and unnoticed into that world, ambushing and overthrowing those powers by a greater power—the power of love—not of rage, division, or confusion—such inferior powers that at the end of time will along with the devil himself be thrown back where they came from. But the love that casts out all fear? Keep preaching it, pastor—that's how the story ends.

Chapter Seven

For Pastors Preparing to Preach in That Perilous Pulpit Once Again Tomorrow

Preaching during this pandemic season, protests for racial justice and political polarization that threaten to upend the presidential election are complex and potentially dangerous for the one who gets behind the pulpit each week. The division within the country has found its way into our churches such that there is often little tolerance for pastors to address the very issues that are right smack in front of us in the news every day. Politics has become the new sacred cow for the Church. Pastors are given space to preach as long as what they preach doesn't smell like being political. But what sounds like the Gospel to one may sound like politics to another. The problem is that we live in a culture in which everything has been politicized so that the trick of the devil is that if a pastor is to satisfy those in the pew, the list of things they can preach about is increasingly limited. For even God and the Bible have been politicized. When that happens, there really isn't anything a pastor can safely get away with except perhaps greeting the saints with a smile and having an opening prayer, followed by a benediction.

But this scene isn't new to the Church because the devil isn't very creative. It was experienced by Paul in the first century just as the Church was getting off the ground. Paul talks about divisions between those who loved Paul, those who loved Apollos, those who loved Peter, and, yes, those who loved Jesus. Paul is aware that a church with walls is an immature church, a church that has not yet lived into the mystery of Christ, which he preaches about in Ephesians 2 and 3. The mystery that there was One in the universe who could tear down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. Given Peter's difficulty overcoming this new mystery, I suspect that Paul's proclamations in Ephesians 2 and 3 sounded a bit like political propaganda to the Church fathers back in Jerusalem, who raised their eyebrows as they read Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus. It makes me wonder if they wished they had had the power to censure Paul.

But, no, Paul says in I Corinthians 4, nobody except God will be my judge. Paul was not going to get caught in the middle between those who saw the good news he proclaimed as gospel freedom and those who may have seen it as propaganda that they rejected for the teaching of Apollos. Paul was so incredibly focused on one thing—and that one thing was Christ crucified, and that grand mystery was that in Christ, every wall had to come down, between Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free. And if that sounded political to his audience, I get the sense from I Corinthians 4 that Paul could just care less. Just think for a minute how radical Paul's message of

equality across these dividing walls had to sound to everyone who heard it. What sounded like politics and propaganda to those in power (Jews, men, and the masters of slaves) undoubtedly sounded like the bells of freedom to those on the margins (Gentiles, women, and slaves). Imagine what it must have sounded like to the Gentile, to the woman whose husband had abandoned her, and to the slave biding his time until he could run away into the night.

Because you see, as I've mentioned before, who you are and where you sit in society's social hierarchy has a significant impact on how you hear the Gospel—as politics or as freedom! We have done without being aware of it as a Church to privatize our politics, separate them out from the scrutiny of the Church, and argue that my politics are my business and not the Church's, and certainly not the pastor's. I get to make my own decisions about my political preferences. The Church has no right to inform those decisions unless the preacher happens to agree with my political choices. I wonder what we just might tell Jesus to avoid teaching or preaching about today because it is just a tad too private and personal, and we're not sure we want him telling us what we should do.

I have long told my students that in the modern world, we have separated out our religious beliefs and commitments from the other areas of our lives—from our work, from our recreation, from our finances, from our sexual activities, from our education, from our political engagements, and on and on. Going to Church and being a Christian is one thing we do and one part of who we are, but these do not dictate the rest of our disintegrated selves.

For those members who do not want their preacher to preach about issues related to politics, what are they ultimately saying? Are they saying that the Bible has no relevance to social and political issues? Are they saying that they know best personally about these things and don't need anyone else speaking into their lives about them unless it's their favorite talk show host? Or are they saying, "Preacher, we also don't want you speaking about other private issues such as sexuality, we don't want you speaking to our finances because this is a private thing, we don't want you speaking about going to war, because I have my own personal views on this, we don't want you addressing the sacredness of marriage because we don't agree with you." Where does this kind of reasoning stop once we start down this road?

Which raises the question for all of us: Is there just a chance that in this time of global upheaval, national chaos, and many reasons to be anxious, we have decided to take things into our own hands—to give up on God's Word as the source of our faith and life and future, and to build a small golden calf that seems so much more relevant to us, or to find a ninety-foot statue to worship because the king we worship has told us to do so and all the other Christians seem to be doing it too?

Pastor, this is a time for courage. This is a time to reclaim the place of Scripture for every area of our lives. This is a time to reclaim the ethic of Jesus, who came not only to bring us back to God through his death and resurrection but also spent three years teaching us how to live in a world that was falling apart then as much as our world is today. This is a time to stand with a long line of reformers who, in speaking God's truth regardless of the cost, are remembered for having salvaged the Church at a time when it otherwise might have been lost.

If you listen to what Jesus taught and how he lived his life, what you will see and hear is one who largely ignored the politics of his day and instead spent his time telling stories about the Kingdom of God to the down and outers—a kingdom that as he said that was not of this world.

Those stories often focused on why Jesus had come to be with us in the first place, "to preach good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoner." But, like today, that message sounded strikingly political to those in power, and for that political message, our Lord found himself in deep trouble with those in power.

Pastor, tomorrow morning, we are telling stories of a kingdom much greater than the one with the sacred cows, golden calves, and ninety-foot towers. We are telling stories about a kingdom that will put to dust those cows, calves, and towers one day. If telling such stories gets us into a fiery furnace or hauled off to the top of a hill somewhere, don't worry; we will be in good company either way. That fourth man is already there waiting for us, and his word to us will be, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Chapter Eight

If Gentiles Mattered—Then Black Lives Must Matter Also

And you he made alive, when you were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not because of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. ¹¹ Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end. ¹⁷ And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:1-22 NRSV).

It is difficult for we who are white evangelicals to accept or understand the continued relevance of racism to our society and to the Church. But then, if we are honest, it was also challenging for the early Jewish Church to accept that the Holy Spirit was being poured out upon the Gentiles, a people whom God had explicitly called upon the Jews to remain separate from. In other words, God had historically created a divine, not just a socially constructed wall, between Jew and Gentile.

But the Spirit was stirring, and the Spirit is relentless, relentless at addressing the dividing walls of hostility that must come down as part of the mystery of Christ, says Paul. And that Spirit remains relentlessly at work today in continuing to call the people of God to destroy the dividing wall that remains between black and white, to destroy once and for all the color line that still determines whether one gets Covid-19, how long one lives, one's overall wealth, one's education, one's income status, where one lives and what one's house is worth, and on and on. Indeed, zip code is one of the most significant predictors of one's quality of life.

The Apostle Peter had difficulty understanding what the Holy Spirit was up to in the post-Pentecost people of God. But then he has a vision—a vision that defied the divine reality he had been brought up with and taught that God had put in place. Get up and eat that which I have declared unclean, the Lord told Peter. Can you imagine Peter's astonishment at the very way in which God was dismantling the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile and now asking Peter to assist God in destroying it?

To his credit, Peter saw through what he understood it meant to be a Jew, and following the Spirit's lead, found his way to Cornelius' house where the Spirit was poured out on this Gentile lover of God and of the poor.

And yet, Peter, like us, had so internalized his biases that later he would go up to Antioch and cave into the Jewish leaders who demanded that the new Gentile follows the letter of the Jewish laws.

Gentiles too had received the Gospel. But the apostle Paul was livid with Peter and, in his words, "opposed Peter to his face because he was clearly in the wrong." One can almost hear Paul screaming, "Peter, Gentile lives matter too. There is no difference in Christ between Jew and Gentile anymore."

Because for Paul, the mystery of Christ as he describes it in Ephesians is all tied up in the reality that on the cross, Christ had dismantled the dividing wall of hostility between all groups regardless of race and ethnicity. And that all had been set free from the law. Preventing Gentiles from entering the grace of Christ would also diminish the grace of Christ for the Jew who was in Christ. Says Paul, "We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Jesus Christ." (Galatians 2:15-16). To keep walls of division in place denied the mystery of Christ's reconciliation and grace for both Jew and Gentile.

The Bible does not talk about race in terms of the distinction between skin colors. Race as a word is only about 400 years old and shows up in the English vocabulary at the time of the slave trade. For the first time in history, slavery is identified with the color of one's skin. And the word was created by those in power to distinguish black as slave from white as free. At this time in history, blackness began to be identified with inferiority and someone less than fully human.

This ideology of inferiority based on skin color went against the Bible's understanding of one race descended from Adam and Eve, and each of us is made in God's image. From the origins of this country, those in power used that power to dehumanize a particular group of people based on skin color—few other countries began their origins with this sin embedded into the fabric of their social institutions.

The fact that we have created the idea of race has had social implications and consequences, especially for black people. These folks were declared 3/5 human by our founding fathers as a way of being consistent with the ideal that "all men are created equal." The struggle for Jefferson and others was that how do we promote equality while owning slaves? Well, we do so by defining black people as less than fully human. This also went against the Bible's understanding of one race descended from Adam and Eden.

Jefferson created a hypothesis for scientists that led to two tragedies: abortion and the Holocaust. Race scientists created the hypothesis that because not everyone is equal, again against a Biblical principle that we are all made in God's eyes as one race, some can be eliminated. Margaret Sanger and others made race science the justification for abortion and Hitler the extermination of the Jews. The origins of these human tragedies lay in the idea of race and differences between races that were socially constructed and passed down through the centuries.

Biology and genetic research have confirmed what the Bible says—that there are no significant differences between racial or ethnic groups other than superficial features such as skin color and nose shape, and hair texture. But athletic ability, intelligence, etc., are not variable among human beings by "racial grouping."

The Atlantic slave trade and plantation slavery were largely supported by the churches in the U.S. and England up until the mid-19th century. The dehumanization of black Africans was accepted by white folks as natural, engrained as it has been into the early founding of the United States. This ideology became the justification for keeping blacks enslaved, beating them, raping them, assaulting them, tearing apart their families, and selling and buying them like livestock.

But by the mid-18th century, some evangelical Christian voices began to hear God's Spirit revealing to them the deep sin of slavery and the oppression of those with black skin, folks who no longer took the taken for granted reality of white supremacy for granted. William Wilberforce in England, a politician in Parliament, began to agitate for the abolishment of the slave trade, saying this:

- "You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know."
- "If to be feelingly alive to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures is to be a fanatic, I am one of the most incurable fanatics ever permitted to be at large."
- "So enormous, so dreadful...did that trade's wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for abolition. Let the consequences be what they would. I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition."

Wilberforce unsuccessfully appealed to his peers in America to abolish the slave trade to America. But Jefferson had already cashed in his chips with those who would define persons with black skin color as innately inferior by raising the question but suggesting that science

would indeed be able to give us the answer. And years later, science did so—repeatedly showing the superiority of those with white skin. In fact, Jefferson's hypothesis was the seed that would lead to race science and the eugenics movement, a movement to sanitize the country of the inferior species of human beings who were ruining the blood line of Caucasian superiority. Sterilization was used to prevent such wreckage from occurring. As I noted above, this same line of reasoning would be picked up and used by Hitler to validate the mass murder of Jews, those with disabilities, gay and lesbian individuals, and others he deemed inferior to the so-called white race.

Wilberforce's efforts would win sufficient support to stop the slave trade in England, but it would be some time before the Church in North America would have enough courage to do the same. But the Holy Spirit was moving, and courage would grow in individuals such as Jonathan Blanchard. He taught at Andover Theological Seminary but left when the Seminary rejected the work of the American Anti-slavery society. Blanchard was then assigned a preaching assignment in southern Pennsylvania, and in 1837 found himself the victim of stoning by folks agitated with his teaching in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. After a somewhat indirect journey, Blanchard would end up as the founder of Wheaton College in 1860, a college based upon his ideals related to abolishing slavery and radical social reform. He permitted African American students to attend the College and allowed them to live in his home.

Wilberforce and Blanchard lived at a time when evangelical Christians understood that to be a follower of Christ meant addressing the social ills of their day that included care and advocacy for the poor, oppressed, and those whom white folks had defined to be less than human, thus allowing for their enslavement. The problem remained that once an ideology like racism is woven into the fabric of a society, it doesn't just disappear with legislation.

It is not easy for the Church today to see its ongoing complicity in continuing racial oppression. The responses I have been receiving to my clearly stated support for racial equality and the eradication of the sin of racism make that abundantly evident. For some reason, white folks feel terribly threatened by a Christian perspective that addresses the sin of systemic racism and the call to dismantle the artificially constructed boundaries between those with different skin color. For it is hard to support the dismantling of a reality that we white folks have never experienced.

Which brings up an unsettling question for the white Church today—how in failing to join William Wilberforce and Jonathan Blanchard and the Apostle Paul in tearing down the humanly constructed barriers between those of different racial and cultural groups, as we as white folks missing out on the grace of God for ourselves? How are we missing out on the mystery of Christ? To what degree is our own failure at God's mission, which I have argued accounts for the dismantling of the Church, related to our inability to address the continued ideology and structures that sustain racism in the U.S.?

The work of dismantling racism may be possible only in a dismantled church in which white folks join the call of their oppressed black brothers and sisters and in unison shout to the heavenlies, "Black lives matter too!" This call should not offend white folks, nor should it create fear or resistance but cause us to grieve that nearly 200 years after the courageous work of William Wilberforce and Jonathan Blanchard and others, black folks who are our brothers and sisters still sense the need to remind us that they are human beings too, that they count too, that they matter too.

For this is not the cry of the oppressor but of the oppressed, not the cry of the villain but of the victim, not the cry of the white supremacist but of Emmet Till and the thousands of other black men and women and children who died. In contrast, white folks watched with picnic baskets as if they were attending a circus. While this is the cry of the oppressed, the traumatized, and the broken, it is also the cry of a people who no longer accept their dehumanization. It is the cry of the courageous, the cry of the strong, the cry of the confident, the cry of the last who know they will be first. And perhaps this is ultimately why the phrase black lives matters are so complicated for white folks to accept—we fear it challenges our own power and position in the social hierarchy.

This is our work church, and it is directly tied to God's mission to the world that God so loved and so loved still. And it is directly connected to the movement of God's Spirit who will not rest until every last child of God is set free, set free at last. How can we, gentiles who the Jewish Church allowed to matter, reject the cries of our black brothers and sisters with anything other than “Yes, you matter. Indeed you matter, to God you matter and to us!”

Chapter Nine

Why White Evangelicals Have So Much Difficulty Accepting the Church's Complicity in Racism

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:14-18)

The Apostle Paul had a vision that in Christ, the socially constructed and artificial boundary that humankind had created between Jew and Gentile would be dismantled in Christ. In fact, if one looks carefully at what Paul says in Ephesians 3, this reconciliation is the mystery of Christ: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 3:6 NIV)

Paul, Jew of Jews and Pharisee of Pharisees has come to understand that what Jesus brought through his death on the cross was nothing less than the dismantling of artificial boundaries between ethnic/racial groups, groups defined by their bloodline, and even a division that God had created in the Old Testament but that now had become irrelevant in the New Testament through the new reality that Christ had brought—this new mystery.

In an interview with me, African American Bishop Al Motley clearly articulated that racism is about spiritual warfare—I suspect this is news to most white folks. But if we white folks had experienced generations of beatings, lynchings, discrimination, dehumanization, oppression, police brutality, separation of husbands and wives, public housing in ghettos following World War II while white folks were offered the suburbs, unjust incarceration at the hands of white judges, juries, prosecutors and police—it wouldn't take us long to figure out that what we had experienced was nothing less than Satanic and demonic.

This is a critical moment in a dismantled church and a church that I can't help but believe that God is dismantling because things are not right in the Kingdom. As I listened to my black friends whom I interviewed, I was so impressed with their vision of the Kingdom, a vision that extends beyond the Church. And no wonder—the Church has in many ways been such a disappointment and failure in revealing the mystery of Christ and God's purpose through Christ to "the two groups one" and "to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,"¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." (Ephesians 2:16 NIV).

Folks, the work of the Kingdom is the dismantling of walls that alienate, not the building of new ones. I am aware that standing with the Gospel of reconciliation as Paul so clearly preaches it has risks for the Church and me. Addressing racism may well divide the Church I love. But if that division contributes to the dismantling that must occur if racism is to be overcome and its demonic spirit exorcised from the Church, then so be it. I would much rather stand before God at the end of time and be known for standing with my Black brothers and sisters in their day of oppression and for having proclaimed the mystery of Christ than for supporting politicians and policies and practices and police and preachers that denied that mystery and its power.

I would much rather stand now with my brothers and sisters of color, whose Gospel I find so much more consistent with that of Christ than to stand with those who give lip service to the Gospel but vote for further division and oppression of the marginalized in November's election. Because in the end, I sure hope to be among a church of the last who find themselves first than a church of the first who find themselves last.

We live in a nation within which the sin of racism is embedded into our social and cultural fabric, just as was the commitment to "all men being equal" and religious freedom. We continue today to reap the blessing of religious liberty. No one would argue that our doing is unrelated to Thomas Jefferson's defense of Baptists in Virginia in the 18th century. In other words, evangelicals are quick to point out that what makes this country great is that our founding fathers committed to such freedom and wove it into our national fabric and foundation.

But what is puzzling to me is the rejection, on the other hand, that the dehumanization and objectivation of black Americans are woven similarly into our national fabric. Still, we don't see or deny this reality. We accept that the freedoms we value have historical and cultural, and even spiritual origins but reject that the sin of racism has such roots or even exists anymore.

I have often said that it is difficult for most evangelicals to identify structural or systemic sins because we understand salvation and sin as a personal thing and can be identified in personal relationships. If I take care of my personal sins and my grudges, bitterness, and hatred in personal relationships, I've taken care of all the sins I am responsible for. Thus, we reject and react personally to conversations about sins outside of the personal or relational realm.

We have great difficulty separating out personal guilt from responsibility. In other words, when we white folks hear terms like "white privilege" or "white supremacy," we tend to immediately personalize these phrases and assume one must be personally guilty if these sins exist. We respond with comments like "but I treat people of color well" or "I have lots of black friends," and so on. But these responses and our instinctive reaction prevent any further conversation about sins at the level of our society. But what if we can take responsibility for something

without being guilty of it? Even though it is true that we are complicit in and benefit from the way our society is constructed racially as white folks.

The Old Testament prophets often owned the sins of their people for which they were not responsible for having committed personally. Daniel does this, Moses did this, and of course, Jesus did this on the cross. The Scripture says that Christ "became sin" for us and was cursed for us—for things, of course, that he never committed. So if Jesus our Lord took on the sin of the world, why is it so hard for white evangelicals to pick up their cross and carry the sin of racism?

I received this response from a white evangelical pastor and businessman who was offended by my efforts to address the sin of racism. Listen closely to the language, and you will hear the typical defenses that white evangelicals use for rejecting responsibility for racism—and well-defended we have been for 400 years since we had to be to live with a commitment to Christ's love for all people while also owning slaves, participating in lynchings, supporting Jim Crow, rejecting the Civil Rights movement, and now denying any such thing as systemic racism within our criminal justice system and society. You will also clearly hear echoes of Voddie Baucham:

As an employer, who employs 70% of minorities, most earn more than \$55,000 a year. My heart is torn by your message. They are not mistreated, under-appreciated, exploited, or marginalized. They take pride in their work and earn respect in their field. I understand the sins of our fathers and the sad history of harming and exploiting minorities. However, we live less than 40 miles from Gettysburg, where over 20,000 white men died from the Union Army attempting to bring an end to these injustices. Some of your teachings may dishonor their "Final Just" effort to change the "woven societal fabric" of discrimination you repeatedly referred to. Without them, we would not have the 14th and 15th Amendments. Is the effort for all discrimination complete? No. Has progress been made? Yes. I would disagree that I go to my church because it's white in nationality. I go because Holy Spirit has me assigned there. I would welcome you to interview any of our minority employees and determine if our company treats them any different from their white coworkers. If you believe we are no further in 2020 than 1619, we are the most pitied people. I have many friends who agree with you and believe the same things you do, so I'm familiar with this teaching. I respect your viewpoint and the courage to share it. I chose not to live under it. I Daily invite the Holy Spirit to help me live out the principles of Christ right here in my Jerusalem. It's my choice to love people of all colors. (Most of my struggles and problems in life are actually with White People)

What can we hear in this response?

First, this individual takes very personally something that I never intended to make personal, nor was it ever aimed at this individual. But the response for most white folks is almost automatic—"I didn't do it, so I am not responsible for it." Does he lead his congregation that way or his business where undoubtedly he does take responsibility for situations that he did not cause or create.

Second, since he personally treats people of color well, the message of racism doesn't apply to him. This is typical Evangelical response—to see all situations as personal and relational and to miss the structural and systemic forces of a society that push down and control us.

Third, to continue to talk about racism undermines the sacrifices of those who fought for the Union—apparently, those sacrifices were a sufficient atonement for continued racism. But what about the sacrifices and suffering of Black folks since the Civil War. Does the sacrifice of a war discount the pain and suffering of victims of racism since then? Did the sacrifice of Jesus for us mean that we should no longer address the pain and suffering of others? I think not.

Fourth, my choice of place of worship is personal and not based on race—the evidence from a societal level tells a very different story. This is like saying I married the person that I did because she was my soul mate. No, she happened to be your schoolmate or lab partner or neighbor, etc.

Finally, he lapses into a string of defensive statements which prevent any possible rejoinder: I follow the Holy Spirit. You are wrong. And these are my personal choices.

Had this minister read Voddie Baucham? I don't know. I do know that Baucham's *Fault Lines* has only further fueled this kind of white evangelical denial of our continued complicity as a community of faith in a racialized society that offers privilege and opportunity according to the color of one's skin.

Chapter Ten

Racism: Sin Then—The Same Sin Now

The Covid pandemic of 2020 has revealed what many have known and expressed. If you are a person of black or brown skin, you are more likely to die from the disease earlier in life than those of white fur. If you are African-American or Latino, you are more likely than White people to contract and succumb to the coronavirus.

Of course, the disparities would have nothing to do with the color of one's skin or the place of one's birth, that is, except for the fact that nearly three hundred years ago, our nation's founding fathers, aligned as they were with the scientific principles and methods of their day, were quite content to uphold a social construct that was deeply entrenched in racial inequities.

Thomas Jefferson, well known for the Jefferson Bible from which he removed all texts containing the miracles of Jesus, hypothesized that persons possessing dark skin were less intelligent, and thereby lesser humans than persons of light skin.⁹

Jefferson's subjective theory of racial inequality lent credence to the emergence of "race science" or, more precisely, "scientific racism" as espoused by movers and shakers of the dominant European-American social, academic, philanthropic, and political culture.

America's original sin of racism, already rooted in Europeanized colonialization and institutionalized chattel slavery a century and a half before the nation's founding, resulted in the widespread twentieth-century practice of eugenics. Eugenics in the United States involved the

⁹ See Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Query XIV, "Laws," beginning with "To emancipate all slaves born after passing the act . . ." https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffvir.asp/.

forced sterilizations of thousands of Blacks, Native Americans, the mentally ill, and close to a third of Puerto Rican women. The movement extended beyond our borders to Great Britain, France, and Germany. The latter instance became a major inspiration for the Third Reich's demonic experimentation with racial cleansing aimed at eradicating the Jews and others deemed social misfits for the sake of purifying the Aryan race.

In an ironic footnote to Germany's collective racism, where Black athletes were considered inferior to their White counterparts, the African-American track and field star, Jesse Owens, made a fool of Hitler's "race science" right beneath Hitler's nose. Mr. Owens became the celebrated four-time gold medalist of Berlin's 1936 summer Olympics. As a result of his undeniable prowess, "race scientists" began to change their tune to say that Blacks' physiological superiority was due to their being "closer to the primitive"—a classic instance of rationalizing racist postulations to maintain the myth of White supremacy while at the same time accounting for Mr. Owens's irrefutable triumph.

It was all the more ironic that Mr. Owens, the grandson of Southern slaves, returned home from the praises of cheering crowds in Nazi Germany, only to be subjected to the degrading indignities of Jim Crow segregation. After a hero's parade in New York City, he proceeded to a reception held in his honor at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. There he was required to take the service elevator instead of the one reserved for guests. President Franklin Roosevelt failed to offer congratulations. Southern newspapers refused to publish photos of Mr. Owens's Olympian achievement.

After the flattery of raining ticker-tape, the black-skinned gold medalist went to work as a janitor in a children's playground and as a service station attendant pumping gas. "After I came home from the 1936 Olympics with my four medals," he said, "it became increasingly apparent that everyone was going to slap me on the back, want to shake my hand, or have me up to their suite. But no one was going to offer me a job." "I had four gold medals, but you can't eat four gold medals."¹⁰

Beyond the flagrant discriminations of Jim Crow segregation and the shameless mob lynchings of Blacks, racial inequities and systemic injustices have persisted in our own time for African-Americans. The rash of killings of Black citizens by White police officers, for one. The mass incarceration of young Blacks by White-led judicial systems, for two. The decimation of Black neighborhoods by creeping White gentrification, for three. The disparity between the payments of Black wages and White wages, for four. And today, the high rate of Black deaths relative to White ends due to Covid. And that's not all, for the long shadow of slavery as America's original sin hangs over the entire American landscape like a giant pall.

So, to what then does this sordid history of White racism and White supremacy beckon from us Christians now?

¹⁰ <https://www.biography.com/news/jesse-owens-biography-olympic-triumphs-olympic-sized-struggles-20892201/>.

As Evangelicals, lest we forget, Scripture summons us to the removal of blinders concerning the collective sin of wholesale domination that invariably leads to the evils of social, political, and economic enslavement. Remember, it was our spiritual ancestors who were enslaved in Egypt. For that reason, the Mosaic law says explicitly, "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Exod 23:9). "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 19:34).

Were that text to be written for us White European-Americans today, it would read: You shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were once immigrants—aliens—yourselves!

Was that not also true for Africans as they first set foot on the shores of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, having endured the throes of hell as human cargo chained to the blood-stained holds of slave ships during the Middle Passage through the waters of the Atlantic? Was it not the case that those dark-skinned women, men, and children of God were branded as resident aliens the minute they touched their toes on the White Man's turf, which the White Man had seized from the Native American? Was it not tragic, beyond belief, that Whites sought to strip Blacks of the divinely given dignity and worth of their very humanity?

To what end? By the crack of the whip and the dangling of the noose, entire populations of our White "Christian" forebears coerced African bodies, minds, and spirits to bend over row-after-row of cotton bolls and tobacco leaves, day-in-and-day-out, year-after-year, in sweltering toil beneath the baking sun. So that the oppression of the Black Man would assure the economic prosperity and political hegemony of the White Man. Sadly, prosperity deafens, and hegemony blinds.

Did our White ancestors not read from the same Bible as we modern Evangelicals do? Yet, because prosperity deafens and hegemony blinds, whenever our White forebears spuriously and selectively dipped into their Bibles to find validation for a system of oppression that required obedience of slaves to their masters, they turned a deaf ear and blind eye to God's commandments: "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien" (Exod 22:21). "You shall love the alien as yourself" (Lev 19:34b).

No shortage of Scripture summons us as God's people to the confession of our sin.

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites: When a man or a woman wrongs another, breaking faith with the Lord, that person incurs guilt and shall confess the sin that has been committed. The person shall make full restitution for the wrong, adding one-fifth to it and giving it to the one who was wronged. (Num 5:5–7)

Then those of Israelite descent . . . stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors. They stood up in their place and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a fourth part of the day, and for another fourth they made confession and worshipped the Lord their God. (Neh 9:2–3)

The authenticity of our confession and the validity of our worship reveals our love for God to the extent of our passion for "the least of these" among us. Jesus's words, spoken through the Gospel of Matthew, make this abundantly clear.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. (Matt 25:31–33)

Our ancestors knew, and we know, the rest of that story. It's entirely too memorable to be forgotten, far too important to be ignored. Jesus will not be asking whether we are Christians or non-Christians, Protestants or Catholics, Mainliners or Evangelicals, Mennonites or Baptists. Rather, he will judge how we measured up to the following:

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me . . .
"Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (vv. 35–36, 40)