
Faith and #BlackLivesMatter: Future Directions and Current Directives for White Folk¹

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James Baldwin, that genius of social insight wed to literary eloquence, once declared: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”² In a nation founded and foundering on the ravaging and interlocking sins of white supremacy and economic exploitation, the pernicious presence of structural racism and the undergirding myth of white supremacy cannot be changed until they are faced by White people. Perhaps that facing is now beginning (at least to an unprecedented extent), thanks to the revelatory cries of anguish and outrage by Black people and those who join them in the struggle.

“It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.”³ Again, the words are Baldwin’s. White people’s ignorance of the daily dangers, death-traps, terrors, and traumas experienced by Black people has been a “ferocious enemy” of racial justice. Perhaps that ignorance (aptly known as white blindness) is beginning to be cracked by the raw and holy fury and truth-telling unleashed in this land. As John Powell, the brilliant Black public intellectual/activist, notes, parts of the White United States public are beginning to see.⁴ We (I speak as a White United States citizen) are beginning to recognize some of what we have so cruelly ignored:

- The daily terror of a Black mother knowing that her child could be shot this day for being Black.
- The fear that stalks. (“I fear taking out my cellphone out of my pocket,” said one student whom I know well. “Someone might think it is a gun.”)
- The anguish and rage that burn when one’s Black son is imprisoned for something that would have been reprimanded

1. Significant portions of this article are taken from Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, “Faith-Rooted Anti-Racist Living,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 59:3 (Sept 2020), 163-167.

2. James Baldwin, “As Much Truth as One Can Bear,” *New York Times Book Review* (14 January 1962).

3. James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, (New York: Dial Press, 1972).

4. “You see for the first time a large number of white Americans...saying something’s wrong. We’ve never had that in this country on the issue of policing, so we are at an inflection point.” Powell goes on to question: “[C]an we now cash in on this?” and to warn that attention spans can be “very short.” J. Powell, on CBSN April 22, 2021 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QrQyTtyIzw>.

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or ignored had her son been White.

- The centuries of systematic killing, enslaving, and imprisoning of Black people.

However, for White people, who tend to assume that racism is not dangerous to our own wellbeing, our attention span could be short and the seductive comfort of ignorance more persistent than our efforts to overcome it. Moreover, while beginning to crack through white blindness is utterly necessary, alone it is inadequate for the leap into anti-racist living as a necessary and inherent aspect of God’s call to practice justice-seeking love when that call resounds in a racist society.

What, then, are some future directions and current directives for White U.S. citizens of relative economic privilege if by our lives we are to assert that Black lives do matter?

Guideposts and faith foundations

For years I have taught that living rightly depends upon “the difficult and dangerous art of seeing” (moral vision). In Christian faith terms: Heeding God’s call to live according to justice-making, Earth-honoring neighbor-love depends upon what I have called “critical mystical vision.” By this I mean, in the first place, that discerning “what we ought to do” (the classic task of ethics) requires seeing clearly four things:

- “what is going on,” especially systemic evil that parades as good, inevitable, God’s will;
- “what could be,” that is more just alternatives already in the making;
- the power and presence of the great mystery we call God moving throughout creation, luring humans into ways of life that enable all of creation (including all human creatures) to have life in its fullness (John 10:10);
- that each human being and Earth’s web of life are beloved by God and are imbued with stunning and infinite beauty, splendor, and goodness.

This is one principle of moral vision.

A second is that moral discernment is flawed – sometimes fatally – if it does not hear and heed the cries and constructive proposals of people on the underside of power and privilege in any given situation. A third principle of moral vision is that people in positions of privilege must learn to “see the eyes through which we see,” or more specifically must learn to recognize the blinders of privilege that obscure our vision.

I am still unraveling the implications of these principles. But one is surely this: For White U.S. citizens of relative economic privilege, discerning future directions entails:

- Hearing from Black, Brown, and Indigenous people the truths about what it is to live as Black, Brown, or Indigenous in this land.
- Hearing from Black, Brown, and Indigenous people what is needed to dismantle white supremacy and other manifestations of racism in the US, in order to practice anti-racist living.
- Unearthing how the lenses of whiteness and of economic comfort have shaped our perceptions and assumptions about what is good, normal, God’s will, inevitable, just, and possible.
- Transforming guilt, shame, and blame into fervent, committed, and ever-deepening anti-racist action and consciousness.

These will be our guideposts. They have power only if heeded, by which I mean practiced. When practiced, they are life-transforming.

What difference, then, does faith in a Lutheran tone make for using these guideposts to discern future directions into a society in which Black lives do matter? A full response is beyond the scope of this single article and has many rich components. Let us explore two, though, as a way of considering initial steps.

First: Christian faith offers, demands, and makes possible truth-telling. Another name for the elements of “critical mystical vision” named above is truth-telling. Jesus said, “I am the truth” (*aletheia* in New Testament Greek). The late Vitor Westhelle pointed out that *aletheia* means the negation of oblivion (*letheia*).⁵

5. Vitor Westhelle, “Freeing the Captives: Speaking the Truth,” paper delivered at New Day Begun: Engaging Our Wholeness, a multicultural seminar sponsored by ELCA at Prior Lake, Minn., July

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“Truth,” in the New Testament, is “negation of oblivion,” or “revealing the concealed.” Christ, then—and by extension, the Church as Christ’s body on Earth—are about revealing the concealed, negating oblivion including moral oblivion. Said differently, Christ—and by extension, the Church—are about seeing what is going on, truth-telling. Westhelle went on to note two distinct and valid referents of truth-telling. Their full significance appears when they are held in one breath.

- First: Truth uttered (that is, oblivion undone) refers to “Christ recognized or manifest where Christ was not seen,” especially where Christ was least expected, or where Christ had been hidden by Christian piety, or where Christ is with and within those whom society renders invisible or non-persons.
- Second: Truth uttered (that is, oblivion undone) refers to full disclosure of social realities that have been concealed by lies or myths.

In the struggle to build a society in which Black lives do matter, these claims align truth-telling with: 1) perceiving the power and presence of God present in that struggle but possibly unrecognized, and 2) full disclosure of or, in ethical terms, “seeing what is,” regarding the pernicious presence and impact of white supremacy in the United States.

However, in my experience, truth-telling in the second sense is too horrible, too ghastly, when one begins to see one’s own life tangled so intimately in the snarls of white supremacy, and the death and torment it has rendered. One turns away, loath to find oneself so implicated in the horrors.

Truth-telling, I find, is made possible by another gift of faith in a Lutheran tone. Faith tells us who we are (and here “we” means all people). From Luther, I understand that we human creatures are at once three things: 1) first, foremost, and forever beloved by a creating, healing, liberating Love that will never cease and is more powerful than any force in heaven or Earth, a Love that will not cease or diminish regardless of whatever we do or fail to do; 2) broken by the pervasive presence of sin, including structural sin; and 3) body of God’s liberating, healing Love that is at work within and beyond us and that WILL gain abundant life for all. In my experience, only holding fast to the first face of who I am

29-August 1, 2008.

makes it possible to hear and tell the truth about the second.

With these guideposts carved and faith foundations laid, we move on to ask: *What are some future directions and current directives for White U.S. citizens of relative economic privilege if by our lives we are to assert that Black lives do matter?* Consider two directions/directive. The first pertains to how we perceive reality and the second to how we act.

ONE: Seeing through an anti-racism lens and economic equity lens

Jesus has cried out for generations to White America: “Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes, and fail to see?” (Mark 8:17-18). What we see, and through whose eyes we see is morally loaded. For White people, it determines whether we tacitly comply with structural racism or resist it. Widespread failure over four centuries to see the reality of structural racism fed the development of “stand your ground” culture, encouraged murder (lynching, police murder), and made living while Black so much more dangerous than living while White.⁶

One directive is an on-going commitment to develop and ever-sharpen an anti-racism lens and an economic equity lens through which to perceive reality. This means looking for the pervasive presence of structural sin in the forms of white supremacist assumptions, public policy that favors White people while not appearing to do so, and racialized economic exploitation infiltrating daily life while hiding from the view of White people. Doing so includes intentionally re-examining history for the shaping hand of White racism in order to see how Black people are brutalized today not only by current practices, policies, and unconscious white supremacist presuppositions, but also by the historical legacy of the same.

Theologically this form of seeing is a vitally important dimension of Christian faith for White people and economically privileged people, because it is integral to repentance. **If we do not see the structural sin of which we are a part, then we cannot repent of it. If we do not repent, we remain captive to that sin. That is, we remain as silent beneficiaries of systems that kill.**⁷ More on repentance in a moment.

An anti-racism lens also means digging in to decipher **how it is that White society has failed to see the killing of Black people by White people as horribly wrong, as sin, as crime, as evil.** The murder of George Floyd is yet another in a centuries long list of murders of Black people by White people that were not charged with murder and not prosecuted for it. **Why in God’s name have we been—for centuries—silent bystanders to murder? How is this possible?** The questions are haunting. One gulps, one

6. Regarding development of “stand your ground” cultural norms, see Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2015).

7. The role of repentance and its relationship to the hiddenness of structural evil is discussed more fully in Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), chap 3.

In a sense these myths—which lead to demonizing, dehumanizing, or otherwise damaging others or oneself without our knowing it—are a form of demon possession. They will be uprooted and exorcised only if faced and refuted.

flees. But we must ask them if we are to throw off bondage to this founding and corrupting sin.

A worthy and complete response to these searing questions would fill volumes. Wise insights come from Kelly Brown Douglas, womanist theologian and Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary—especially in light of conclusions reached by cognitive linguist, George Lakoff, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, White resister of fascism in mid-century Germany, and Black professors Willie James Jennings and Denise Herd offer further insight.

According to renowned cognitive linguist, George Lakoff: “The cognitive and brain sciences have shown that most thought—as much as 98 percent—is unconscious.”⁸ Thus, we are driven by conclusions of which we may be unaware. They may be considered “myths” that guide our lives yet live below the surface of our awareness. The anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss says as much: “We can never know our own myths because myths do our thinking for us.”

The intertwined myths of white superiority and white right to dominate, patronize, or kill Black people is emblazoned in the American (U.S.) psyche—including the American White Christian psyche. To a significant extent it is unconscious. The Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, provides a historical lens into white blindness, tracing the development of the myth of Anglo-Saxon superiority from a tract published by the first century historian Tacitus, which she writes, has been called “one of the most dangerous books ever written,” not so much for what it says but for “how his words have been construed.”⁹

In a sense these myths—which lead to demonizing, dehumanizing, or otherwise damaging others or oneself without our knowing it—are a form of demon possession. They will be uprooted and exorcised only if faced and refuted. That facing and refuting is not just an act of will or thought; it also entails action. In this case the actions include advocating for public policy which treats the murder of Black people as murder to be prosecuted as such. The killings will not stop until they are prosecuted.

8. George Lakoff, *The Little Blue Book* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 1.

9. Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 4-5.

Bonhoeffer, reflecting from prison on the widespread complicity with fascism in Hitler's Germany, provides striking insight into how evil remains hidden (unseen) from those not suffering directly from it.¹⁰ He writes of the "great masquerade of evil" in which evil appears "disguised as light, charity, historical necessity, or social justice." Its ability to "appear disguised"—to hide—"confirms the fundamental wickedness of evil."¹¹ That is, the cloaked nature of structural evil is at its very heart. Bonhoeffer's words reveal more. They name four masks behind which evil hides: "light, charity, historical necessity, [and] social justice."

White society needs to heed Bonhoeffer's words: His wisdom pertains to the two demonic myths of white superiority and of the white right to kill Black people. White people have allowed the evil of unconsciously suspecting Black people of criminal activity and of consciously killing or imprisoning them to be disguised as "light" and "charity" (think of protecting White women, children, police officers and White people's property from Black danger);¹² as "historical necessity" (think of the school-to-prison pipeline in which it has been deemed "necessary" to suspend or prosecute Black students for action that would warrant a mere reprimand for White students); or "justice" (consider the racism that cloaks mass incarceration of Black people as a form of criminal justice).¹³

A further step into moral seeing for White people is to acknowledge the whiteness of many worlds in which White U.S. citizens walk without being aware of that whiteness. It is an example of the fish not seeing the water in which they swim. For me this is a more unfamiliar, tenuous terrain than recognizing other aspects of white supremacy in U.S. society, and this terrain seems vitally important. I have long recognized the racist nature of our society in many ways, including being highly colonized by racialized capitalism. But I am only beginning to see how pervasive is the whiteness of spaces inhabited by White people. Many of the spaces that I occupy are White spaces, not only because they are peopled largely by White people, but because they are shaped by white culture and white-dominant power structures. Professor Willie Jennings, for example, points out that theological education and other aspects of higher education in the West are "distorted" by their formation in, as, and by whiteness. "Theological education in the West," he writes, "was born in White hegemony and homogeneity, and it continues to baptize homogeneity, making it holy and right and efficient—when it is none of these things."¹⁴

For Black people, a danger of White people's failure to rec-

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ognize the normalization of whiteness and white space is daily emotional and physical trauma that also goes unrecognized by white culture. The examples are endless—Black students listening to White professors using "we" when talking about realities that pertain largely to White people; Black professors in white-space universities having twenty times the number of 'advisees' because Black students come to them, while that extra advising load goes unacknowledged in tenure processes; Black professors being faulted as aggressive by student course evaluations and this impacting tenure and promotion; Black students walking to the library at night to access required readings being stopped by security patrols as suspect; daily fear of being shot or of having one's child or partner or parent shot. In her research¹⁵ UC Berkeley professor, Denise Herd, has found that "the harm from police killings of Black people goes beyond the people and places directly involved in these incidents to affect Black Americans far from the site of the killing, who may have never met the victim. Evidence shows that many Black Americans across the U.S. experience police killings of other Black people as traumatic events, and that this trauma diminishes the ability of Black communities to thrive."¹⁶

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TWO: Repentance as action that takes reparations seriously¹⁷

A second directive is repentance as action that takes reparations seriously. Repentance, as a theological call, is not guilt or shame

10. This paragraph draws heavily on Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, chap. 3.

11. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Scribner, 1972).

12. Think of the heinous history of lynching in which White people would watch while having a picnic after church; Amy Cooper; Tamir Rice; and so many false claims by White people to have killed Black people to protect White people or property.

13. Michell Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2012).

14. Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 5, 6-7.

15. Denise Herd, "Cycles of Threat: Graham v. Connor, Police Violence, and African American Health Inequities" 100 B.U. L. Rev. 1047 (2020). See: <https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/bulr100&div=30&id=&page=>

16. <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/blog-pain-police-killings-ripples-outward-traumatize-black-people-and-communities-across-us/>.

17. "[T]he concept of reparations... is a well-established part of international law... Reparations is... the repair of the physical, spiritual, cultural, and psychological damages done to a people... The presupposition there is that if there's domination or there is oppression or suppression, then... the oppressor and the parties that are afflicting... that damage, need to repair it... Traditionally, what happens is, first of all, there must be the acknowledgment by the offending party that a wrong has been done, number one. Secondly, there must be an

and blame. It is a powerful turning the other direction. *Teshuvah*, the Hebrew word often translated as repentance, suggests turning from sinful ways and toward the good by means of turning back to God; it redirects one's life. The Greek, *metanoia*, means to think and perceive differently, to have a new mind and consciousness. Repentance then involves a distinct turning away from sin, in both consciousness and action.

Said differently, repentance entails action. And action must include joining in efforts led by Black people to put reparations onto the public policy agenda on local, state, and national levels.¹⁸

It will take reparations in various forms—along with other kinds of action on all three levels of social change (individual behavioral change, social structural change, and consciousness or worldview change)—to make the great transition to a nation in which driving while Black, walking while Black, putting your hands in your pockets in public while Black are not dangerous risks to life for Black people.

Here is not the place to map out the varied forms of reparations called for in a historically and contemporarily racist society bound to a criminal (in)justice system. Nor am I equipped to do so. However, I note four keys to repentance as action that includes reparations. The four keys are based on four lurking obstacles that suck White people away from heeding God's call to the sacred work of reparations aimed at racial justice. We may be:

- lured into privatized morality;
- trapped by either/thinking;
- waylaid by naïve notions of reconciliation;
- distracted by single issue thinking and action.

*Replace privatized morality with a sense of systemic moral responsibility and agency*¹⁹

This society teaches us to think of morality in individual terms; we are moral actors as individuals, not as players in social systems. Our impact on other people through our roles in economic, political,

apology and then beyond that apology, there must be restitution. There must be an effort to repair in terms of compensation and restitution and to do it in such a way that that which occurred will never, ever happen again." Dr. Ron Daniels in interview with Rev. Ronnie Galvin at: <https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/reparations-and-democratic-economy>.

18. Three excellent resources for understanding the case for reparations are: 1) the National African American Reparations Commission which educates and advocates for reparations for Black people. 2) The CARICOM Reparations Commission, a regional body "created to establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of Reparations by the Governments of all the former colonial powers and the relevant institutions of those countries, to the nations and people of the Caribbean Community." While not explicitly pertaining to the U.S. it provides excellent resources on the case for reparation. 3) H.R. 40, a bill that calls for a reparations study in the U.S. See also "Reparations and the Democratic Economy" <https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/reparations-and-democratic-economy>. my," at

19. A more extensive treatment of privatized morality is in Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil*, 88-91.

cultural, and military systems is obscured. Yet, in reality, most of our impact on others (our relationships with them) is mediated through such systems.

Privatized morality perpetuates the myth that if I don't have racist thoughts, feelings, words, or actions, then I am not part of the problem. I am innocent of racism. This is not true. Because society is structured to protect White people and give White people advantages, I—as an individual—do not have to do anything personally racist to benefit from those racist structures. Aida Hurtado, notes astutely, "[I]t does not matter how good you are, as a person, if the political structures provide privilege to you individually based on the group oppression of others; in fact, individuals belonging to dominant groups can be infinitely good because they never are required to be personally bad. That is the irony of structural privilege: the more you have, the less you have to fight for it."²⁰ To be White in the United States is to benefit materially from the systematic current and historic oppression of Black people.²¹ John Powell says it well: White people receive the "racialized distribution of benefits" the "spoils from a deeply racialized system" without having to act personally in racist ways.²²

Just consider the wealth afforded by home ownership that was systematically wrenched from the hands of Black people over decades (e.g., through the GI Bill, which indirectly but powerfully favored White veterans, red-lining, and more).²³ White U.S. citizens should see the revelatory film, "The House We Live In," episode three of the PBS series, "Race: The Power of an Illusion." Or consider the consumer products made cheap by the low wages paid to "essential workers" who are disproportionately Black and Brown. How do those consumer savings over the long-term feed White peoples' investment accounts and pay for college educations not affordable by Black or Brown people? The myth of privatized morality absolves me of any responsibility for these economic systems that can lead to death by poverty for many Black and Brown people, but that have built material wealth for many White people. Because relationships with our "neighbors" far and near are so determined by social structures, I need not be (in the words of Black theologian Peter Pero) an "active thief" to be a "passive profiteer."²⁴

20. Aida Hurtado, *The Color of Privilege: Three Blasphemies on Race and Feminism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 34.

21. Of course, we embody multiple social locations. An economically poor White person "benefits" in very different ways than an economically secure White person.

22. John Powell, *Racing to Justice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 79. See also 4-5. See also Ibram Kendi, *How to Be an Anti-Racist* (London: OneWorld Publications, 2019) and Allan Johnson, *Power Privilege and Difference*, 3rd edition (McGraw-Hill Education 2017).

23. Powell, 14-28. See also: <https://daily.jstor.org/the-inequality-hidden-within-the-race-neutral-g-i-bill/>, and Edward Mem, "How the GI Bill Shunted Blacks into Vocational Training," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 53 (Autumn, 2006), 92-104.

24. "In ecclesiological terms, if the church is the one universal body of Christ, this body of Christ is divided among active thieves, passive profiteers, and deprived victims" and—I would add—courageous

This knowledge—that we are “passive profiteers” of racist structure that are deadly for others can lead White people to a sense of futility, and even self-loathing. I have seen it in students, and I experienced it myself as a young person. For me that self-loathing for my role in violent social structures could have cost me my life. That, however, is not the way toward God’s ends of life in abundance for all. As Rev. Jasper Peters so passionately insists, “On behalf of all Black people, let me say this: ‘I don’t need your guilt. I don’t want it and its not useful for a single thing....I don’t need you to be guilty; I need you to get to work.’”²⁵

What then is the way to see the reality of structural violence in which I am complicit without being overcome by shame? Here I harken back to the moral anthropology noted above in “Faith Foundations.” Trusting that we are beloved and knowing that—due to brokenness by sin—our efforts to embody radical love always will be imperfect, can free White people from disabling guilt and free us for also being the body of God’s radical inclusive justice-seeking love. As the body of God’s love, we may declare: “I will be a part (albeit a finite and fallible part) of structural change toward abundant life for all, and that includes resisting and transforming structural racism.” This faithful alternative to debilitating guilt makes sense for followers of a dark-skinned Palestinian Jew named Jesus who declared²⁶: “You will love your neighbor as yourself.” Perhaps Jesus could make that audacious claim because he knew that the Holy Spirit would breathe into us Jesus’ own Spirit which is power to defy systemic domination where it is damaging neighbor, self, or Earth’s life systems.

Yet, replacing a privatized sense of morality with a systemic sense means not only seeing moral culpability in systemic terms but also moral agency. There is tremendous moral agency in recognizing the power that we have in collective action, in seeing self not only as an “I” but as a “we.” Seeing myself primarily as an “I” induces the conclusion that systemic racism cannot be undone; I cannot dismantle systems. But, “I” as part of a vast “we,” a movement for structural change to dismantle white supremacy—a movement in which White people align with Black-led organizations and heed their leadership, or work with White-led organizations that are accountable to and honoring the leadership of Black counterparts—breeds hope.²⁷ Repentance as action that takes reparations seriously will replace privatized morality with a sense of systemic moral responsibility and agency.²⁸

resilient resisters/rebuilders. African American theologian, Albert Pero, Jr. “The Church and Racism,” in *Between Vision and Reality: Lutheran Churches in Transition*, ed. Wolfgang Greive (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2001), 262.

25. <https://www.facebook.com/jasperdpeters>.

26. I use the word “declare” rather than command because in this statement by Jesus in the synoptic Gospels, the verb form of the Greek word translated as “will love” or “shall love” is not only in the imperative but in the future indicative. It says what will be. This coheres beautifully with the affirmation of baptism (in the ELCA) that affirms the covenant God made with us that we *will* “seek justice and peace in all the Earth.” A covenant is more than a command; it is a promise.

27. A good example, available in chapters throughout the U.S. is SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice) at surj.org.

28. For the power of “we” and a firm expression of hope for

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Replace either/or thinking with embrace of paradox

Either “I am not racist because my intentions are good and I don’t think racist thoughts or do racist acts” or “I am a racist and therefore a terrible person.” Either life is beautiful or it is brutal. If I grieve then I cannot have joy. If I admit my despair, then I have no hope. “We should protest,” says one person while the other declares: “No, we should work for policy change.” These dichotomies cripple moral agency.

I am convinced that a key to long-term resilience for anti-racist living is learning to practice paradox:

- Yes, I am part of and receive benefits of a racist system AND I am an anti-racist.
- The way toward racial justice is not a matter of either/or—either protest or policy work, either resisting or rebuilding, either lifestyle change or structural change. It is, in the words of Barack Obama addressing the nation following the murder of George Floyd, “both/and.” This is “not an either/or,” he said of protesting and pushing legislative reform; “this is both/and.”
- Life is both brutal and infinitely beautiful. A gift of Lutheran theological tendencies is to recognize that the two are deeply intertwined. Recognizing the stark brutality of white supremacy does not mean I must relinquish my deep awareness of life’s beauty. Personally, am awed and fed by life’s beauty, while being horrified by its brutality.
- My grief and my joy may co-exist. Searing grief need not destroy my joy and relishing my joy does not require repressing my grief.
- Yes, I do feel despair. Yet even while knowing despair, my hope is unceasing and will always endure beyond the despair because God has promised in the resurrection that life will—in some way that we cannot fathom—arise from death and destruction.

dismantling racism, see the response of John Powell to the presentation by Ibram Kendi in a panel sponsored by The Othering and Belonging Institute at: <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/video-ibram-x-kendi>.

This is the promise of resurrection faith.-

Seek reparations before assuming reconciliation

Christians often move uncritically to the assumption that reconciliation is the path forward into racial justice. That assumption is part of the problem, and it perpetuates structural racism in two senses. First, as Jennifer Harvey so aptly argues, reconciliation without first admitting terrible historic and contemporary wrong and without reparations, is “fundamentally flawed.” A reparations paradigm for the work of racial justice is far more efficacious and faithful than is a reconciliation approach devoid of work toward reparations.²⁹

Second, reconciliation presupposes re-conciling, returning to a good of conciliation that once was. However, there is no such past in black-white relations in the United States.³⁰ “To be reconciled,” declares the Rev. Jasper Peters, “means to return to a point of conciliation...a place in time where things were equitable.... there has never been a conciliatory space in America for Black people.... There is no place that we can return to that is a point of conciliation, and so if we want... a place for all of us...we have to do the work of creating it.”

Repentance as action that includes reparations will eschew the easy tendency to seek reconciliation without the steps of reparation. Those steps are: 1) acknowledging harm done historically and contemporarily, 2) apology, and 3) restitution—“effort to repair in terms of compensation and restitution...in such a way that that which occurred will never, ever happen again.”³¹

Replace single issue thinking and action with intersectionality

The movement toward racial equity is crippled by single issue thinking—the tendency to step aside from action around one form of oppression because one is committed to action around another (e.g., I cannot be fully committed to racial justice because I devote my energy to economic justice or creation care or gender justice, etc.). One tremendous gift of the current moment (including the Black Lives Matter movement and the climate justice movement) is the increasing awareness that oppressions based on gender, race/ethnicity, and class are all intertwined. For example, capitalism and the class oppression imbedded in it has been wed to white supremacy in the United States since before it became a nation. The U.S. capitalist economy—so exploitative of people impoverished by it—was born of chattel slavery and the genocide of indigenous people.

Moreover, these forms of social injustice are inseparable from ecological degradation. The illustrations of racism intertwined with ecological devastation are endless. First exposed in the written literature with the publication of “Toxic Wastes and Race” in

29. Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians* (Eerdmans, 2014).

30. <https://www.facebook.com/jasperdpeters>.

31. Dr. Ron Daniels in interview with the Rev. Ronnie Galvin at: <https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/reparations-and-democratic-economy>. See note 14.

Christians often move uncritically to the assumption that reconciliation is the path forward into racial justice. That assumption is part of the problem, and it perpetuates structural racism in two senses.

1987, and the coining of the term “environmental racism” by the Rev. Dr. Benjamin Chavez, these connections are manifest today in the tormenting reality of climate injustice (the racial, economic, and gender injustice embedded in climate change). While caused primarily by the worlds high-consuming people who are largely White and economically privileged, climate change is killing and displacing first and foremost the world’s economically impoverished people who are disproportionately people of color and Indigenous people. Moreover, as Hop Hopkins points out, the fossil fuel-based economy that is so destructive of Earth’s livable climate requires sacrifice zones, and invariably they are the communities of people of color and impoverished people.³²

The climate justice movement focuses on the root causes of the climate crisis and ways to address it through an intersectional lens that includes race, class, capitalism, and ecology. This movement, along with Black Lives Matter, insists that single issue approaches to justice will fall flat, and that tremendous power for social transformation toward justice emerges when economic justice, racial justice, and ecological well-being are held together. A recent report, “Energy Democracy,” by Race Forward makes clear the potential inherent in that intersectional awareness and action, and calls for energy democracy as an ingredient of racial justice.³³ Repentance as action that enables reparations will replace single issue thinking with intersectionality.

Closing

Baldwin was correct: “...nothing can be changed until it is faced,” and “...ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.”³⁴

White people in the U.S. who seek to embody the claim that Black lives do matter may be wise to take on these guideposts: hear and

32. H. Hopkins, “Racism is Killing the Planet,” (2020), at https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/racism-killing-planet?fbclid=IwAR38R7h4gnYZuMGChnMtKbUVaYr_LSF5_masPSZVbkkkX_XlkbF-PVUUqnY.

33. Race Forward, “Energy Democracy,” at <https://www.race-forward.org/research/reports/energy-democracy-honoring-past-and-investing-new-energy-economy>. See also:

Stacy M. Brown, “Environmental Racism Killing People of Color” (2019), at <https://greenlining.org/press/2019/environmental-racism-killing-people-of-color/>.

34. See footnotes 2 and 3.

heed Black, Brown, and Indigenous people's truth-telling about the realities of white supremacy in this land and about what is needed to dismantle it; unearth how the lenses of whiteness and of economic comfort shape our perceptions of reality; and transform guilt, shame, and blame into fervent committed anti-racist action.

That action will take many forms. We have explored two. They are learning to see reality through an anti-racist lens and an economic justice lens, and embodying repentance through action that takes reparations seriously. We posed four keys to such action.

White people of relative economic privilege—I speak now to myself as well as others—beware. We may be sucked into moral inertia. Sucked in part by the mistaken myth that racial justice is for the benefit of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people alone. That is a myth. Ultimately, all of us are endangered by a racialized global economy of exploitation and extraction wed to white supremacy. To love neighbor through anti-racist living is also to love self as Jesus calls us to do.

Christians may be fed for this work by faith's gifts of truth-telling and of knowing ourselves to be at once three things: beloved (forever), broken by sin including structural sin, and bearers of God's justice-seeking, Earth-honoring love.

We are blessed to be alive at this moment in history. So much is at stake. Christians are called to accept Jesus' promise that "you will love your neighbor as yourself"—that is, we are called to embody in public life the radical justice-seeking and infinitely compassionate love of the One who breathes in and among and beyond us to bring life in fullness for all. This is a call to faith-rooted anti-racist living and is power for it.

Ultimately, all of us are endangered by a racialized global economy of exploitation and extraction wed to white supremacy. To love neighbor through anti-racist living is also to love self as Jesus calls us to do.
