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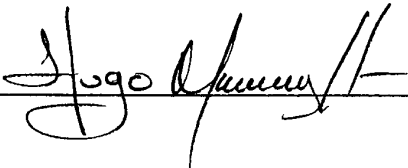


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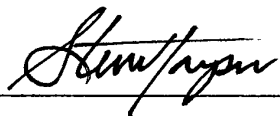
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One Faith, One Body:  
A Study in Racial Reconciliation  
Thesis submitted to  
Asbury Theological Seminary  
in partial completion of the  
Master of Divinity degree

by  
Jesse S. McLain  
Spring Semester 2002

## **Thesis Abstract**

I. Title: One Body, One Faith: A Study in Racial Reconciliation

II. Statement of Thesis:

A. The intent of this thesis is to present and analyze the spiritual deformation experienced within the Church of God Reformation Movement due to our racially divided fellowship and leadership. From there I intend to show how our theology has shaped the movement positively toward and through the process of racial reconciliation.

B. Methodology

1. Present a brief discussion of relevant theology and the history of the racial segregation.
2. Discuss and analyze the spiritual and practical limitations this segregation imposed on our ecclesiology and self-understanding.
3. Present a proof of the validity of a theology of unity and its implications for racial/ethnic diversity.
4. Review the recent moves toward reconciliation and make recommendations for further progress toward unity.
5. Either as closing remarks or as an appendix, discuss the implications for other areas of ecclesiology and evangelism.

C. Mastery

1. The development of this thesis will require me to pursue historical and theological research.
2. In analyzing and discussing the thesis I will have to use social and behavioral research.
3. As a major component of my theological analysis I will be doing exegesis and interpretation of scripture.
4. In applying the results of my study, I will be dealing directly with pastoral as well as community/ecclesial concerns.
5. As part of the overall process, I will be applying the dynamics of spiritual formation in community, ecclesial, and personal relationships

D. Nature of Contribution

1. A concise and relevant presentation of truth applied to a specific organizational movement.
2. Provide valid and concrete reasons for racial reconciliation as well as discrete procedures for accomplishing reconciliation.
3. Speak to the church universal of the possibilities and necessity of racial reconciliation within the church and throughout our communities.

### III. Summary

The thesis is divided into four chapters preceded by an introduction and followed with some short concluding remarks. The Introduction provides a summary of what I intend to prove and how I intend to make my case. This includes some personal experiences and general statements about racism in general.

Chapter 1, "From Unity to Division," discusses the early history of the Church of God Reformation Movement and how racial division was subtly developed in its structures. This chapter serves as a statement of the problem.

Chapter 2, "Racism: An Anglo American Tradition," covers the general history of racism in the American church. This includes how racism was expressed ecclesiologically, and specific ways the church has responded or failed to respond to racial issues. Chapter 2 serves as an analysis of the problem.

In chapter three, "Theological Reflections on Racism," I discuss the biblical concept of ethnicity and what the scriptures teach us about unity, holiness, and social justice. I deal with several ideological myths about scripture that are often used by racist people to defend their beliefs and with the specific doctrines of the Church of God that should cause us to reconsider our racist attitudes. This chapter is intended to show the scriptural validity of the doctrines of unity and holiness held by the Church of God. In addition, these reflections are meant to address our understanding of what it means to be a community.

Chapter 4, "Recommendations for Unity," deals with concrete suggestions to help the Church of God achieve racial reconciliation. Although some of these would apply only to the Church of God, most of them can be applied in principle to any church institution. These recommendations are by no means exhaustive. They do set out the parameters of what needs to be done and what can be done to achieve the goal of reconciliation.

My "Concluding Remarks" address the present situation and hope within the Church of God as well as the cost of racism. The intent of these remarks is to encourage progress and to plant hope in the hearts of divided Christians.

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## Introduction

It was the summer of 1976 and I was in a hurry. The congregations of the Church of God in Northeast Florida were having a unity service and I was scheduled to play bass guitar with the worship team and choir. Traffic was crazy and I was trying to rush back to my father's shop so I could get home and prepare myself for the evening service. As I pulled into an open lane of traffic, a black woman driving a large automobile pulled into the lane ahead of me, but driving slower and less hurried than I was. In my frustration I yelled, "You stupid n- - -r!" This type of angry display was thoughtless and useless, since only God and I heard my racial slur. Knowing God heard me had greater consequences than I would have imagined. That night I drove across town not even considering my angry words, but God had prepared a surprise for me. As I entered the Greater Jacksonville Church of God, with my instrument in hand, I saw the woman whom I had screamed at, sitting at the piano and playing our pre-service music. Quickly, I set up my bass and amplifier. Throughout the service I was hot and uncomfortable. I kept praying for forgiveness, but my prayers seemed to bounce off the roof and settle around my soul, choking out my spiritual breath. I did not even know her name, yet her music kept reaching me with its power and its joy. This only deepened my conviction about the racist attitude I had expressed that afternoon.

Despite of the discomfort I felt that evening, I refused to apologize to her. Instead, I rationalized that she did not know my sin and to confess to her would only add pain to her life. However, God was not through with this story; over the next eighteen years I continued to encounter Sister Nellon (I did learn her name) at church functions and regional meetings of our church fellowship. We played together many times in worship services and she never seemed to know my struggle and my sin. This was the case until 1994 when I was delivering a sermon to a

gathering of several congregations of both blacks and whites, when I had to come clean. I could not remain in sin anymore, and I had to let the whole church know my sin and humble myself before them and my dear sister in Christ. During those eighteen years she had encouraged me, prayed for me, and blessed me, not knowing the sin I kept deep in my heart. Now I had to reveal the sin and make my relationship right. Sister Nellon cried as I spoke and the church wept with her, but when the confession was over, she was the first one to take me in her arms and tell me that she loved me and forgave me. In revealing this painful truth to her, both of us were set free: she from ignorance about the behavior of someone she loved and I from a prison of sin.

The sin I had committed against God and her had deformed my own soul. While it was hidden, it became oppressive to Sister Nellon, although she was unaware of the specific act I had committed. I was not free of the spiritual bondage of sin and she was, unknowingly, in the position of giving love while receiving little in return. Neither of us could reach the full potential of our relationship until my sin was confessed, forgiven, and all of its consequences dealt with appropriately. Sister Nellon was the victim of my racism and was deprived of the blessing of forgiving me, as well as the love I owed her as a Christian.

Based on my personal experience, it is my contention that the Christian church as a whole, and the Church of God Reformation Movement in particular, have been deformed spiritually by our racist attitudes and our failure to address the situation. Just as I was deformed by my refusal to admit the problem and confess my sin, the church is deformed by denying and not confessing its sinful and oppressive actions and attitudes. In our blindness, the white church establishment has intentionally refused the love, enthusiasm and strength that ethnic diversity brings.



Although there are many tensions between ethnic minorities and Anglos in the United States today, the latent and active racism of Whites against Blacks is unique, particularly in the church. This type of racism has deeply scarred the white establishment as well as our brothers and sisters who remain the victims of white oppression. This oppression can be as simple as attitudes of racial superiority to overt acts of hate and violence against Blacks by Whites. It consists of economic, social/class, and interpersonal elements. It has deformed the image of the Church as an inclusive and loving community of cooperation and witness. It is my intent to look at this form of racism from the context of my own faith tradition, the Church of God Reformation Movement. I use this context as my frame of reference because of our theological heritage, which in my opinion presents a solution to racism. Focusing on a single church movement is not as narrow as it may seem because the solutions to our racial division are applicable to other movements and denominations as well. Furthermore, I see the current efforts within the Church of God as healthy signs of forward momentum in overcoming attitudes and behaviors that threaten real unity and reconciliation. More will be said about the specific doctrines of The Church of God tradition, but our emphasis on the unity of all believers has been foundational in my spiritual journey and continues to shape my social, cultural and religious attitudes. The importance of this theological tradition for this thesis is in the fact that we preach our theology so strongly, yet have failed to grasp the full implications of what we preach. In struggling with the tension between what we believe and how we actually live, I believe we can achieve significant reconciliation as well as provide valid models for other Christian groups to use.

I am a white, middle-class pastor, living in a white, middle-class community, shepherding a white, middle-class congregation. I was born and raised in the same type of context during the

heyday of the civil rights movement. I am old enough to remember Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" sermon (yes, it is a sermon, not just a speech!).<sup>1</sup> My mind can still recall the variety of responses by white persons in my home church regarding race riots, school busing, and the end of legal segregation in schools, restaurants, busses and other public places. Some of them cheered the moves toward civil rights; others thought the blacks should learn to "keep in their place." A few applauded the goal, but were troubled by the violence that any action on racial issues seemed to foment.

As a child of the south and a White by birth, I claim no freedom from racial bias. Despite my ongoing effort to be a person of reconciliation, I continue to fight an ingrained prejudice against non-white people. Some of this is a fear of surrendering power and control and some is just the angst of dealing with others who are distinctly different from me. Throughout this work I will attempt to remain open and confessional about these prejudices. At the same time I hope to present a model for reconciliation that has been part of my life and ministry and has helped me to fully embrace my non-white brothers and sisters.

For me, another deeply held conviction is that the Wesleyan Holiness movement in general and the Church of God in particular have something to contribute theologically and practically to the solution of the race dilemma in the Church. E. Hammond Oglesby describes the situation as follows:

"From an Afro-centric perspective, it seems to me that the church today is in trouble, not only because it lacks a coherent global vision beyond the mountain of racism, but also because of its preoccupation with maintenance over mission and respectability over credibility-in her feeble attempt to respond to the needs and cries of the hurting ones in the world."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I first heard Martin Luther King deliver this sermon when I was in first grade. Our teacher had us watch it on a Public Television broadcast several weeks after the actual event.

<sup>2</sup> E. Hammond Oglesby, O Lord, Move This Mountain! (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998) page 107

The Wesleyan holiness tradition calls us to see beyond our private little worlds into the pain and anguish of others. John Wesley himself ignored the propriety of his church tradition to reach and love those persons neglected by his church. The Wesleyan movements have a strong emphasis on active engagement with real life issues and strong biblical support and interpretation for such involvement. I believe Wesley's approach is still a valid viewpoint that can assist churches in dealing with racial tensions.

Another important conviction in addressing racism is that I believe in the inspiration of the Bible and its power to shape and transform our lives spiritually, physically, and relationally. I believe the Bible leads us into relationships with God and one another rather than being a system of privately applied rules or moral orders. From a Christian ethics perspective I view the Bible as a matter of interpersonal involvement. That is, morally good people reveal the nature of God through Christ Jesus as God shapes our behavior and life in relationship to others.

To put it somewhat too sharply: Christian ethics is not concerned with the good, but with what I, as a believer in Jesus Christ and as a member of his church, am to do. Christian ethics, in other words, is oriented toward revelation and not toward morality.<sup>3</sup>

One other personal consideration I wish to disclose is, my own continuing struggle to master the full implications of a Christian life lived out for the sake of others. This is reflected in my fight against my own selfish desires, such as the accumulation, appropriation, and the distribution of wealth, knowledge, and fellowship. My journey is like that of Mattie Greathouse when she states, "What was becoming apparent to me through the unsettling process of serious biblical study was that God cares more about my character than my pride."<sup>4</sup> As long as I continue to pretend that there is no struggle, then no reconciliation can happen. Therefore, if

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Lehman, Ethics in a Christian Context (New York: Harper and Row, 1963) page 45.

<sup>4</sup> Mattie Greathouse, My Story is Grounded in Life, Asbury Herald, vol. 112, #2&3, (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Seminary, 2002) page 7

what I teach is valid then it must be applied in the fullest measure to my relationships and activities with other ethnic groups. It is my hope that this project will help lead me to a personal transformation and spiritual maturity, and not only simple academic exercise.

Therefore, the intent of this thesis is two-fold: prophetic confrontation and hopeful application. Prophetic confrontation is needed because; "[t]he silence of organized Christianity during this prolonged struggle now requires strong prophetic voices."<sup>5</sup> Hopeful application is necessary because we need concrete and workable models of reconciliation to be offered as alternatives to current church practices. Under this two-fold goal, I intend to address the deformative sin of racism within my own faith tradition. I do this as honest criticism, not just to point at others in accusation. Since I believe that my heritage is so rich, I can no longer allow excuses and myopic attitudes to shape the congregational and institutional structures of our Church. My hope is that my own church "family" will begin to heal and that others may find in it an example and a promise. Developing my two-fold goal will involve the discussion of specific acts of racism, institutional attitudes and structures that foster racist behavior, and issues of belief and attitudes that individuals use to oppress others.

The first part of my two-fold goal is prophetic confrontation, which has implications for the Christian life. Facing the truth about one aspect of individual and corporate sin will lead us to deal with other sins. As we deal with the specific issue of racism, we must also confront other issues of isolation: classism, sexism, and whatever other "ism's" divide the God's people. This is especially true in America with regard to gender isolation. For example, as DeYoung affirms, "I

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<sup>5</sup> Ivan A. Bales, Our Racist Legacy (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publications, 1997) page xv.

am troubled when I hear people speak with great clarity regarding racial reconciliation who are still locked into hierarchical views on gender issues."<sup>6</sup>

It is my hope and prayer that this prophetic confrontation will lead to true confession and active repentance. Too many token gestures have been offered by Whites, accepted by Blacks, and then forgotten by White Christians. It is time to establish real and lasting relationships across racial, ethnic, gender and class borders. Indeed, it is time for the church to start doing away with the boundaries it has created that separate people by ethnic categories. I do not mean a uniform homogeneity, but rather a complimentary and broad range of diversity in which everyone can find a place to fit and be embraced.

The second aspect of my two-fold goal is to provide workable and appropriate models for racial reconciliation. These are not presented as infallible solutions or as applicable to all situations, but rather as starting points of reconciliation between Blacks and Whites. All of us, regardless of ethnicity, are deformed by sin and therefore are dependent on a loving and merciful God. For example, as Oglesby argues:

For us to raise the critical ethico-theological questions does not mean, necessarily, that we can provide the correct and perfect answers; but rather, the burden of ethical discourse requires that we be honest in our response, unrelenting in our spirit to "know the truth," and faithful in our convictions to *act* upon that which we know as moral agents of a freeing and unfailing God.<sup>7</sup>

This application of workable and appropriate models of reconciliation flows from a Wesleyan understanding of theology and is rooted in the "orthodoxy" of the Church of God. From this perspective, social problems are best addressed from the concept of a loving and faithful God whose nature and being demands our sacrificial response to others. The distinct applications that I will suggest include poignant pictures of success in racial reconciliation. They are neither

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<sup>6</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Reconciliation (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997) page xviii.

<sup>7</sup> Oglesby, page 35.

theoretical nor narrowly defined. Rather, they are real stories of real people who have captured a vision of God's church as inclusive and powerful in a world of pain, suffering, and aloneness.

In developing this thesis in the following chapters, I will follow the method employed by liberation theologians.<sup>8</sup> First, they state the problem and its historical context. Second, they analyze the problem and its formative, or rather deformative, aspects. This analysis leads into the third level: a discussion of theological implications and considerations. From theological considerations, the final level will move to a discussion of concrete recommendations and examples of successful moves in racial reconciliation.

I believe this method is valid for my thesis for several reasons. First, it makes it possible to include dialogical and narrative elements in a structure that extends beyond theoretical research and into the practical engagement of persons and issues. Second, this method keeps theology active in the everyday lives of the people and groups under discussion. Third, racial reconciliation is a liberation issue. As long as one group holds and exercises power over another group for personal and communal advantage, then the group deprived of power is in need of liberation. Therefore, the methods employed by liberation theologians are valid for this discussion. Not only is this method valid, but it is also vital and needed because it provides an approach in which the voices and stories of others can be heard.

As part of my research for this paper I have included reading, personal interviews, and gathering information through questionnaires mailed to pastors, lay persons and leaders on the local, national and state levels. The information gained from the personal interviews and questionnaires may be as much anecdotal as statistical. Such information is still valid because it

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<sup>8</sup> This method is clearly explained in Francisco Moreno Rejón, "Seeking the Kingdom and Its Justice: The Development of an Ethic of Liberation," in The Ethics of Liberation—The Liberation of Ethics, ed. Dietmar Mieth and Jacques Pohier, Concilium 172 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1984), 34.

provides personal perceptions of what is, and is not, happening in the area of reconciliation between Blacks and Whites in my denomination. I have studied academic materials in order to obtain reliable information on historical material, the pervasiveness of racism in our society, appropriate theological considerations for dealing with racism and practical applications with which we can rebuild our faith community. Personal interviews and questionnaires will affirm these readings.

My assumption is that this research will show a significant difference between what blacks and whites perceive regarding our progress in reconciliation. Whites will either see it as unnecessary to pursue further reconciliation or an almost accomplished fact. Blacks will most likely see our efforts as sporadic and ineffective in dealing with long-term problems. Much is being done, or at least attempted, in the Church of God Reformation Movement to move us into a unified existence. Resistance is still great from white leaders, pastors, and laity. If nothing else, I pray we might stoke the fires of racial revival and truly move forward into unity as the body of Christ.

## Chapter One: From Unity to Division

The Church of God Reformation Movement was born out of the rumblings of a divided country. Less than two decades after the Civil War, the United States was just as divided racially as it had been before. Blacks were technically free, but socially and, on the local level at least, legislatively bound. Reconstruction, the period which followed the Civil War, had done little more than fuel the antipathies between North and South. The Christian churches in the United States and its territories were little better. Denominations were defining orthodoxy as adherence to specific creeds or disciplines and, for the most part, were ineffective in dealing with the social and spiritual issues of a post-war United States. Many of them spent more time and resources defending their own theological position than they did healing the hurts in a war torn nation.

In the middle of all this social, political, and religious chaos, men and women began to respond to God's call to rediscover their true spiritual heritage and social witness. This was the heritage of unity and holiness found in the early New Testament church. Daniel S. Warner and E. W. Wimbish were two of these individuals. Their stories lay the foundation of what we know today as the Church of God Reformation Movement.

In October of 1881, D. S. Warner stood up in the Northern Indiana Eldership of the Church of God to offer some proposals on conforming church government more closely to biblical standards. We do not have a record of exactly what Brother Warner said, but we do know that it was not accepted by the Eldership. Brother Warner walked out on the assembly followed by five others who agreed with what he had proposed.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gale Hetrick, Laughter Among the Trumpets (St. Louis, MI: Church of God in Michigan, 1980) 7.



D. S. Warner had never been comfortable with the Northern Indiana Eldership, which was itself a splinter group of The Churches of God of North America. As he looked into the Word of God and analyzed the structures and behaviors of various denominations, he pointed out some fundamental inconsistencies. Although we do not have a record of his specific proposals at that meeting, we do have record of a meeting at Carson City two weeks later. The group that met at Carson City was to become the second congregation of this movement, the first being made up of the individuals who had walked out with Brother Warner two weeks earlier. At the Carson City meeting a resolution was adopted that included the foundational elements of what Warner perceived as "New Testament Christianity."<sup>2</sup> The essential elements of the resolution are:

- 1.) Embrace holy living.
- 2.) Affirm the imminent return of Christ.
- 3.) Disavow church organization.
- 4.) Affirm the need of an annual gathering of the saints.
- 5.) Ignore and abandon the practice of licensing preachers.
- 6.) Recognize a fellowship composed of all regenerated and sincere saints.
- 7.) Urge "children of God" to forsake human parties and sects and stand alone in unity of the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Of these seven resolutions, numbers one, six and seven are crucial to this thesis: Holy living; the fellowship of all saints; Unity among believers through the Holy Spirit. These doctrines would shape the early understanding of Christian community among the founders of the Church of God. According to Warner's understanding of Scripture, Christian community ought to be seen as 1.) A community of redeemed persons (Eph. 2:14-21 and I Cor. 1:12); 2.) A divine/human partnership with Christ as head (Eph. 2:19-22 and Acts 2:47); 3.) A holy community (I Cor. 1:2 and 3:17); and 4.) A unified community (John 17:20-24).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hetrick, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

As a Union soldier in the Civil War, Warner had fought to win the freedom of slaves from the yokes of white tyranny. Through his education at Oberlin College and his early ministry in the Methodist Church, Warner had learned Wesleyan Holiness and its implications for ministry and social reform. These experiences shaped Warner's ministry. He held tenaciously to the truth about unity and holiness he perceived in Scripture and struggled to live out the fullest implications of that truth. Ironically, within two decades after his death the movement he was instrumental in founding would be divided by the same racism he had fought to abolish.

A few years later, after Warner's death, in Cleveland, Ohio, Brother E. W. Wimbish, his wife, and several friends were making the same moves toward deeper fellowship with God and a more holy walk in the world. As Mother Wimbish records it:

We saw the need of a closer walk with God so we started a little prayer band and called it, "The Brothers and Sisters of Love." Those who wanted more of God in their lives became members of the prayer band. We earnestly prayed and studied our Bibles. God revealed the light of His word to us, saved, and sanctified us.<sup>5</sup>

Brother Wimbish was a member of the Baptist church and after he moved to Western Pennsylvania, his small band of holiness believers became unpopular and unacceptable to his local congregation. They were barred from fellowship and for a while operated as a totally independent congregation. Brother Wimbish had sensed a call of God to "come out" of earthly organizations and political church structures. This call is almost a direct parallel to what D. S. Warner and others were sensing in their hearts just a few years before. However, the Brothers and Sisters of Love, as they called themselves, had never heard of the Church of God Reformation Movement or its teachings.

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<sup>5</sup> Katie R. Davis, Zion's Hill at West Middlesex (Corpus Christi: Christian Triumph Press, 1957) 11.

While proceeding as an independent fellowship, a White brother in the Church of God heard of the Wimbish's teachings and came to visit their fellowship. This brother in Christ affirmed their consistency with Church of God teachings and helped establish a relationship between this small local fellowship and the larger Church of God Reformation Movement.<sup>6</sup> This early encounter and fusion of fellowships highlights the character of the early Church of God movement: individuals and small groups developing a similar understanding of holiness and unity, then being incorporated into a larger and growing fellowship. That cooperative spirit was to last for a few years, but was, all too soon, swallowed up by social expediency.

Since the early ministerial years of Brother Wimbish's holiness adventure, he had dreamed of a gathering place for the saints. He first experienced this dream in 1901 while still residing in Cleveland, OH. He describes his dream as follows: "Crowds and crowds of real happy people having church out in the woods where there were beautiful buildings among the trees."<sup>7</sup> The beauty of this vision so amazed Brother Wimbish that he kept looking for a specific site that matched the details of his vision. During a hunting trip into the woods near West Middlesex, PA, J. A. Christman found a site that triggered a memory of Brother Wimbish's dream, and when he visited the site, Brother Wimbish declared, "Yes, this is the place."<sup>8</sup>

Within a short span of years, there were annual gatherings at this site and according to recorded testimony, Brother Wimbish's dream became a reality. He wrote, "The campground meetings and the city on Zion's Hill at West Middlesex are made up of individuals, church groups, conventions, etc., so one life touches another."<sup>9</sup> This fellowship was originally a

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<sup>6</sup> James Earl Massey, The Question of Race: An Historical Overview, printed in, A Time to Remember Milestones, Barry Callen, editor (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1978) 22.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Katie R. Davis, Zion's Hill at West Middlesex (Corpus Christi: Christian Triumph Press, 1957) 12.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 33.

gathering place for saints in Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio. Although at the time there was some racial separation in the church of God, in comparison with other church groups and denominations, there was a high degree of mutual support and cooperation among Whites and Blacks. In fact, Rev. Daniel Harden writes:

The first 30 years of the movement, blacks and whites worshipped together in local congregations, but particularly at camp-meetings and area gatherings. Confirmation can be found of blacks and whites meeting together in Chicago, New York, St. Louis and Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>10</sup>

Although I have used the specific names of individuals and described events that seem to be centered on their personal life and work, it is unlikely that these individuals would view their efforts as significant as I have presented them. During the genesis of the Church of God Reformation Movement, one of the most profound understandings that individuals held was that the work was not theirs, but rather the Holy Spirit's work through them. As John W V Smith, a Church of God historian describes it:

They were so caught up in a sense of significance for their message that they took great care to keep from calling attention to themselves as persons. They regarded the developing response to their activity as the work of God and not the product of their own leadership.<sup>11</sup>

This cooperation and spirit of selflessness ended at Anderson Campmeeting in 1917. As the movement had grown and the fellowship and spirit of the group seemed to be maturing, more and more blacks began to attend this annual gathering of the saints. Some of the white folks approached the leaders of the blacks and asked them to come to a meeting. Mother Laura Moore's words can best describe what happened next:

We went to the appointed place and this is what they told us: "There are too many of your people coming here. You'll hinder the whites from coming and being

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<sup>10</sup> Daniel Harden, The History of Human Relations in the Church of God (Shining Light, Jan/Feb, 1999) 3.

<sup>11</sup> John W V Smith, I Will Build My Church (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1985) 14.

saved. Why don't you get a place of your own?" Our hearts were sad and many tears were shed, for we had no place to go.<sup>12</sup>

This incident marks a tragic story of division and racism within the Church of God. What had previously been a regional and local camp meeting at West Middlesex rapidly became the gathering place of the black saints and churches from across the United States. Out of this developed what is now called, The National Association of the Church of God, which has come to represent the majority of our Black congregations and Black leaders.

One note I find of extreme interest to our present discussion is Mother Wimbish's removal from her journal of all the names and incidents of those who had wronged the blacks.

Katie Davis records her conversation with Mother Wimbish regarding those deletions:

I asked why several leaves were torn from the end of her writing. She said, "There has been a whole lot of love, joy and cooperation in this work. I decided not to leave any heartaches on record because Jesus has washed them all away through his love."<sup>13</sup>

Another important historical event that deals with racial tensions occurred at the Alabama State Campmeeting of the Church of God in 1897. Blacks and whites were divided by a rope that stretched down the middle of the sanctuary, as it was required by Alabama law. Rev. Lena Shoffner delivered a sermon on the tearing down "the middle wall of partition," based on Ephesians 2:14. The sermon was so moving that some in attendance took down the rope that separated the blacks and whites. In violation of Alabama law, the saints knelt together in prayer. This dramatic rebellion by the saints against white supremacist law led to an assault on the campground and a scattering of the saints. Events of this nature rarely occur now!

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<sup>12</sup>Laura Moore, quoted by Katie R. Davis, Zion's Hill at West Middlesex (Corpus Christi: Christian Triumph Press, 1957) 47.

<sup>13</sup>Priscilla Wimbish, quoted by, Katie R. Davis, Zion's Hill at West Middlesex (Corpus Christi: Christian Triumph Press, 1957) 10.

What had happened to a movement like this? In twenty years, from 1897 to 1917, we had gone from social rebellion to social conformity. James Earl Massey describes the situation:

Like other religious bodies in America, the Church of God also polarized the races within its constituency. And like other bodies, the Church of God sought to rationalize the separateness. All of this is especially interesting in view of the groups teaching on Christian unity.<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Massey goes on to point out that such social concerns were "hardly part of the fundamental mind of the Church of God during those early years."<sup>15</sup> As with most organizations, such polarization was "not viewed in the main as proscriptive, but merely as a social fact."<sup>16</sup>

The social realities did not stop the work of the early movement. "There was development, but it was only along divisive lines of color and race concerns."<sup>17</sup> Although several Black leaders, such as Mother Laura Moore and her husband Samuel Moore, expressed concern about the growing division, I can find no written record of substantial white objection to the separation.

The sad fact is that this separation has continued to the present day. The national level offices of the Church of God and several state organizations are making decisive moves toward reconciliation, "Yet the core issues undergirding our distrust and division remain largely unaddressed and unchanged."<sup>18</sup> Just as the South had gone back to oppressing blacks through segregationist legislation, so the Church of God went back to business as usual. "Unfortunately, the seeds for a growing sense of isolation had been planted."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> James Earl Massey, The Question of Race: An Historical Overview, printed in, A Time to Remember Milestones, Barry Callen, ed. (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1978) 87

<sup>15</sup> Massey, 87

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>18</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Reconciliation (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997) 4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 4.

Where do we stand today? According to the 2002 Church of God Yearbook, the National Association of the Church of God is only an "Affiliated Organization." This places the black group on a footing with some independent colleges and professional associations within the broader church context. The Church of God includes them within the structures of the church in order to rationalize our doctrine of unity, but, in reality this is no different from a "keep them in their place," mentality. The main organizational entity of the Church of God, called the General Assembly of the Church of God, stands in a position of power over the organization of our black brothers and sisters. This is carried on at a state level by separate organizations in at least eight of the fifty states. These figures only represent the states where a state level Association is registered in the Yearbook. In many of these states, these figures represent different fellowships of members and pastors, separate credentialing boards, separate missionary efforts, and separate gatherings at the state level. At the local level it is evident that White and Black congregations in relative proximity to each other cooperate little more than through an occasional "unity service." There is little, if any joint evangelism, combined outreach, or efforts at establishing cross-cultural relationships between members and communities. I must agree with E. Hammond Oglesby when he states:

I believe passionately and contend that for some people the church in our time—either by neglect of the gospel of Jesus Christ for the poor and oppressed, or by compromise of God's unrelenting righteousness and truth—has come to symbolize the 'grand mountain' of racism in American Culture.<sup>20</sup>

What has this neglect and compromise done to the Church of God and the larger fellowship of the Christian Church? As a movement that has historically taught that we should maintain relational and structural unity, it is apparent we have not maintained such unity, and in fact have become almost two denominations, one predominately White and the other almost

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<sup>20</sup> E. Hammond Oglesby, Oh Lord, Move This Mountain (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998) 5.

exclusively Black. Has the Christian church become "connoisseurs of fragmentation?"<sup>21</sup> Curtiss DeYoung describes it this way:

Even the church impedes the reconciliation it preaches. We who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ find ourselves struggling with the reality that the same walls we construct in society are found in our Christian community. We allow the fact that we are created female and male to keep us apart. We embrace class distinctions. We segregate ourselves by racial designations. We exalt theological differences at the price of unity. We use cultural diversity as an excuse for division. The divide in the community of Jesus Christ creates perceptions that further perpetuate our separation.<sup>22</sup>

The result of this division and fragmentation is a church with a distorted sense of community. Living in Christian community demands an other-centered attitude. In failing to engage the issues of racism and separation in our local, state, and national attitudes towards persons of color, we have twisted our perceptions of both Whites and Blacks. This distortion reveals itself, first of all, in a fear of change. "Because of the seductive power of individualism and greed in contemporary society, the church has become a "prisoner" of an individualistic middle-class orientation, the chief defender of the prevailing values of the status quo."<sup>23</sup> This causes us to fear change because it may cost us our comfort, security or privilege. This fear causes movements to stagnate into mere institutions.

Another consequence of this disfigured community is a fear of authority, either biblical or that of prophetic and charismatic leadership. We resist the word as proclaimed because it forces us to re-evaluate our own activities and attitudes. If we took the time and effort to truly understand the Word of God and live out its fullest mandates we would have to surrender control of our resources and prideful accomplishments. This surrender of pride and control applies to all. To submit ourselves to the authority of another person might mean we would have to accept

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<sup>21</sup> DeYoung, xvii.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>23</sup> Oglesby, 7.



a Black person as our pastor or spiritual leader, of a predominately White congregation or a White leader in Black congregation. In reality, "Some of us are simply afraid to take a look at our own bigotry."<sup>24</sup>

Not only are we deformed into fearing change and fearing authority, we also begin to fear others who are not very much like us. The burden of "wearing the mask too long,"<sup>25</sup> causes us to distrust smaller and smaller differences between others and ourselves. This can and does rapidly develop into an attitude that says, 'Only you and I are right brother, but I am beginning to have my doubts about you.'

The final outcomes of this passionate neglect are empty worship and a non-credible witness. Empty worship due to incompleteness in the worshipping community. If God intends for us to worship, celebrate, and fellowship as a diverse, but unified entity, then we cripple our community when we isolate ourselves from others. Such isolation can be based on skin color, language, or just worship style and preferences. Indeed, worship style has been a matter of serious debate within the church in recent years. Too often, we seek uniformity rather than completeness. "This emphasis on uniformity impedes reconciliation."<sup>26</sup> As long as everybody must look, sing, act, or believe exactly like everyone else, we miss the point of real reconciliation.

Our witness is compromised with inconsistency between spoken proclamation and practical application in our behavior and attitudes. No one outside the fellowship believes what we have to say because it seems to have had no effect on us personally. Racial reconciliation is a prerequisite for effective global witness.

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<sup>24</sup> DeYoung, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Oglesby, xii.

<sup>26</sup> DeYoung, 21.

Our racist tendencies and behaviors seriously damage the Church of God, and the Christian church as a whole. "The long painful history of the church is the history of people ever and again tempted to choose power over love, control over the cross, being a leader over being led."<sup>27</sup> Are we willing and ready to make the choice for love; for the cross; for being led? In the next chapter I will present a look at the history of racism and how we have failed to make the biblical choice of love and how Whites have been unwilling to deal with Blacks as equals in Christ.

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<sup>27</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, In the Name of Jesus (New York: Crossroad, 2000) 60.

## Chapter Two Racism: An Anglo/American Tradition

Before I can begin any presentation of racism in the United States and the church, I must define terms and concepts. This will ensure that the reader may understand clearly what I am referring to when I speak of racism, prejudice, our culture, and the church. It is important to understand these terms because persons cannot interact effectively when one person says and means one thing, but listeners hear and understand something quite different. For this reason, in the following section, I will define the terms bias, prejudice, racism, church, and culture.

Let me begin with the term, "bias." Webster's dictionary defines bias as, "An inclination or preference that interferes with impartial judgement."<sup>1</sup> It may or may not involve a measure of pre-judgement, but is primarily an attitude of preference based on familiarity or commonality. All of us have biases. Some of them are matters of taste, such as the style of music we prefer. Others may be rooted in our ethnic and cultural beliefs about authority, relationships, or any other area of belief. Our biases do not mean we hate or despise a certain style, belief, person or group, but are only our unique understanding of our own culture and tastes.

Prejudice is defined as, "[i]rrational intolerance of or hostility towards members of a certain race, religion, or group."<sup>2</sup> Where a merely biased person may at least be open to sharing with and considering the other person's or group's viewpoint, the prejudiced person chooses to ignore or deny the viewpoint of the "other." Prejudice is the foundational attitude that undergirds racism in any culture. Where bias is a relatively passive attitude, prejudice is an active and willful choice in the heart and mind of the individual.

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<sup>1</sup> Webster's Second New Riverside Dictionary, s.v. "bias."

<sup>2</sup> Webster's s.v. "prejudice."

This brings us to the terms, "racist," and "racism." Oglesby defines racism as "prejudice plus power."<sup>3</sup> Racism is specifically the unjust exercise of power based on assumed differences created by skin color and ethnic distinctions. According to Oglesby's definition, racism is limited to those who hold power. Although I have not always accepted this definition, my research for this project has transformed the understanding in my own mind and heart. Oglesby's argument is based on the following reasons: (1) Racism is the active or passive oppression of a person or group based on skin color or ethnicity; (2) Oppression requires the possession and use of power over one person or group, therefore; (3) Blacks, by definition, cannot be racist, for they do not have power over whites in our society. This by no means implies that blacks cannot be prejudiced. In fact, racism by Whites against Blacks may actually be blamed for prejudicial attitudes in the hearts and minds of black persons. If Whites are guilty of systematic oppression of Blacks, then Blacks may learn to distrust any action by Whites. In my own community we witness this when a Black person becomes a police officer. Young Blacks will consider them a "sell-out" to the White establishment. The more racism oppresses a person or group, the more they will develop a prejudice against the oppressive group or person. It is difficult to imagine an oppressed people feeling or thinking any other way. In addressing the use and abuse of power we must determine the foundations, or lack of them, for the assumed differences based on race.

Is there a basis for racial beliefs that White is somehow superior to Black? Beals concludes, "The origin of the concept of race occurred elsewhere than in the Bible."<sup>4</sup> He goes on to say that "rather than being a biblical category, "race" became a recognized category of

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<sup>3</sup> E. Hammond Oglesby, O Lord, Move This Mountain (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998) 19.

<sup>4</sup> Ivan A. Beals, Our Racist Legacy (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publications, 1997) 18.

evolutionary biology."<sup>5</sup> I will discuss in later pages the development of the concept of "race" but let us consider the following:

For reasons unknown, the African's skin color became his defining trait. It aroused the deepest scurrile response in Europeans and Americans. Often called a "Moor" or "Ethiopian," he also was a "negro" to the Spanish and Portuguese, a "noir" to the French, and a "black" to the English. In all four languages, the word implies gloom, evil, baseness, wretchedness, and misfortune.<sup>6</sup>

Although I will develop more fully the biblical view of ethnic identity in a later chapter, it is important to note that there is no Judeo/ Christian basis for a belief that persons are different or less human because of skin color or ethnicity.

Furthermore, in this thesis, I will refer to the total body of Christian believers, regardless of denominational divisions, by the generic term, "Church." When referring to a specific denomination I will use the denominational label, such as, "Methodist," "Baptist" or "Church of God." I do not want to create confusion for the reader in my use of the terms, "Church", and "Church of God." Many faith traditions use the terminology "Church of God" in reference to the broadest category of believers or the universal church. My faith tradition calls itself by that name as well as using it in reference to that same wider category of Christians. Since I will be speaking of both in the content of this project, thus I want to be clear which group I am referring to in any given situation.

Since this project will cover the subject of racism in both the wider culture and within the specific institution of the Church it is only fair that we define two more terms: "Institutional racism" and "cultural racism." For the purposes of our discussion, "institutional racism" refers

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 19.

to, "the application of those beliefs and behaviors, consciously or unconsciously, in the structure, practices, and overt or hidden assumptions of an organization."<sup>7</sup> This term would describe the racism as practiced within an organization such as The Church of God Reformation Movement. "Cultural racism" as defined by Davies and Hennessee, "is the application of those beliefs and practices in the mores, standards, customs, language, and group life of a society."<sup>8</sup> Cultural racism is therefore the racism that permeates and affects the largest cultural structures, such as that of the general society of the United States.

Culture is defined as, "[a] particular form of civilization, especially the beliefs, customs, arts and institutions of a society at a given time."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, culture may refer to the broad characteristics of life in the United States, in general, or the ethnic distinctives of a particular ethnic group like the Navajo or African Americans.

Even the most cursory examination of current experience of Blacks will indicate that the United States is still a racist nation. Educational opportunities, job opportunities, housing, human services, and especially church life in the United States all continue to be divided along lines of skin color and ethnicity. These divisions extend into matters of gender, as well as ethnic groups other than African Americans. Other groups such as: Asians, Native Americans, Hispanics, and others are victims of racism in many ways. The issue of relations between Whites and Blacks is one of such depth that it shapes both the identity of Blacks and the self-understanding of Whites. Feagin and Vera relate:

Racism, however, encompasses more than the way whites view the black "others." It also involves the way whites view themselves because of participating in a culturally and structurally racist society.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Davies and Sister Paul Teresa Hennessee, S.A., editors, Ending Racism in the Church (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998) 1.

<sup>8</sup> Davies and Hennessee, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Webster's II New Riverside Dictionary, s.v. "culture."

<sup>10</sup> Joe R. Feagin and Herna'n Vera, White Racism (New York: Routledge, 1995) 13.

Such self-understanding is an attitude that Whites are superior to Blacks. No matter how much we may believe that racism has been or soon will be outdated, "[b]elief in white racial superiority survived both the antislavery crusade and the rhetoric of equal rights."<sup>11</sup> The tendency has always been to look at what has been accomplished and decide it is all that needs to be accomplished. As Feagin and Vera describe our current situation:

Since the mid-1970s many influential commentators and authors have argued that white racism is no longer a serious, entrenched national problem and that African Americans must take total responsibility for their own individual and community problems.<sup>12</sup>

Ivan Beals points out, "Whites believed the character of each race was grounded in history. The creator made Negroes to be servants of white men, and this surmise was basic in the history of black-white relations."<sup>13</sup> I would add that not only is this belief basic to our culture, it continues to shape the way we respond and deal with other ethnic groups. Perhaps because we have made some progress, "Whites typically view problems of the black underclass as the central issue for black Americans and believe that that class condition has little to do with discrimination."<sup>14</sup>

The major mistake we make is that of our perspective on social and unjust realities. Rather than open our eyes and minds to the oppressive attitudes we live by we choose to ignore blatant injustice that separates White from Black, rich from poor, and powerful from powerless. E. Hammond Oglesby refers to racism as a "mountain" and states:

Whether the mountain (of racism) appears to be good or evil, right or wrong, moral or immoral, tasteful or distasteful-all depends on one's cultural location, status, skin-color, ecclesial loyalties, values, and position in the socioeconomic system of American society.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Beals, 100.

<sup>12</sup> Feagin and Vera, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Feagin and Vera, 27

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>15</sup> Oglesby, 20.

Too often the ruling opinion is that we have done enough and any problems "they" are still experiencing, it is up to "them" to solve them. The entire attitude of "us" and "them" is symptomatic of our racist attitudes. We fail to realize that it is not a matter of whether the problem is a White issue or a Black issue. It is a problem, and it affects all humanity, regardless of our ethnic, cultural or social position. Although responsibility for the problem may vary, racism's effects are pervasive.

What then are the reasons behind our racial systems and structures? In the following historical analysis, I intend to highlight at least four political and historical reasons behind our racist legacy as a nation. Each of them is part of a long established pattern of behavior and thought in the United States.

The first reason for White racism is simply greed or the desire for financial prosperity. My research shows that wealth, greed, and financial accumulation are foundations for a racist society. This aspect is not just a recent trend: for example Ivan Beals states, "Goodell [an abolitionist] believed the decline of early antislavery commitment came chiefly from the American's quest for wealth."<sup>16</sup> Today we continue the same historical pattern in our capitalist system. We continue to let profit and financial gain determine our choices and structures, failing to recognize the ways in which workers are alienated from the benefits their labor produces. "Indeed, most white workers have yet to seriously question the capitalist system and its corporate elite."<sup>17</sup> Since most workers desire to increase their wealth and position, they are hesitant to question the system or institution that provides them the opportunity to make such an increase.

This type of greed that results in racism is related to what has been referred to as the "Protestant work ethic." This work ethic is little more than a Calvinistic method of enforcing the

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<sup>16</sup> Beals, 25.

<sup>17</sup> Feagin and Vera, 24.



*status quo*. It explains the reality of those who have and those who lack, by affirming that those who have deserve what they have and those who lack have only themselves to blame.

The gospel of the work ethic is central to the white conception of self. Its essential beliefs typically include: (1) Each person should work hard and succeed in material terms; (2) Those who work hard will in fact succeed; (3) Those who do not succeed (for example poor people) have only themselves to blame: their laziness, immorality, and other character defects.<sup>18</sup>

Until we realize that some do not have material wealth simply because they are not allowed to have it, we will not be effectively dealing with racism and the economic issues related to it.

The second reason, is the inability of humans to handle freedom and power once it has been gained. This tendency can be witnessed across the world when peoples and nations revolt only to practice the same oppressive behaviors on those now in their power. South and Central American countries are full of such portraits, as well as many countries in Africa. In fact, the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and Asia did little more to help the average citizen of those countries than the monarchs and aristocrats they replaced. In the United States this can be seen through the first two generations of settlers. The early puritans and others were themselves escaping persecution in Europe. Within one generation, the native Americans, who had been essential to survival for that first generation, became the victims of exploitation by the children and grandchildren of those so recently delivered from persecution.

The inability to handle power, once received, may be indicative of unhealed wounds in the ones now misusing power. Curtiss Paul DeYoung sees this as affecting even subsequent generations, not just the first ones to abuse their power. In commenting on this possibility he states, "There also may be serious wounds among the descendants of those who misused power to dominate others."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Feagin and Vera, 150-151.

<sup>19</sup> Curtiss P DeYoung, Reconciliation (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997) 117.

Issues of power relate to the third reason for the perpetuation of racism, the illusion of national or political unity. This illusion begins with the subtle belief that we are better off with the appearance of unity, rather than the substance of real oneness. This was a driving force in Abraham Lincoln's own thought life and philosophy, which might explain why he waited so long in emancipating the slaves. His concern was with saving the nation, and he saw slavery as the issue dividing it. As Beals affirms, " only the needs of the Union guided him."<sup>20</sup> Unity without solidarity or oneness is a dangerous tendency in institutions because it gives them tacit permission to degrade the individual for the sake of the institution. This will become an increasingly important reason, as we look at the church in the United States and the Church of God in particular. I say this as a caution to Blacks. Since it is essential that Blacks be empowered, Blacks must also be accountable for how they use that power. The only possible remedy to the abuse of newly gained power is that of ongoing dialogue between Whites and Blacks, and mutual submission to each other and the task of reconciliation.

A final reason, that is an underpinning to all the others, is the unique United States attitude of resisting any other nation's attempt to define who are we and how we should live as a nation. Although national pride is probably part of every nation's corporate character, in the United States it has taken on particularly strong and individualistic dimensions. Stemming from the same roots as our desire for religious and political freedom, this permeates our culture. The USA is a nation of non-conformists, or at least we would like to be seen that way. Part of this may be our own cultural pride that wants everyone to serve our personal and national prerogatives. Whatever the reasons, the United States always seems to insist on doing things its own way and gets belligerent when others refuse to comply.

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<sup>20</sup> Beals, 95.

In analyzing these reasons and the structures of racism that exist in our society I will look at the political and historical development of racial structures in the United States. This will be followed by a look at how the church resisted, contributed to, and paralleled the larger structures of our societies. Then I will conclude this chapter with a look at the Church of God's place in the broader context of a racially divided nation.

It is valuable for us to look at our racist history because United States history "sets a pattern of relations between blacks and whites."<sup>21</sup> If we fail to see and understand the patterns and structures created by White dominance, then society is powerless to change or transform them into beneficial structures that reconcile persons and groups.

Patterns of domination trap people in dehumanizing structures. When there are no other models, previously oppressed people who achieve liberation may simply adopt the structures of power that were used against them.<sup>22</sup>

Society in general, and Whites, in particular, must effectively deal with patterns and structures of oppression or Whites are doomed to the constant repetition of oppressive behaviors and structures. Therefore, we must remove the ignorance of our own racial history. "If we remain ignorant of significant portions of history, we cannot understand what created the division and the injustice we experience today."<sup>23</sup>

What are the structures Whites have created and perpetuate? During the era of overt slavery, the main power and domination structure was that of ownership and property. Blacks were nothing more than chattel possessions of White owners. During the period of reconstruction following the Civil War, the emphasis moved to political power. This included attempts to prevent Blacks from gaining franchise, and if gained, trying to prevent them from actually using their vote. During the social era following Reconstruction, white power was the

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<sup>21</sup> Beals, 171.

<sup>22</sup> DeYoung, 117.

power of condescension. It was assumed that Blacks could do nothing apart from the leadership and providence of Whites. Although motivated to help Blacks, this was clear evidence of White superiority. In the current historical phase, the prevailing forms of power domination seem to be through economic means and tokenism. By controlling access to resources and offering advancement only to compliant individuals, Whites perpetuate racism through subtle and demeaning methods that appear harmless when observed superficially.

Where does the history of racism begin? From the earliest days of Europeans settling this land, there have been racist attitudes. The belief in White or Teutonic superiority was prevalent long before the Americas were discovered. It had both overt and covert effects on White attitudes about newly discovered peoples and how we would relate to them. This belief, fueled by human greed became the backbone of racism that affected government, business, social life, and the church.

Slavery was introduced into this country as an acceptable system of labor and consisted of both totally bound slavery, with persons becoming the legal property of the slave owner, and bond-servanthood, where persons owed the "master" a fixed amount of labor in exchange for sponsoring their passage to this country or as payment for some other debt. Slavery became such a powerful institution in the South due to near tropical conditions and the heavy work required for such agricultural endeavors as cotton and indigo. These jobs were labor intensive and few Europeans were willing to endure the climatic and work conditions, much less the diseases of coastal and marshy areas of the southern areas of the colonies. The Native Americans tended to either run away or to fight rather than submit to forced labor. Imported Black slaves had no where to run and no one to whom they could run. They were considered physically strong, acclimated to near-tropical climates, and resistant to the diseases that devastated Europeans.

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<sup>23</sup> DeYoung, 104.

By the time of the American Revolution (War of Independence), slavery was an entrenched social and economic reality. Although it appears from today's perspective that the issues on which the American revolution focused could be equally applied to the issues of human slavery, very few of the revolutionaries actually seemed to consider slavery a part of the revolutionary agenda. This agenda was discussed and considered by some to be intrinsic to the revolution, but since most Whites had already classified Blacks as sub-human, it was easy to believe they were not entitled to the same liberties as others. Patriotism drove White, European thinkers and leaders to focus on the colonies' collective relationship with Britain, while ignoring the local applications of the same thoughts and ideas. This same patriotic attitude, "overarched all such circumstances of the various churches, pervading every aspect of the country's feeling and thought."<sup>24</sup>

As the War for Independence developed blacks, both free and slave, became ready replacements for white men on the battlefield. "To meet manpower requests for Washington's army, recruiters began to send any available blacks."<sup>25</sup> The reasons behind this reveal the pervasiveness of the attitude of white superiority: "This spared an equal number of white men for the state or county militias, who usually served short-term local enlistments."<sup>26</sup> Let us look at how they reasoned: (1) Whites need to be near home and only serve short enlistments; (2) Blacks are available for the national army; (3) Let's send the Blacks to die and stay away from home.<sup>27</sup> Even with the pervasiveness of racism, the war did affect the thinking of many people. "After the war fought for liberty ended, many Americans became more aware of the wrongness of

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<sup>24</sup> Beals, 39.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>26</sup> Beals, 33.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

holding people in bondage."<sup>28</sup> Yet, no attempt to free the slaves during the revolutionary era succeeded.

As the 19th century unfolded, several significant events shaped the thought life of citizens in the United States. Darwin's development of evolutionary theory seemed to feed white supremacist thought. "As 19th century scientists converted to evolution, they also were convinced of racism."<sup>29</sup> If "survival of the fittest" was a valid concept then it is easy to assume that the "inferior races" were just that, inferior and unable to fully evolve as the white man had evolved. "From the mid-19th century and beyond the middle of the 20th century, prevailing worldwide scientific racism spoiled the social, political and even religious realms."<sup>30</sup>

Another event of a legal nature was the Dred Scott decision by the Supreme Court. Dred Scott was a slave who claimed he was a free citizen because he had been with his master in a state where the law declared him free. The court denied Scott's claim, but the decision affected more than this one individual.<sup>31</sup> Three points are of significance to an examination of this particular historical event: (1) The ruling denied Blacks, even free ones, citizenship. This, in effect, nullified Dred Scott's case completely, for only citizens could appeal to and make use of the legal system. (2) The court banned congress and territorial legislatures from depriving citizens of slave property. This gutted the specific law Dred Scott was using to make his case. (3) The Dred Scott case fully polarized North and South on issues of slavery and thus laid the foundations for armed conflict.<sup>32</sup>

It is an historical tendency to view the Civil War as a war for and against slavery.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>30</sup> Beals, 28.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Although slavery was the issue at stake in the North/South polarization, the real reason for war was the preservation of the nation's political unity. This attitude, which was discussed previously as a reason for our racist political history, is important because it is a viewpoint that values appearance over substance. Most politicians and citizens would rather have the country appear as a politically unified whole, even if that meant allowing a significant number of persons to live without basic human rights. This attitude will become an important consideration as we look at the development of racism within the Church of God.

Many politicians viewed the war as the result of state and national leader's refusal to deal effectively with the issue of slavery. "Lincoln never viewed the Civil War as a Northern crusade, but as divine punishment on the entire nation and people for their indulgence in slavery."<sup>33</sup>

Whether defending slavery or crying for its abolition, no one treated the issue of slavery casually. From the abolitionist side two approaches were used to deal with the issue of slaves and free Blacks. Sadly, both were unsuccessful: one was time and the other was colonization. Some believed slavery would fade away if we gave it enough time.

Though slavery was recognized as a serious problem by political and religious leaders alike, they relied on the overrated cure of time. A religious awakening must occur. Neither slavery nor the conflict of racism would heal themselves or fade away in time. Freedom would not prevail for African-Americans until the conflict was resolved in true reconciliation.<sup>34</sup>

Since racism and slavery involved the way people thought about themselves and others, something more than time is necessary to close the gap between Whites and Blacks.

Another solution that was offered was re-colonization: sending the slaves somewhere (usually back to Africa) and allowing them to set up their own nation. "The colonization view blended

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 42.

racism and humanitarianism, as rooted in the American heritage."<sup>35</sup> Lincoln considered this option, as did the evangelist, Phoebe Palmer, and many congressional delegates from the Mid-western states.<sup>36</sup>

Palmer's attitude reveals a common theme that was developing within the thought-life of the church during this time. "The other-worldly and spiritual aspects of Palmer's quest for perfect love subdued the impulse to antislavery reform."<sup>37</sup> The church began to see the "kingdom of God" as something in the future or something that transcended mere earthly reality. This was a dangerous, but significant, development because it divorced the church as a corporate entity from the issues affecting real persons in real situations. Christians allowed this theological development to isolate them from social justice issues in their communities and nation. The effects can be noted in the subsequent history of racism in the United States.

Following the war, a period of supposed reconstruction began. The problem of racism, however, remained. "The racial impasse that aroused armed conflict also prevented a just reconstruction."<sup>38</sup> The underlying attitudes and heart of the people had not been changed by the war. In fact, for many Southerners, the war only hardened their resolve. "In the decade following Lincoln's death, malice more than mercy typified reconstruction in the South."<sup>39</sup> The era of Reconstruction became just more of the same for Blacks: "So-called Reconstruction

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<sup>35</sup> Beals, 92.

<sup>36</sup> Phoebe Palmer was a female preacher in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition who traveled, taught, preached, and wrote numerous books on holiness and the experience of sanctification. For more information see: Jean Miller Schmidt, Grace Sufficient (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999) pages 133-142.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 105.



followed-after 1865-1867-a time when the Southern states passed 'Black Codes' to annul Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in all but name."<sup>40</sup>

One of the ways this was done was through controlling Black's vote and whether or not they could vote. Southerners originally tried to prevent Blacks from voting. Even when Blacks were given franchise the effort to annul their power did not stop.

From Reconstruction days into the 1890s Southern White factions controlled the Negro vote. When that failed, they disenfranchised him by devious requirements. He must prove his literacy or pay a poll tax-from which white men usually stood excused.<sup>41</sup>

This was more than just simple poll control. With no vote Blacks were deprived of participation in the decision making process, just as they were during Reconstruction. Actually it was worse, because now they were powerless to stop or even curb the measures designed to keep them in submission to White control. A political and economic caste system took over where slavery left off. Whites had control over resources that gave them command over the persons who needed and produced those resources. This control of persons only led to greater control of resources, thus creating a hopeless spiral of oppression for Blacks. With the repeal of Reconstruction laws after 1890 and the withdrawal of federal troops from the South by President Rutherford B. Hayes, the South returned to virtual, if not legal, slavery.

From this point on and well into the 20th century segregation became the rule and model for Black/White relations. Blacks were forced to live in separate neighborhoods, attend separate schools, and had separate hospitals, drinking fountains, bathrooms, and even cemeteries. Whites had created a cradle to grave system of racial segregation. With no voice in government and no

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<sup>40</sup> Beals, 111.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 137

substantial moral leadership within the legal process of this country, "Separate and equal in theory soon meant separate and unequal, practiced in every sector of common life."<sup>42</sup>

These patterns of domination continue into the present era. Although racism in post Civil War United States is often seen as simply the attitude of ignorant and/or mean spirited people, the truth is that many persons and institutions were guilty of perpetuating racial isolation of Blacks.

Besides the mob, the hangmen who fired public feelings, people of wealth and respectability, the press and the pulpit, who created and upheld public opinion, also had responsibility. The North colluded with the South in founding white supremacy nationwide. They both held Africans in contempt.<sup>43</sup>

Whites embraced racial bias and allowed prejudice to persist in all areas of life: economic, social, cultural and even the religious and faith life of our nation.

Whites chose identity over interaction. "The act of exalting one's identity over another's by embracing a false sense of superiority cuts off any meaningful interaction with other members of the human family."<sup>44</sup> This failure to interact with Blacks led to atrocious violations of personal rights and liberties. The more subtle damage was done to Whites themselves. "The lack of empathy on the part of whites entails a denial of other's humanity-and thus of their own."<sup>45</sup> By deciding that slavery/segregation was not intrinsically wrong Whites became unable to deal with Blacks except in oppressive ways. By refusing to heal the wounds slavery and racial oppression had caused, Whites continued to wound Blacks and poison their own souls.

As Feagin and Vera point out: "Most whites wish to enjoy their privileges not by brute force but legitimately."<sup>46</sup> The only way to do this in the face of another's oppression, "is to find

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<sup>42</sup> Beals, 172.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>44</sup> Curtiss P DeYoung, Reconciliation (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997), 114.

<sup>45</sup> Feagin and Vera, 174.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 161.

something intrinsic in themselves to justify their array of racial privileges."<sup>47</sup> Too many whites continue to live behind a mask regarding racial issues. Some simply deny that there is a racial problem in our country. This is simply ignorance. Others will admit prejudice, but deny being racist because they do nothing overtly to oppress Blacks. This is a failure to recognize the cost of their own privileges and the awesome responsibility they have to actively free and empower others. Feagin and Vera compare this to the sacrificial religious rites of ancient cultures and describe White's perspective on Blacks as, "alien others who may be compelled to forfeit their lives or well-being in the name of compelling dominant group interests."<sup>48</sup>

In concluding this discussion of the history of race relations let me illustrate where our society stands now. Most legal racism has been dealt with, yet the negative consequences for Blacks are still experienced continually. The problem is a major shift in the structure of our racism. Feagin and Vera describe it as a shift from "substantive racism" which openly segregates and oppresses Blacks to "procedural racism" which puts less emphasis on supposed Black inferiority and more on the rules established by whites to invalidate or limit Black opportunities.<sup>49</sup> This can probably be seen most clearly in workplace attitudes that demand that Blacks deny their cultural distinctives and become like whites in order to get ahead, be promoted, or even to be employed.

Where was and is the church in all of this political and historical development? Did the church, as the body of Christ work to stem the tide of racism in the United States or is the Church guilty of contributing to the problem? As one explores and reads the history of this nation and analyzes the history of racism, it becomes apparent that the church has always been

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<sup>47</sup> Feagin and Vera, 161.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 163.

involved in slavery issues. Paradoxically, the church has been both an advocate for racist attitudes and a prophetic voice declaring it as evil.

The reasons for this paradox are similar to the reasons behind political and social racism. One of the problems with a powerful religion is that the participants in that religion can so easily corrupt themselves. In his introduction to the book of Galatians, Eugene Peterson says, "When men and women get their hands on religion, one of the first things they often do is turn it into an instrument for controlling others, either putting or keeping them "in their place.""<sup>50</sup> This describes the active and passive enforcement of racist attitudes and structures by the church.

The first reason behind the church's failure to take a firm stand against racism is financial expediency. Plainly stated: greed. Most preachers in colonial America believed the doctrine of predestination.<sup>51</sup> It was an easy rational process to argue for slavery as God's design for Negroes.

They said God predestined some persons for damnation and some for salvation. Many whites thought God predestined blacks for damnation. Some evangelists taught that slavery was a natural station in life for the Negro. Even those who held a modified view believed slavery benefited the slave. These whites maintained that Africans lived better as slaves in America than as "savages" in their homeland. This became known as the "noble good theory" of slavery.<sup>52</sup>

With a rationale like this it was only a small step to maintain slavery in order to maintain prosperity (the proof of God's choice). "Flawed religious beliefs combined with economic greed, induced even loyal churchmen to excuse heinous acts against black humanity."<sup>53</sup>

A second reason is very similar to the argument for political unity of the nation. Denominations and organizations chose institutional unity over strong moral declaration and the discipline that might threaten such unity. This is tragic because, "[m]ost colonial Christians did

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<sup>50</sup> Eugene Peterson, The Message (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995) 391.

<sup>51</sup> Beals, 30.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

not oppose slavery because no part of the Christian church ever took a firm stand."<sup>54</sup> With no authoritative voice questioning the status quo, why should individuals object? There existed a great gulf between what Christ taught and the moral action of most Christians. Churches chose not to deal with the complex problems of racism, thus participating in its genesis and its perpetuation.

The church was also afraid of the disruption in the task of either establishing themselves or fulfilling their mission of evangelizing the world. As Francis Asbury led the American Methodists he discovered that the issue of slavery was too touchy for a young church movement mainly concerned with conversion and expansion.<sup>55</sup> "Thus the major thrust of 18th century revivalism ended with the missionary, not the abolitionist."<sup>56</sup>

One philosophical development that connects all these reasons together is the theological rationale used to promote slavery. Drawing on certain interpretations of the Bible, the arguments presented by supporters of slavery follow this logic:

- 1.) Africans could be enslaved because they were under Noah's curse upon Ham.
- 2.) Israel, God's chosen people, had slaves.
- 3.) Jesus Christ did not forbid slavery.
- 4.) Slavery was merely the lowest level of a divinely appointed social order.
- 5.) Enslavement actually improved their lives, by giving them access to the gospel.<sup>57</sup>

It is important to note the simplicity of these arguments, each is easy to accept if one allows the underlying assumptions. The problem with the first step in this logic is that Ham was not "dark" because he was cursed, nor was he cursed because he was "dark." A lack of explicit prohibition or explicit prescriptive directions does not allow an interpreter of scripture to assume something is either allowed or denied. For instance, Israel had to make regular temple sacrifices, but that

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>54</sup> Beals, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

does not mean we should do so. There are many things Jesus did not explicitly forbid, but that does not mean we are allowed to do them (i.e. child abuse, driving too fast, drinking to excess). If social order is the standard for behavior, then what right did White Europeans have to leave Europe to avoid religious persecution? The last rationale is like saying a cancer patient is better off being sick because it gives them the chance to read a free Gideon Bible.

The final reason, also similar to purely political reasoning, is a nearly church-wide belief in the superiority of Teutonic/Germanic, and therefore Anglo, peoples. This had been a trend in England and easily moved to America with the colonists.

Lauding the peculiar qualities of the Germanic people had been common on the continent since the early years of the Reformation; German reformers drew an analogy between the earlier "Germanic" or "Gothic" destruction of the universal Roman Empire and the new destruction of the universal Roman Church. Theories were advanced which foreshadowed the ultra-Teutonism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>58</sup>

It is immediately clear how such a "theology" could lend credence to such racial systems as Nazism, much less the slavery and anti-black ideology of the United States. In these examples it is easy to observe the tendency for the church to be shaped by the surrounding culture, rather than being a force that shapes culture.

The church was at low ebb during the Revolutionary era. In fact, "The Revolutionary era brought decline for American Christianity."<sup>59</sup> This decline was characterized by low spiritual vitality, the flight of partisan pastors, disruption of organizational structures and a preoccupation with political and military questions. There was a drop in church membership and great

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<sup>57</sup> Beals, 7

<sup>58</sup> Reginald Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 11.

<sup>59</sup> Beals, 3.

difficulty in recruiting and training clergy. Seminary and college faculties were scattered and most educational facilities were being used by the military.<sup>60</sup>

In 18th century England, "The church became a department of state."<sup>61</sup> This became the model for colonial Christianity. "Meanwhile, the hungry sheep looked up and were not fed."<sup>62</sup> This is not to imply that the colonial church was completely silent on matters of slavery and race. Quakers did not always maintain their abolitionist stance, but neither did they attempt to "Christianize" slavery.<sup>63</sup> Those Quakers who did own slaves tended to be more humane than most slaveholders. What is truly surprising is the lack of a stand taken by the outspoken revivalists of the Great Awakening. "Revivalists had often urged that slaves be Christianized and treated according to New Testament ideals. Yet none of the Great Awakening leaders denounced slaveholding as a sin or even as an evil."<sup>64</sup>

A conflict of kingdoms developed following the Revolutionary War. "The ideals of proslavery Christianity and a Christian abolitionism clashed in the very heart of Protestantism."<sup>65</sup> This conflict of kingdoms was centered on whether the church was better off supporting the nation as it was, or trying to live and proclaim the gospel as a message of hope and liberation to all. Some of the issues under debate include:

- 1.) Whether churchmen might, any more than politicians, jeopardize the unity of the nation in pursuit of freedom for the slave?
- 2.) At what point does the solidarity of national religious and benevolent societies become less important than a clear witness against human bondage?

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<sup>60</sup> Beals, 31.

<sup>61</sup> Oscar Sherwin, John Wesley, Friend of the People (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961), 14.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>63</sup> Beals, 7

<sup>64</sup> Beals, 21.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 59.

3.) Whether the proper role of the churches in a democratic society was to regulate individual conduct or impose Christian principles upon social and legal institutions?

4.) Whether in disciplining individual conduct the central or the local governing bodies of the sects should act, and by what procedures?

5.) Whether Christians might do violence for loving ends?<sup>66</sup>

In the end it was only a small remnant of the church which was actively engaged in abolitionist moves. "Political events, not preacher's cries awakened mid-19th century America to the 'slave power' menace."<sup>67</sup>

Although by 1830 abolitionists had pinpointed Black slavery as a microcosm of the larger structure of our sinful human condition, there was little response from government and social institutions to do away with slavery. In fact, such abolitionist moves were seeking more than just freedom for the Blacks. There were also calls for racial brotherhood. However, this message was easily lost without the active involvement of the Christian church. The church continued to attempt to evangelize the Black populace, but, "[t]he freedom offered to those in bondage was primarily deliverance from the "chains of sin." Yet converting the blacks to Christianity never became the gateway to social freedom."<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, there were some strong voices for abolition and mercy within the church. Joseph Lowery records a conversation between a Methodist bishop and a layman who was an advocate of slavery. In this conversation the Bishop states that, "I advised him, as a Methodist preacher to a Methodist layman, that God would hold him accountable for his hateful words which others transformed into hateful deeds."<sup>69</sup> Others, like Henry Ward Beecher, went a step further than condemning southern slaveholding and

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<sup>66</sup> Beals, 59-60.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., xi.



criticized the degradation of free slaves in the North. "Other men sought broader theological grounds for discerning America's ordeal. Unsure about God's purposes, they saw the ambiguity of historical events, and doubted their region's moral purity."<sup>70</sup>

Such criticism of slavery was far from pervasive within Christian churches. Some church denominations, because of their structure and organization, were nearly powerless in terms of national influence. One such denomination was the Congregationalists, whose structures prevented them from taking a unified stand on either side of the slavery issue. "Since the Congregationalists had no central government, their local decrees and views on slavery caused no structural crisis." Others experienced near catastrophic splits because of divided views on the slavery question. A clear example of this is the division in the Methodist Episcopal Church, which became two denominations, Methodist Episcopal North and Methodist Episcopal South.

Furthermore, most churches in dealing effectively with the issues of freedom and human dignity, exerted little spiritual influence. In part, this was because of the location of the organizational headquarters for these churches and societies.

The benevolent societies of the nation, as many church denominations, were headquartered in New York City, where the cotton trade was king. There, advice of "Christian" capitalists easily prevailed.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, "[b]y mid 1863, most of the large religious organizations of the North and many leading pastors served as the spiritual arm of the Republican Party."<sup>72</sup> Church members and leaders chose brotherly love toward one another over love for the Negro. Because they remained so anxious over their own social status they were unable to admit the evil of racism and slavery. If they had done so, armed conflict might have been avoided. It is the view of Ivan Beals that

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<sup>69</sup> Joseph E. Lowery, "God Makes the Crooked Places Straight," in Fellowship, 61, Number 7-8 (July/August 1995), 5.

<sup>70</sup> Beals, 110.

<sup>71</sup> Beals, 65.

since the churches failed to confess and proclaim the evils of slavery, "God used the Civil War instead of the Church to free the slaves."<sup>73</sup>

Reconstruction was another chance for the church to become an element of redemption for the United States. Unfortunately, the church failed that chance as well. Our thinking and rationalizing only led us deeper into the quagmire of division and racial separation. Once again the rationale was "unity."

Historically when a dominant group has wished to subjugate a certain group of people in this society in the name of unity, it first has to make them subhuman. In such a social setting, the 'unity' means the protection of the dominant group and its culture rather than a representational and mutual sharing of 'life-together.'<sup>74</sup>

The South went its own way before and following the Civil War. Rather than reunification of divided houses or reconquest of lost regions, the only major change was, "the growth of Negro churches, mostly Baptist and Methodist."

Churches divided along racial lines were only a symptom of a deeper problem. "Church divisions showed that the nation's moral conscience acted awry."<sup>75</sup> Blacks were accepted in some churches, but only if they sat in balcony galleries or rear seats. Many Blacks refused to enter on those terms. Alienation within the body led to splits of the body. Blacks chose the relative dignity of all-black fellowships over an inferior place within the existing denominational structures.

It is noteworthy to point out that the black churches have rarely been this inhospitable to whites, asking or expecting them to sit in isolated seats. "History teaches us that black Christians in the dominant host culture have, apparently, appropriated the moral teachings of the Christian

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 97

<sup>73</sup> Beals, 73.

<sup>74</sup> Famitaka Matsuoka, Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1995), 57.

<sup>75</sup> Beals, 104.

message in such a way that allows for more openness and acceptance of whites in the "House of the Lord" than the reverse."<sup>76</sup> Whites on the other hand, befriended "Jim Crow" laws and while trying to retain their status quo rejected a sizable portion of this nation's Christians from their fellowships. For black Christians, the church became a surrogate for nationality and provided an arena to develop leaders as well as provide for religious needs. "After 1877 as 'Jim Crow' laws, harassment and political repression mounted, the church helped to preserve racial solidarity."<sup>77</sup>

By the turn of the century, the Christian churches were divided into Whites and Blacks, even more than before the Civil War. The social gospel preachers of Northern cities had neglected most southerners and almost all Negroes and the 20th century opened with Blacks as the economic, if not legal, slaves of Whites. The church had neglected her message and left a sad stain of racial oppression on nearly every aspect her life as the Body of Christ. "Yet in all cases the antiblack feelings reveal a breakdown of human empathy across the color line and a waste of much valuable human energy."<sup>78</sup>

Right in the middle of the Reconstruction period, a new Christian movement entered the scene. Daniel S. Warner had looked around at the division among denominations and the low moral state of the church and society and felt that God's people were failing to live up to their calling as Christians. His response was to begin preaching on several key themes: (1) Holiness; (2) Unity among believers and (3) Freedom from man-made organization structures. Although other points were considered, these seem to be the driving doctrines of what became known as the Church of God Reformation Movement. Racial and ethnic issues never appear at the forefront of early Church of God writings or teachings, but this is not because of neglect or denial. The message of unity was so clear to Warner and others that racial inclusion was simply

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<sup>76</sup> Oglesby, 16.

<sup>77</sup> Beals, 143.

assumed. Many of the Northern and Mid-Western congregations of the Church of God were multi-cultural from their very beginnings.

In Chapter One I have described how the Church of God began to separate racially following the confrontation at Anderson Camp-meeting in 1917. What is interesting about this event is that it coincides with a period of struggle where the Church of God was being forced, by circumstances, to organize at a national level, yet was uncomfortable with that organization due to our particular teachings on being a Holy Spirit led "movement." By the time of the Great Depression, the Church of God was just as segregated as many of the denominations they had so severely criticized only a few short years before.

Like the larger body of Christians in the United States and the political structures of our nation, the Church of God segregated for some obvious reasons (or should I simply call them excuses?). The first can be found in that historic confrontation in Anderson, Indiana, which can be named, "evangelical expediency." In fearing that Whites would be scared away because of the Blacks present at Camp-meeting, the White leaders who instigated this confrontation chose their own group at the expense of the other. "The separation was an accomodation to racism within the church and within society. The church was too much a part of the world."<sup>79</sup>

The second reason why the Church of God took a racist position, was our willingness to accept the appearance of unity over the substance of unity. By trying to maintain an outward appearance, while neglecting real reconciliation we rendered ourselves impotent to proclaim effectively the message of the Gospel. In reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I realized a parallel between what happened to the German Lutherans before World War II and the Church of God. "Our church (Bonhoeffer's German Lutherans), which has been fighting in these years for its self

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<sup>78</sup> Feagin and Vera, 167

preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word of reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world."<sup>80</sup> When concerns about organizational integrity take precedence over the needs or fellowship of an individual or group, our organization becomes an idol. We cease to worship the one true God and fall into the trap of worshipping institutions of our own invention. We continue to accept the appearance of unity over the substance of unity even today.

Such an emphasis on superficial appearances is especially sad in the case of the Church of God. Since our theological heritage was forged and proclaimed fearlessly in the face of many opposing voices, why did we become so afraid of what people might think about our movement? These questions bring us to a third reason and explanation for Church of God racism: a failure to recognize, communicate, and implement the full implications of our unity and holiness doctrines. As James Earl Massey states in the foreword to Reconciliation, "Conflict holds center stage in our time, and voices of wisdom addressed to those involved in the fray-or to enlist persons of good will to help quell the conflicts-are all too few."<sup>81</sup>

The development of separate Black churches and fellowships in the Church of God can be viewed through three major periods. The "Provincial" extends from 1886 until just before the major breach of 1917.<sup>82</sup> From about 1916 or 1917 until 1946 is the "Developmental" period.<sup>83</sup> This is followed by the "Progressive" period, which extends from 1946 into the present day.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Daniel Harden, The History of Human Relations in the Church of God (text of speech) printed in, Shining Light (January/February 1999), 4.

<sup>80</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison, The Enlarged Edition, edited by Eberhard Beithge (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 300.

<sup>81</sup> James Earl Massey, Foreword to Reconciliation, by Curtiss Paul DeYoung (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997) ix.

<sup>82</sup> Barry Callen, ed., A Time To Remember Milestones (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1978) 88.

<sup>83</sup> James E. Massey, "The Question of Race: An Historical Overview," in A Time to Remember Milestones, ed. Barry L. Callen (Anderson: Warner Press, 1978) 89.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

The Provincial period is characterized by establishment and planting of Negro and multi-racial churches across the North, Mid-West and South. Most of the Southern congregations were Black only, due to Jim Crow laws in those states. An example of this is Jane Williams, one of the early pioneers of the Negro Church of God. She started a church in Charleston, South Carolina that became the hub for Church of God growth in the South. Although most Southern churches acknowledged and submitted to the social realities of a segregated social world, there was a growing discontent with those circumstances.<sup>85</sup> Rather than face and deal with the growing discontent on the part of Blacks, Whites retreated and only widened the social breach. By the close of this period, even the multi-racial churches of the northern cities became either Black or White.<sup>86</sup>

Following the historic confrontation at Anderson Camp meeting in 1917, most Black congregations developed their own evangelism efforts aimed primarily at other Blacks.<sup>87</sup> Whites did the same and with Blacks increasingly in attendance at West Middlesex, Pennsylvania, two separate organizations evolved. One, the General Assembly of the Church of God, believed it represented all Church of God congregations, yet numbers reveal only a few Blacks in national leadership of the movement during this period. The Black organization, The National Association of the Church of God, has verbally and socially welcomed whites to fellowship with them, particularly at West Middlesex Camp meeting. I could not find any record of white persons serving in leadership positions with this organization and it is clear from only a few visits to both Anderson and West Middlesex that far more Blacks are present at Anderson than

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<sup>85</sup> James E. Massey, "The Question of Race: An Historical Overview," in A Time to Remember Milestones, ed. Barry L. Callen (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1978) 88.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 89.

Whites at West Middlesex. This division of evangelistic effort and the development of two national level organizations are the main characteristics of the Developmental period.

The Progressive period was sparked by the return of soldiers from World War II. After fighting and winning against fascism in Europe. Many came home to find another kind of fascism existed. "Negroes who had fought refused to accept discrimination and segregation any longer upon their return home."<sup>88</sup> This period has been an era of Black Churches of God being highly involved in both sacred and political movements toward equality of the races in our country. Some characteristics of this period would include a further expansion of Black congregations, a higher degree of education and theological training for Black leaders, and a growing involvement in general Assembly leadership within the Church of God. A result of this powerful Black presence in my own region of Florida can be seen in the nature of our Black churches' ministries. For example, of all the pastors in Northeast Florida, only one has an earned doctoral degree and he is a Black pastor. Our Black leaders are responsible for Success Academy, an academic charter school in one of our predominately Black neighborhoods. One of our Black churches has established a weekly presence in the public schools, where they are both evangelistic and educational. This same church has an active prison ministry.

The Church of God Reformation Movement was born in the midst of the failures of Reconstruction and the Civil War. Despite years of turmoil, economic disaster, and bloodshed, the country remained distinctly racist. The Church of God had both a message and an opportunity to live before the world as a reconciled people, yet we became just like the world and the larger church around us: divided and segregated along racial lines. From being a voice for unity in a nation and church divided, we became a divided church only reflecting and submitting to the evil realities of our culture.

The very message, which offered so much hope to Blacks in a racist society, was wasted by Whites who were little concerned for the precious gift they offered others. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, "It is, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift of God to the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden under foot by those who have the gift every day."<sup>89</sup> The precious freedom from division and spiritual impotence came to be taken for granted by most Whites within the Church of God. Although many will claim that they are not racist and will bridle at my accusation of racial prejudice, the truth is that we remain separated by attitudes of superiority and we hide behind masks of denial and rationalization.

Denial is evident when our reply to the suggestion of prejudice is, "I am not a \_\_\_\_\_ist! There is no \_\_\_\_\_ism here!" Even when confronted with statistics or anecdotal data, we are tempted to respond, "It is not that bad!" We find it easier to deny reality than to deal with it.<sup>90</sup>

All too often, our focus and rationalization for the segregation is based on assumed or actual differences in worship style or theological understandings of authority and practice. However, as D. S. Warner said: "[t]o ignore fellowship simply because of some doctrinal error is bigotry."<sup>91</sup> Even if someone is wrong in their theology (and I do not believe for a moment that Blacks are wrong), we have no right, reason, or excuse to deny or avoid fellowship with them.

Because of our continuing refusal to fellowship and engage each other in dialogue we are becoming an increasingly isolated church. We are not only separated racially, but also separated by our congregational polity, which allows individualistic approaches to ministry, by congregations. Our refusal to fellowship across racial and ethnic lines, shapes our understandings, or rather misunderstandings, of each other and prevents substantial

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>89</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, trans. John Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper, 1954) 20.

<sup>90</sup> DeYoung, 14.

<sup>91</sup> D. S. Warner, "The Experience of Oneness," in A Time To Remember: Teachings (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1978) 17.



reconciliation. "When our perceptions do not intersect with those of others through dialogue and shared experiences, we are isolated."<sup>92</sup> Having trampled on the unity Jesus prayed for, having denied the existence of racial problems in the church, and having spent too much energy on our differences, we have become lonely and spiritually empty churches. These types of congregations remember past glories and victories, but seem to have little influence in their communities today.

Recently, new voices are being raised in both Black and White congregations and institutions of higher learning. They are calling for a clear declaration of unity and holiness that opens the doors to reconciliation and shared ministry within the Kingdom of God. In spite of this, too few of those who lead or support the Church of God, "really seem to get the point of the biblical imperative or of linking it to the problem of the "racism dilemma" in our dominant religious and sociocultural system."<sup>93</sup> As Curtiss P DeYoung points out, "[i]f we are honest, we will admit that even among those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ we see evidence of the same divisions in broader society."<sup>94</sup>

I am not advocating some utopian view of church life, but rather an understanding of Church as a community that constantly confronts its failures and deals with them in the context of a shared life and responsibility. "The New Testament's realistic picture of the life of the church indicates, however, that it did not always live up to the idealism of its ecclesiological definitions and understandings."<sup>95</sup> If we are the church, we will always have the problems related to fallen humanity, but that is no excuse for not working toward a better understanding of each other and our life together. Although it is true for both Whites and Blacks that, "[w]e often

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<sup>92</sup> DeYoung, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Oglesby, 68.

<sup>94</sup> DeYoung, xvii.

<sup>95</sup> Gilbert W Stafford, Theology for Today (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1996), 208.

deny our own involvement in and our victimization from racism and oppressive behavior" this will not heal our racist wounds or make us into a reconciled people.

In a later chapter I will develop the following ideas in more detail, but for now I am proposing some confessions we need to make as a church movement. These are mainly concerned with overcoming our tendencies toward denial. First, we need to recognize that the Church of God is a divided church. This means we must honestly look at our fellowships, congregations, and leadership, then count the numbers of Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, and other minorities who are part of our church. Once we have identified our divided reality and the lack of minority representation in our churches, then we must admit, secondly, that we have made excuses for this division. Often, in making these excuses, we have blamed the other group(s) for the problems we are willing to admit. Third, we must acknowledge both the ways we have hurt others and been hurt by this division.

In concluding this chapter, I want to point out the similarities between political, church and Church of God histories and rationalizations. All three have sought the appearance of unity over the substance of real reconciliation. I consider this an important aspect of this research because:

The issues of faith and life do not take place in a vacuum but within the tensions and cultural polarities of this present social order-i.e. the tensions between forces of justice and injustice, between immoral power and powerless morality, between the haves and the have nots, between black and white, between men and women, between the conflicting impulses of "holding on and letting go," and implicitly in the dialectical rhythms, the tensions between experiences and expectation.<sup>96</sup>

We must as a church and as society come to grips with our tendency to pretend to something we might really experience. By working for justice, as opposed to just pretending we are just, we will begin to experience justice as a practical reality rather than an intellectual concept.

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<sup>96</sup> Oglesby, 101.

A second common element is a tendency to function for political, economic and dominant group expediency. Part, if not most, of the reason for this attitude is our national heritage of democracy and majority rule. "While many are aware of the negative side of injustice, it is often less obvious that we can acquire privilege simply by benefiting from how society is arranged."<sup>97</sup> We act unconsciously to protect our own interests, never realizing by simple expedience we are alienating, oppressing or isolating some person or group. Thus, "We continue to breed new bigots because our culture is infected with injustice."<sup>98</sup>

Another latent pressure that is common to all three arenas discussed is the pressure to assimilate. "The assumption that everyone wants to put on white Anglo-Saxon cultural attire has created tremendous pressure to assimilate, with dire consequences for both people of color and whites."<sup>99</sup> In the church this is witnessed through pressures to conform to a common style of worship, dress, and leadership. DeYoung calls this a "crisis of identity."<sup>100</sup> We do not know who we are as either individuals or as a group. This makes us uncomfortable with differences, because we have no solid ground of identity from which to evaluate ourselves in relation to others. In order to raise the comfort level of our collective psyche it is easier to demand that everyone be the same. We need to count the cost of attitudes. "Racism confers benefits upon the dominant group that include psychological feelings of superiority, social privilege, economic position, or political power."<sup>101</sup> If not dealt with these practical and psychological benefits become powerful weapons to exclude, demean, damage, or destroy less powerful groups. Those who experience the betrayal, condescension, and injustice of our racism develop deep scars on body, spirit and psyche. If not healed and reconciled, "This feeling of worthlessness and

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<sup>97</sup> DeYoung, 95.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 114.

personal pain can lead to anger and rage."<sup>102</sup> In even passive oppression of Blacks, we become guilty of fueling their emotional rage and, I believe we are then guilty of empowering the violence so often witnessed in racial confrontations.

It is my understanding that the answer to our racial dilemma can be found in the proclamation of the Gospel message. Instead of trying to be like Christ, "[w]e have misinterpreted, reinterpreted, misused, and remade Jesus to serve our own purposes."<sup>103</sup> The only answer to this, especially if we are committed to the task of reconciliation, is to face, "the shameful fact that Anglo-American Christians are part of the problem."<sup>104</sup> In the next chapter, I will discuss the witness of the Bible on such matters as race, reconciliation, and liberation, and hospitality as a model for Christian living. I would like to close this chapter with one more word about acknowledging the reality of our situation. "Using the term *reconciliation* acknowledges that there are preexisting barriers to relationships. So reconciliation signals the reconnecting of those who have parted."<sup>105</sup> As society, the church at large, and the Church of God recognize and confess the reality of racial division, we can begin to experience the reality of reconciled lives, reconciled relationships, and reconciled worship.

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<sup>101</sup> Davies and Hennessee, 1.

<sup>102</sup> DeYoung, 25.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 37

<sup>104</sup> Oglesby, 60.

<sup>105</sup> DeYoung, 45.

### Chapter Three Theological Reflection on Racism

In the previous chapter, I examined the racist attitudes within the United States, especially those attitudes that continue to shape the church. This examination reveals that the church is very much like the secular world in terms of racist attitudes and actions. Although the church may be the leader in many efforts of social justice, it has failed to address adequately the racism inherent in its own structures and actions. In this sense, the church has remained very "worldly." As Daniel Harden describes the situation, "[t]he worst of worldliness is racism."<sup>1</sup> In terms of race relations, the church appears to neither shape the culture of worldliness nor even resist the culture of worldliness. In fact, rather than deal with the real issues of racism we seem more concerned with placing the blame on Black people themselves. "When you no longer have the power or the will to fix problems, it is easier to find a scapegoat."<sup>2</sup>

The issue of racism in the church is more than dealing with a racist history. "This present generation's guilt is not over 390-year-old sins. People today are called to account for the immediate past and the present thrust of their own deeds."<sup>3</sup> It is not that I believe the church as a whole or the Church of God in particular possesses the wrong message. I will argue in this chapter that the message of the Gospel is not only the correct message, it is the only message that will make a lasting difference. I do not believe the church has lived out, in practical measures, the message it claims to teach. I concur with E. Hammond Oglesby: "As I see it, the deep tragedy of the church today is in its compromise of faithfulness to the biblical mandates of

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Harden, The History of Human Relations in the Church of God (text of speech) printed in Shining Light, Jan/Feb 1998 (Lake Wales, FL: Florida General Assembly of the Church of God, 1998) 4.

<sup>2</sup> William Pannell, The Coming Race Wars (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993) 78.

<sup>3</sup> Ivan A. Beals, Our Racist Legacy (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publications, 1997) xiv.

justice, love, mercy, mutuality, and the affirmation of the equality of all persons as the children of God."<sup>4</sup>

Some would contend, "Well, racism is over, isn't it?" Pannell replies, "Not really. Who could, with a straight face, contend that black men are no longer the objects of scorn, suspicion, and political disenfranchisement?"<sup>5</sup> Although we might point our fingers at many blacks that have achieved singular success in our society, "[t]he bottom line is that many blacks are better off only when compared with the past or with other black people whose education was curtailed at lower levels."<sup>6</sup> The fact is, white people both individually and communally, continue to deny justice to Blacks. In terms of freedom and liberation, the black population as a whole continues to serve as slaves to white greed and political expediency.

As discussed in the previous chapter, greed is at the root of white exploitation of blacks. Africans were imported to this country as slaves for economic reasons. Even after their "emancipation" blacks were trapped in poverty through legal oppression, social pressure, and an inability to access the educational opportunities of this nation. It has always been easier to follow the American dream of wealth and prosperity than to follow the dream of equality. Even politicians use our greed to reinforce their own power. "Are you better off financially than you were four years ago today? That is what the typical American is interested in."<sup>7</sup> The churches in the United States, especially evangelicals, have jumped on the greed bandwagon. Most evangelical churches are silent, or very quiet, on issues of racial justice, but particularly on the subject of greed. We tend to preach against sexual profligacy of any sort, "But greed is too

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<sup>4</sup> E. Hammond Oglesby, O Lord, Move This Mountain (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998) 5.

<sup>5</sup> Pannell, 47.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 65.

American to criticize."<sup>8</sup> These financial concerns continue to be at the heart of racism in the United States and within the church. They are also at the heart of a great deal of biblical teaching. Evangelical Christians seem obsessed with sins involving an individual's sexuality and silent on matters of finance and economic justice. Both Old and New Testaments have more direct references to matters of money and its proper use than references to sexual sin and its consequences. In the following section I point out the importance of what the Bible says about greed and economic justice. At the very least, as evangelical Christians, there is a terrible cost to pay for our injustice. But even from a purely sociological standpoint, "the moral confusion and dilemmas that white racism produces in all areas of familial, organizational, and political life in the United States are among the costs whites and the larger society pay for racism."<sup>9</sup>

In reflecting theologically on racism, the Bible will be the foundation of my reasoning and argument. Some may reject the Bible as a source for reflection on social issues, but I use it as my foundation for three reasons: (1) The Church of God, my main focus in this project, has a high view of scriptural authority for how we live and act as Christians; (2) In studying successful multi-ethnic churches, scriptural authority was a significant factor in their success; and (3) The Bible has been misused and misinterpreted by so many to defend racist policies and beliefs, that I believe it is time to set the record straight. My opinion is that a broader study of the biblical witness will reveal the centrality of justice and reconciliation.

"The Church's Jubilee" is the title of hymn #312 in the current edition the Church of God Hymnal. This song, if any, is the theme song for the Church of God movement. We find the following statements in verse two:

The Bible is our rule of faith and Christ alone is Lord.  
All we are equal in His sight when we obey His word.

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<sup>8</sup> Pannell, 61.

<sup>9</sup> Joe R. Feagin and Herna'n Vera, White Racism (New York: Routledge, 1995) 170.

No earthly master do we know, to Christ alone we bow;  
And to each other and to God eternal true-ness vow.<sup>10</sup>

While I could make many points concerning racism just from this one verse, the significant point for this discussion is the Church of God's understanding of scripture. We have no written discipline or model for belief and structure, other than the Bible. This places a huge responsibility on both clergy and laity to read, interpret correctly, and understand the Bible. We believe the Bible is our sole written guide to life, polity, and relationship. "While we may learn from biblical scholars and theologians, the fact that we take the whole Bible as the basis of our own faith places the responsibility directly on each of us to be students of the word."<sup>11</sup> I cannot emphasize this point too strongly. If we believe the Bible is "our rule of faith," then we must understand exactly what it says, interpret that meaning correctly, and then live accordingly. This does not mean that our interpretation will be exact and rigid. In fact, with so many being involved in the interpretive process, there is bound to be a diversity of interpretation. However, the danger for the Church of God is not heterodoxy as much as it is a narrow and legalistic interpretation that begins to exclude others. This is especially important if our desire is to witness Christ's redeeming love to the world. "Our witness is effective only when we live out in everyday life the gospel we profess."<sup>12</sup>

Manuel Ortiz researched multi-ethnic churches in preparing his book, "One New People." His research revealed that those multiethnic churches that were successfully cooperating in ministry and growing both spiritually and numerically, "relied on scripture as the authority for the church and life. The Bible was the churches' manual in reference to multiethnicity."<sup>13</sup> This

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<sup>10</sup> Arlo F. Newell, ed., Worship The Lord, Hymnal of the Church of God (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1989) 312.

<sup>11</sup> John W V Smith, I Will Build My Church (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1985) 39.

<sup>12</sup> Edward L. Foggs, Christ Compels Us (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1996) 42.

<sup>13</sup> Manuel Ortiz, One New People (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996) 111.



not only reinforces the Church of God position it also builds a case for new models of ministry to be used in achieving reconciliation.

The importance of Scripture in the Church of God and in successful multi-ethnic churches brings us to the third reason for using scripture as our theological foundation: the misuse and mis-interpretation of scripture to defend racism and slavery. When the church fails to live up to the responsibility placed on us by scripture, we lose our credibility in the world. It is bad enough that we simply ignore what the Bible teaches, but rarely has the church simply ignored teaching from scripture. This is evident in the legacy of racism in the church.

"Churches could not convert the many self-servers, or redirect professing Christians to truly obey God's word about slavery. In fact, they twisted scripture to pronounce divine approval of slavery as well as to denounce it."<sup>14</sup> This is some kind of dreadful absurdity, that the same ones who would teach love and liberation for their own kind would proclaim oppression and degradation for blacks (as well as women, Asians, Jews, and the list goes on).

In reflecting biblically on the issue of racism I intend to begin by debunking two of the most common misunderstandings of scripture: (1) That the Bible does not prohibit slavery and (2) The, so-called, "curse of Ham" doctrine. Debunking these two elements is necessary because they are based on ignorance of the Bible and narrow interpretations, which are, in turn, based on conjecture and silence. Such ignorance is dangerous, for, "[i]gnorance, especially when it is rooted in a self-centered preference, isolates."<sup>15</sup> By using a misunderstanding of scripture as the basis for belief, racist individuals and groups have turned a gospel of liberating love into the rhetoric of isolating hatred. I am addressing these two particular interpretations because they

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<sup>14</sup> Beals, 13.

<sup>15</sup> Curtiss P DeYoung, Reconciliation (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997) 9.

appear to be central to so much white supremacist rhetoric today, as well as historically. In addition, they are foundational to other interpretations that reinforce racism and oppression.

At the end of the following discussion, I intend to establish the biblical validity of two core doctrines within the Church of God Reformation Movement and how they relate to racism. These two doctrines are (1) The unity of all believers and (2) Holiness. As Curtiss DeYoung states, "this message of unity was at the core of what the disciples understood as serving Jesus Christ."<sup>16</sup> With the doctrine of unity defined as the fellowship of all believers, so holiness can be defined as freedom from outward sinning and inward intentions to sin.

In between the opening and concluding analysis, I want to view biblical issues of race, justice, and reconciliation through the Old Testament lens of the Creator God and the New Testament lens of the Redeemer God. Giving full consideration to space and time constraints, I leave out a great deal of the Pauline literature and even an extensive review of the prophetic works in the Old Testament. My intention is to lay an adequate groundwork for discussion that will clarify the intent and import of the biblical message, not to develop an exhaustive hermeneutic of the biblical message on racial issues.

While indulging my hobby of military and war history, I am constantly running into folks with a fascination with Nazi Germany and Nazi memorabilia. Many of these folks declare they are appalled at the atrocities committed in World War II by the Nazi regime, yet they continue to purchase history books, old military artifacts, and even copies of Adolph Hitler's book, "*Mein Kampf*" (My Struggle). Others are radical white supremacy advocates and resent the moral outrage against Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Without beginning another historical evaluation, it is important to realize that "Nazism" is just an extreme form of the Teutonic spirit that seems to have pervaded the European world and the western church since the Protestant

Reformation. Even in the strong academic worlds of theology, there is an ongoing expectation to master the German theologians as if they are superior to and stand in judgement of all other theological voices. I do not wish to denigrate the contributions of some great minds, but the belief that one people group has some great ability or gift that allows them to rule or be superior to others is a destructive mind-set. This is a sad mind-set when it infects the church because it not only allows the devil of racism to move into our churches, it actually invites this devil to do so. "This is one of the worst kinds of devils for it seeks to separate the family of God on the sinfully presumptive grounds that God made an error at creation."<sup>17</sup>

Many of those who owned slaves and dealt in the slave trade defended their beliefs and practices by saying that the Bible does not forbid slavery. One of the first problems with this interpretation is that we equate slaves in the Bible with North American practices of slavery. "The slavery which scripture mentions refers to that of captured peoples. Neither the Old or the New Testaments attaches racial stigma to slaves."<sup>18</sup> Slavery in the British colony, that later became the United States, was very different. First, most of the original slaves were brought here, not as captives of war, but as captives specifically for slave labor. Caught and sold by their own people or by other African traders, they had not had the chance to fight for their freedom. Second, their living conditions were not even comparable to their homes and villages in Africa. Finally, slaves in the American colony were held in that condition of bondage based on their skin color. In contrast, "[s]cripture writers do not mention any distinct or inferior people, in terms of Caucasian, Mongol, Negroid, or other divisions. Biblical differences among peoples are based on language, families, nations, and lands (Genesis 10:5, 20, 31), not as races."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> DeYoung, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Beals, vii.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 18.

One will not find a commandment that decisively states, "Thou shalt not own slaves." However, there are several texts that deal with slavery that will not allow us to believe that God intended some to be slaves and others free. The first is found in Deuteronomy 23:15-16. The New Revised Standard reads:

Slaves who have escaped to you from their owners shall not be given back to them. They shall reside with you, in your midst, in any place they choose in any of your towns, wherever they please; you shall not oppress them.<sup>20</sup>

In this passage, we see a clear call to keep people free once they escape bondage, but the direct lessons are even more demanding than that. The faith community is required to do at least three specific things. First, is a clear command to receive and protect escaped slaves. This is more than just a passive permission and protection. The fact is that if any person believes they will be protected and welcomed if they escape they are more likely to attempt such escape. Second, the people of God must be prepared to receive them and then protect them from recapture. In my opinion, this can only mean an active response in protecting the runaway slave, even to the point of using arms to defend the former slave's freedom. Thus slaves are not only allowed to escape, they are seemingly encouraged to do so. Third is the command to make a place for them. If no other scripture teaches against our segregation and isolation racially, this one does. God's command allows no leeway or excuses. The former slaves are to live "with you;" This living is "in your midst;" In addition the former slaves are free to choose "any place," and; finally it is in "any of your towns." Just based on this one scripture we must re-evaluate any belief in "separate but equal" and any policy that limits the housing and living choices of persons who have been in bondage.

Not only is the faith community required to do those things listed, it is also forbidden to oppress the former slaves. Had the Church truly obeyed this command following the Civil War,

perhaps the United States would look very different than it does today. No Jim Crow laws; truly equal education; fair representation in our government; real justice for those who perpetrate hate crimes based on skin color; economic justice; and a whole range of differences in our praxis.

This short text is a clear example of God as a liberating Creator who desires freedom for all. The fact that Scripture does not explicitly forbid slavery means that our freedom is not mere license, but rather a heavy responsibility for humans to do justice in creative and liberating ways. This is more than just the freedom of emancipation from slavery. It is a freedom rooted in community where justice is the right of all, even the former slave. Some may object that blacks are no longer slaves and so we are not bound to "shelter them" as escapees from slavery. However, their ancestors were slaves. Have we truly made a place for them "in our midst?" Are they free to live where "they choose, in any of our towns?"

Advocates of racist doctrine might respond that these requirements of the law applied only to the Jewish nation, and they do not bind "Christians" The only answer is to point out that Jesus did not lower the bar on the law's requirement for justice, he raised it. Jesus teaching in the story of the Good Samaritan pushes the requirement to "love your neighbor" beyond the typical thinking that neighbor was just the people we knew best and cared about the most. In fact, as related in the Gospel of Luke 10:25-37, the "expert in the law" is attempting to justify his own belief and practice. Jesus chooses to confront both the expert's limited view of the law and his ethnic prejudice against Samaritans. The problem here is that too narrow a definition of the term, "neighbor," begins to destroy our compassion for persons in need. There is also an implied commentary on the priority of the law of justice over the ceremonial requirements of the law. Jesus tells the story of both a priest and a Levite walking by the injured man and actually going out of their way to avoid the issue. Without stating explicitly that they avoided him for reasons

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<sup>20</sup> Deuteronomy 23:15-16 (NRSV).

of ceremonial purity, Jesus clearly juxtaposes priestly and Levitical regulations with the higher law of compassion. Minimum standards of performance are not enough for followers of Christ. We must rise above the merely legal standard and work toward a fulfillment of complete righteousness. Although the Church would find it difficult to impose such righteousness on secular society, it is still responsible to live and model that righteousness in its own relationships and structures.

The second doctrine espoused by white supremacists and other white Christians is the so-called "curse of Ham." According to this belief, Africans and Blacks of any sort are cursed to be servants and slaves of whites or Europeans because of Noah's curse on Ham, his son. The main points of the argument are as follows: Ham is the biblical progenitor of the African or dark-skinned peoples (Genesis 10:16); because of Ham's behavior when his father was intoxicated, Ham and his descendants are cursed to be slaves to Ham's brothers; this curse is applied to every subsequent generation of Ham's offspring, so the peoples of Africa are to be the servants and slaves of whites. In some interpretations you will get the impression that Ham was cursed because he was dark.

The first problem with this doctrine is that Ham's curse was based on some level of sexual misconduct while Noah was under the influence of fresh wine. Although no explicit sexual misconduct is mentioned, it is evident Ham had crossed some socially recognized boundary in "seeing his father's nakedness." Perhaps it was the fact that he mentioned it to his brothers, but for whatever reason, Noah was upset with Ham's behavior. Nevertheless, there is no indication either explicit or implicit that Ham was in trouble due to his skin color.

The next problem with this interpretation is that most of the tribes listed as descending from Ham (Genesis 10:6-20) are those that later came into conflict with the Jewish nation. The

curse then seems to be more a preparatory explanation of how all these people came to be enemies during and after the settlement of Canaan (the name comes from Ham's first-born son). If one takes this as an explanation of the later conflict then one is simply organizing political realities into an understandable story. If one takes a literal view of the genealogical narrative then one must also take a literal view of the curse story (Genesis 9:20-27). Then one must acknowledge that the curse is applied only to Ham and his immediate descendant, Canaan. Either way one cannot defend slavery or the ongoing oppression of Blacks based on Ham having been cursed by his father.

A third problem with this interpretation is that it completely ignores the removal of the curse of sin that is offered through Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."<sup>21</sup> If God has set us free from the curse of the law, which superceded Noah's covenant and activity, then surely we are free from those curses that took place before the law was imposed.

Both of these beliefs are dangerous to the church. "Even whites who hold stereotyped images of African Americans usually do not acknowledge to themselves that they are racist. Strong sincere fictions often hide everyday racial realities."<sup>22</sup> Hiding from reality is seen often in white Christians who would rather see their children date and marry a white person with no morals than have them date or marry a Black man or woman and these same parents would deny that they are racist.

It is not my intent to cover this subject in any extensive way, but let me make a few comments on the biblical view of inter-racial, or rather cross-cultural, marriage. In Numbers

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<sup>21</sup> Galatians 3:13 (NIV).

<sup>22</sup> Feagin and Vera, 161.

12:1-15 Miriam and Aaron, Moses' siblings, criticized him for marrying a Cushite wife. Their attack was more a question of Moses' authority, but it was directed at his marriage. Now Cush is an African nation, and Cushites are descendants of Ham (do you remember that story?). God hears the complaints of Miriam and Aaron and calls them to the Tent of Meeting, there he passes sentence. In effect, God let Miriam know that if she preferred white so much God would be glad to oblige her by turning her white with leprosy. Only by Moses' intercession did Miriam and Aaron obtain relief.

Other biblical passages relating to such cross-cultural pairings are found in Ruth, who was a Moabite woman that married an Israelite man. Also, we have the story of David and Bathsheba. What is interesting is that one of these women, who is in the lineage of Jesus himself, is a descendant of; you guessed it, Ham! Bathsheba (daughter of Sheba) is the mother of Solomon and an ancestor to Jesus.<sup>23</sup> "Scripture declares all people, of any skin color, were created in the image of God. This basic Christian belief either eludes the minds of many church people, or is denied as fact."<sup>24</sup>

Now let me turn my attention to the character of the Creator/Covenant God. What is God's relation to oppressed people and how does God's covenant with humanity work out in terms of our relationships with each other? In fact, what is the source of our identity? In this section, we will examine the character of God, the command of God, and the judgement of God in relation to issues of social justice. Much of this discussion is focused on the Israelite nation and God's instructions to them on living with aliens, foreigners, and strangers. I do not want to imply that this means Blacks should be viewed as aliens, foreigners, or strangers. The evidence of scripture is that even though people groups are different by culture, language, and geographic

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<sup>23</sup> Matthew 1:6

<sup>24</sup> Beals, 28.



origins, they are not to be mistreated or taken advantage of because of those differences.

Regarding racial views in the United States, Blacks are part of the human fabric of this nation. They have helped to shape it into the nation it is today, even when being coerced into doing so. It is primarily whites who maintain an atmosphere of other-ness in relation to Blacks. Although many Blacks have learned to wear their ethnicity as a sort of rebellious badge, it must be acknowledged that such behavior is only to be expected when you are forced to choose between total oppression or becoming "White" in order to fit in society, church or the workplace.

Two Old Testament passages can highlight God's attitude toward oppressed people. The first is Deuteronomy 10:17-19. The New Revised Standard Version reads:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. You also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.<sup>25</sup>

Three attitudes on God's part are proclaimed in this passage. First, God loves the stranger, the one who is not yet included. God desires and has affection for them even while they are alienated from the community. Second, God makes provision, both feeding and clothing the stranger, orphan, and widow. Third, there is the implication that along with the widow and orphan, God executes justice for the stranger. God is concerned that the stranger is not only embraced by the community, but also treated justly by the community. These are important foundational considerations for Whites who feel they have no responsibility for, or to, Blacks, Asians, Caribbean's, Hispanics, or any other ethnic group that is non-white. No matter the differences, God cares about them and will care for them, through the resources and relationships of the faith community.

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<sup>24</sup> Deuteronomy 10:17-19 (NRSV).

The lesson does not end there. God goes on to remind the Israelites of their own former status in Egypt. God reminds them that they were strangers there and should not alienate others as they were alienated by their Egyptian masters. The intention of this remembrance is to bring to mind their own oppression and the cries they lifted to God for deliverance. "The persistent *shout of justice* on the part of the disinherited demands from the church in our global community more than just a "handout," but a "hand": a hand that empowers the poor and the hurting ones."<sup>26</sup> Just as the Israelites cried for God to save them, the implication is that they have no excuse to allow others to need to call on God for deliverance from captivity.

The second scripture revealing God's relationship to oppressed people is Exodus 3:7-9. This passage takes us back to the situation God refers to in Deuteronomy 10, the enslavement of the Hebrew children.

Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.  
(NRSV)<sup>27</sup>

It is important to pay attention to the "sense" words this passage uses: "observed," "heard," "know," and "seen." These are terms of awareness and recognition. God even claims to "know" their sufferings. God does not want creation and creature to be oppressed and God hears when the oppressed cry out to God. If this is the character of God, shouldn't it be the character of his church? Is it not our duty to hear, see, and understand the pain and oppression of others?

Both of these texts portray God as radically concerned with the oppression of persons. The first is directed at the Israelite nation, not so much as a political group but as an ethnic and

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<sup>26</sup> Oglesby, 106.

<sup>27</sup> Exodus 3:7-9 (NRSV).

familial group. The other is directed to the Israelite nation, but in both cases God's concern for those who were of different cultural, ethnic or familial origins is clearly present and stated. God's concern remains the same for both groups and it is God's expectation that the Israelites reflect that same concern for oppressed people.

This concern is evidenced also in God's covenant promise to Abram. God calls Abram to leave his home and his father's household and travel to an undesignated destination. As part of this call, God promises Abram:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.<sup>28</sup>

The promise made to Abram contains several important elements relating to racial reconciliation. First is the understanding that the "blessing" is far more than just God's providence for the individual. From the very first phrase, the blessing is being poured out to and through community. In fact, I would argue that the blessing is to become a great community. The entire structure of this promise moves from God into larger and larger community. God alone to God and Abram; God and Abram to God, Abram and "great nation;" God, Abram and "great nation" to blessing others; God, Abram and "great nation" blessing others to all peoples on earth being blessed. This is a picture of an ever-expanding community finding and receiving God's blessing.

A second major element of this promise is that no nation, people or group is excluded. I may seem to be redundant since I have already mentioned, "an ever expanding community," but it would be easy to view those outside our communal structures as part of the ones who are cursed. However, the sentence or phrase, "I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse," is not a statement of exclusion. In the context of this promise, it is a radical statement of inclusiveness and judgement for failure to include. God is telling Abram that any

person or people group who wants to cooperate with this blessing community will be a part of the blessing and of the community. Their own denial and exclusiveness will curse those who resist such community. If the blessing is wrapped up in communal relationship to each other and to God, then clearly the curse must be exclusion from each other and from God. In terms of racial reconciliation we will be part of the blessing when we are truly participants of God's community. The oneness of God's community, will neither deny ethnic differences nor worship them. We will be one because of an intentional choice to live and work within the framework of God's promise. If we choose to live in isolation from others then we will be cursed in our isolation.

What may be of special significance in this passage is God's call for Abram to "leave your country, your people and your father's household," in order to fulfill the promise.<sup>29</sup> Before Abram could either receive or become a blessing he would have to depart from the place and people that had defined his being. He was no longer defined by his relationship to his earthly father, but by his relationship with God. We are not called to be reconciled because we are Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, male, female, or any other designation. We are called to be one because we are God's special creation. Our relationship to God must take precedence over family, clan, ethnicity, gender, and every other label we use to divide ourselves from one another. I not mean a rejection of these characteristics, but I do mean that we not allow any of them to become reasons for isolation and division.

God's promise to Abram is affirmed in a covenant ceremony detailed in Genesis 15:9-20.

So the LORD said to him, "Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon." Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. As the sun

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<sup>28</sup> Genesis 12:2-3 (NIV).

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 12:1 (NIV).

was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. However, I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure." When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates--the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites.<sup>30</sup>

Not only does God reaffirm the promises, but also reveals the details of the divine plan. What is important for this discussion is not only the reaffirmation, but also the structure of the ceremony itself. God begins this ceremony in response to Abram's need for assurance. He remains childless and everything God has promised is contingent upon Abram and Sarai becoming parents. God reassures Abram and then outlines part of the future plan so that Abram can see beyond the immediate situation.

In affirming the promise, God performs a covenant ceremony that was probably familiar to Abram. Several animals are sacrificed and laid out in two piles. In the usual ceremony a suzerain (or lord) and a vassal would outline their treaty arrangement, or most likely, the suzerain would tell the vassal what was expected. Then they would walk between the two piles of animal pieces and declare something to this effect: "May what has been done to these animals be done to me if I fail to keep this treaty." According to Samuel Balentine, "such a ceremony is commonly associated with the binding promises that are exchanged between contracting parties."<sup>31</sup> What is unique is that God places Abram to the side and assumes the roles of both parties in this ceremony. God alone has initiated the relationship with Abram and has responded

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<sup>30</sup> Genesis 15:9-20 (NIV).

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Balentine, The Torah's Vision of Worship (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999) 105.

to Abram's need. Now God assumes responsibility for both blessings and curses in his commitment to the promise made to Abram. This ties Abram's covenant with God to the sacrificial nature of Jesus' crucifixion. God has taken on himself the responsibility to both perform what he has promised and to accept the consequences if those who are recipients of God's blessing fail to meet the terms of the agreement.

For the task of racial reconciliation, this covenant ceremony offers us helpful insights about redemptive relationships. First, our task is not dependent on our own resources or strength. Empowered by God's own infinite resources, unlimited love, and grace we are called to be a unique community. The resources and love God provides for establishing community will allow us to do what may seem impossible and help Blacks and Whites live what may otherwise appear to be an unobtainable ideal.

Emphasizing the biblical understanding that we all find our identity in our relationship with God, Isaiah 46:3 reads:

Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and I will save.<sup>32</sup>

Not only does this prophetic voice reinforce the covenant agreement of Genesis 15; it also highlights our abiding dependence on and relationship to God. Understanding such an identity is important because, "A God-centered identity frees us from others expectations or pronouncements."<sup>33</sup> It is those who recognize such an identity that can answer the call to racial unity and true Christian witness in a broken world.

These verses have highlighted God's character and its effect on racial reconciliation. One may ask, are there specific commands that might serve as firm tools for establishing harmonious

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<sup>32</sup> Isaiah 46:3 (NIV).

relationships between Blacks and Whites? Although, in my opinion, there are many such scriptural texts, I would like to select and discuss several that deal with economic issues and the communal nature of resources and property. I choose these texts because economic disparity is one of the most flagrant signs of division in any society. Economic issues have always been central to the relationship of Blacks and Whites in the United States. Attempts to keep Blacks in slavery all had an economic component. Attempts to segregate Blacks following the Civil War were very often rooted in keeping Blacks economically deprived or in protecting the financial position of Whites. Regardless of the reasons behind their economic disadvantages, one of the clearest differences between Whites and Blacks in the United States today is the continuing lack of access to economic freedom on the part of Blacks.

In Deuteronomy 24:10-15 God is recorded as outlining the rules of loans and the proper way of dealing with pledges accepted for those loans. Before we look at this scripture, it is important to note that God is detailing provisions for credit and security to be accessed by poor people. Thus, this is not an acceptance or indication that poverty is the lot in life for these persons. The opposite is true since it seems to be a tacit understanding that the economically advantaged will need no such rules to protect them from abuse by creditors. Equally important to note is the emphasis on allowing persons in economic distress to maintain some level of dignity.

When you make your neighbor a loan of any kind, you shall not go into the house to take the pledge. You shall wait outside, while the person to whom you are making the loan brings the pledge out to you. If the person is poor, you shall not sleep on the garment given you as the pledge. You shall give the pledge back by sunset, so that the neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the LORD your God. You shall not withhold the wages of the poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. You shall pay them

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<sup>33</sup> DeYoung, 124.

their wages before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise, they might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt.<sup>34</sup>

Not only is special provision made for credit extended to the poor, but also specific provisions for the payment of wages. What is implicit in this text is the assumption that such justice is the responsibility of those who hold and control the resources. It is not a passive activity of allowing wealth to trickle down from the richest and most successful. Neither is it dependent on the subsidy of government to maintain the livelihood of the poor. Rather it is a pro-active responsibility to protect the poor and marginal.

Often, in the United States, leaders seem to imply by their words and promises that "if you will make me more powerful you are bound to become more powerful yourself. If you make me richer, the benefits will flow down to you as well." Both Democrats and Republicans have versions of this ideology. Democrats want to tax the wealthy to pay for social justice provisions, but this assumes a wealthy class to be taxed. Republicans want to further the interests of those who already possess wealth and power believing this will raise the standard of living for everyone. This same attitude infects our churches when we teach and preach prosperity as a result of Christian living and then say things like, "Well how do you expect us to have money to give and support the church if we don't increase our finances." When this attitude of greed and accumulation permeates the Church as well as politics and society, who will stand as the prophetic advocate for the poor?

The clear intent of this text in Deuteronomy is for the ones who do hold the resources to make special provision for the poor so that: (1) The poor are allowed their dignity and privacy; (2) Their rest and comfort is not reduced; (3) Their wages are paid in a timely manner; and (4)

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<sup>34</sup> Deuteronomy 24:10-15 (NRSV).



Such wages are not to be so low as to threaten the life of those workers. These instructions are much more than a handout. God is calling on the Israelites to be intentional about paying for honest work and not allowing the poor to become trapped in bondage to un-payable debt.

This provision by God is continued in Deuteronomy 24:19-21:

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back and get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan and the widow.<sup>35</sup>

This passage is targeted at specific groups that are likely to become outcasts by the general society around them. Although the recipients of such blessings are required to provide their personal labor, what is strictly forbidden is a greedy attitude about the land, trees and vineyards that a person owns. There exists a two-sided portrait of resources in this text. First they can be owned privately but not hoarded. It is the duty and privilege of the wealthy to provide the resource and the opportunity to gather it. In fact, according to this text the blessing of God is the reward of making such just provision. Second, there is the implication that the land and its bounty are not the true source of our security and blessing. As a community, our food and sustenance comes from God through the community.

Perhaps this next point is of secondary importance in view of racial issues, but this text is also a picture of God's provision for a balanced diet for those who would otherwise be outcasts. In these few verses, provision for bread (the staple of diet both then and now), sustaining food in the form of olives (rich in good fats and nutrition), and drink in the form of wine constitute God's provision. God is making provision for more than just minimal sustenance. God demands that

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<sup>35</sup> Deuteronomy 24:19-21 (NRSV).

we use our wealth as a means of providing the fullest and healthiest resources for all, strangers and natives alike, within our communities.

Other than references to the "alien" in these passages, there is no explicit reference to such issues as race. The reason for this is that there is no concept of race in the Bible. People are divided and characterized by either family connection or geographic location. Skin color does not define personhood or inclusion within the community. In even a cursory look at the subject of what the Bible refers to as "aliens," "foreigners," or "strangers," one will see an almost universal attitude of persons who have chosen to be associated with the Israelite nation. Even in the case of captives and slaves, their participation in the life of the faith community is encouraged as long as they were willing to abide by circumcision rules. Yet, as the previous chapter pointed out, the "white" church continues to deny Blacks access to our community simply because they are dark-skinned. We isolate them even further by claiming that such isolation is what the Blacks want. In forty three years of worshipping and serving in the Church of God and other denominations I have never felt or sensed that I was unwelcome to Blacks in either their houses of worship or my own. On more than one occasion, however, I have witnessed White Christians get up and change seats when a Black visitor would take a seat near them or on the same pew. How can the Church of God claim that the Bible is shaping and maintaining our community life, when we so blatantly disobey its provisions?

We have examined several passages dealing with God's character and with his clear commands. Now let us look at God's judgement in response to humanity's failure to keep these commandments. The first text I would like to review is found in Isaiah 3:13-15. This passage sounds like a direct response to those who refuse to obey the provisions of the deuteronomic codes. The passage reads as follows:

The LORD rises to argue his case; he stands to judge the peoples. The LORD enters into judgement with the elders and princes of his people: It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the spoil of the poor in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor? says the Lord GOD of Hosts.<sup>36</sup>

The first issue in this prophetic word is that we are accountable for how we use and share our resources. This is not a comfortable message to affluent people. To paraphrase the bumper sticker, "The one with the most toys, does NOT win!" God advocates for those who lack power and resources, first, by making provision for them and, secondly, by judging against those who refuse to cooperate with such provision and command. Furthermore, there is also an implication that judgement is directed at those who are empowered within society. This is even more clear in the next text found in Isaiah 10:1-4.

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth, so as not to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain? For all of this his anger is not turned away; his hand is stretched out still.<sup>37</sup>

Here we find a clear judgement against laws, systems, and structures that oppress.

Judgement is aimed directly at those who have and wield the power to make such laws, design such systems, and build such structures. God is making it clear there will be no hiding behind our possessions or power. Neither will excuses and rationalizations defend us from the systemic injustice we have created, permitted, and maintained in our churches and society. For example, policy makers will not be held guiltless because they were supposedly just doing what the people wanted.

In a nation that at least attempts to practice "government by the people," and in a church movement with an independent congregational polity, like the Church of God, this places

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<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 3:13-15 (NRSV).

responsibility for social justice on everyone's shoulders. No one can blame politicians or church leaders for failing when we have the power and responsibility for putting those persons in office. In situations like that which existed in the South following the Civil War, Whites were not only guilty for making unjust laws that limited African-American's access to the power structures of our nation, they were also guilty of not dismantling that system with their own votes and power. "God's Spirit directs Christians to show their faith in both the religious and secular realms of decision and action."<sup>38</sup>

Both of these last two scripture passages describe God as a powerful advocate for the oppressed in society. It is clear from the discussion that preceded them that God has designed us to live responsibly towards each other, regardless of social position.

Bigotry is a violation of God's design for humanity. When this design is disregarded and oppression takes its place, individuals can collapse psychologically. If we feel powerless to change or dismantle the forms of injustice, we may become overwhelmed.<sup>39</sup>

Who bears the responsibility when persons are overwhelmed by this "violation of God's design?" My answer would be those who hold, control, and can access the wealth and resources of the community in which they live.

Some will argue that Blacks have as much opportunity in this country as Whites and therefore there is no need to make any special provision for them. For Christians who claim to believe, "The Bible is our rule of faith,"<sup>40</sup> this reasoning will not fit with God's command and judgement. The bulk of the prophetic witness is against social injustice. Liberation theologians

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<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 10:1-4 (NRSV).

<sup>38</sup> Beals, 171.

<sup>39</sup> DeYoung, 116.

<sup>40</sup> Arlo F. Newell and Randall Vader, editors, Hymnal of the Church of God (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1989) 312.

often refer to God's "preferential option for the poor," to describe God's character.<sup>41</sup> As much as I am in sympathy with their thinking, I will disagree with their wording. For a biblical Christian it is not an option, it is God's imperative.

With so many other issues involved in racial reconciliation, why discuss economics? As stated previously, this continues to be one of the distinguishing factors between the majority of Blacks and Whites in our society. Economics also tends to be an issue that comes up in racist rhetoric, on the one hand, and political theorizing on the other. One comment often heard is that Blacks use a disproportionate amount of the government subsidy that is welfare. If you look at simple figures, this appears to be true, but is that really the case? According to figures available from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the following figures represent a breakdown of the percentage of people who receive welfare:

Whites: 49.1 %  
Blacks: 32.1 %  
Other: 18.8 %<sup>42</sup>

Recognizing that at the time of these figures Blacks comprised 18% of the statistical population, it would seem that Blacks do indeed use a larger percentage of the resources available. But we must ask the question, what type of person is more likely to depend on welfare assistance? This leads us to look at the figures in light of average income for the respective groups. These figures are:

Whites: \$17,611  
Blacks: \$10,650  
Other: \$13,168

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<sup>41</sup> The earliest record of the phrase, "opcion por los pobres," can be found in a lecture delivered by Gustavo Gutierrez in 1972. The phrase and its meaning developed a fuller shape in the Episcopal conferences and eventually became a book titled, *A Theology of Liberation* Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teologica de la Liberacion: Perspectivas* (Lima: CEP, 1971)

<sup>42</sup> United States Census Bureau ([www.census.gov/hhes/www/income.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income.html))

According to these figures, Whites average 160% the income of Blacks. If poor people are expected to be the ones using these resources of welfare and other entitlement programs, then it can only be expected that Blacks would consume a higher percentage of them, since their average income is less. And yet, this is still not the entire picture.

Let us now take the average income figures and extrapolate the percentage of welfare benefits each group is likely to be using. The expected welfare recipients in each group are as follows:

Whites: 15.8%  
 Blacks: 49.1%  
 Other: 36.1%

Compare this with the first set of figures:

Group	Expected Benefits	Actual Benefits	Discrepancy
Whites	15.8%	49.1%	33.3% >
Blacks	49.1%	32.1%	17%<
Other	36.1%	18.8%	17.3%<

<sup>43</sup>

This stands as a clear example of racist thinking clouding the real picture. Whites are the ones who use and depend on welfare in disproportionate numbers. Blacks and other ethnic groups are considerably under the expected figures in regard to welfare assistance. This is not an attempt to rationalize away poverty. The fact is that Black people have a lower average income than Whites and it is not because they are lazy or unmotivated. It is because society, particularly the church, refuses to answer the call for economic justice. We would rather be content in our consumption and greed, while others go hungry and naked in the richest nation on earth.

What then is the reason for building economic bridges between Blacks and Whites?

Kathryn Choy-Wong provides two that may apply to our discussion: "(1) Because God assumes

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/onemansmind/rb/Poverty.html> (NOTE: The percentages stated on this website and in the chart on this page have been verified using MicroSoft Excel spreadsheet.)

we will; and (2) Because we are made in God's image and we know his love, we have special responsibilities to care for God's world and to be obedient to him."<sup>44</sup> God's covenant requirements are for justice and right relationship with his creation. Biblical justice demands reconciliation between Blacks and Whites and this includes economic justice.

Within the group of denominations and movements that could be defined as "Wesleyan Holiness," there are many definitions of what constitutes true righteousness. Many of these definitions are merely human rules, with little if any biblical basis, while others are clear attempts to interpret scriptural requirements for the faith community. Some definitions focus only on outward behavior and others focus on inward attitudes, feelings, or uniquely personal experiences. The Wesleyan movement, begun by and named for John and Charles Wesley, was founded on the principles of both a personal experience of God and social liberation of those oppressed. In reflecting on issues of reconciliation, I want to contend that righteousness is defined as, providing justice for those living under oppression. Before reconciliation can occur, persons must be free. "In fact, liberation is the prerequisite for reconciliation."<sup>45</sup>

As the religious life of the Israelite nation evolved, rules and regulations began to take precedence over matters of justice and relationship. The prophet Ezekiel declares that God's intent is for humanity to do more than just follow the rules. In Ezekiel 18:5-9 we read:

If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right-if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor's wife or approach a woman during her menstrual period, does not oppress anyone, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not take advance or accrued interest, withholds his hands from iniquity, executes true justice between contending parties, follows my statutes, acting faithfully-such a one is righteous; he shall surely live, says the Lord GOD.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Kathryn Choy-Wong, Building Bridges (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998) 2.

<sup>45</sup> DeYoung, 76.

<sup>46</sup> Ezekiel 18:5-9 (NRSV).

It is important to note the emphasis given to social justice matters (food, clothing, debt regulations, peace making). Ezekiel's proclamation clearly links righteousness with social justice and the fulfillment of the deuteronomic codes we discussed previously. Sacramental righteousness takes a back seat to matters of social righteousness.

Amos, the shepherd from Tekoa, proclaimed an even stronger message of the contrast between sacramental faithfulness and true worship. Amos declares with boldness God's message in the following way:

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.<sup>47</sup>

In the above passage and in the rest of the book attributed to him, Amos establishes justice as God's priority. In a day and age when we see churches dividing over worship styles and the types of singing done in our services, we should pay special attention to this text. Within the Church of God, the differences in worship style and practice have been at the center of a heated discussion and provided the rationale for keeping Blacks and Whites segregated on Sunday morning. For Amos, and presumably for God, the songs and how we sing them are not nearly as important as how we promote, provide for, and enforce social justice and righteousness. This is not a matter of small concern, rather it is a pervasive issue that hampered true religion in Amos' time and continues to affect the church in negative and self-destructive ways. By using worship style as an excuse to avoid fellowship, Whites, in particular, have deprived themselves of the rich expressions of joy and faith that Blacks share in their worship and singing.

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<sup>47</sup> Amos 5:21-24 (NRSV).



Somewhere in our struggle for corporate and individual identity, we missed the whole point. As far back as Adam and Eve, or Cain and Abel, humanity has tried to avoid the issue of responsibility for those around us.

The main issue of American Protestantism became "Are you saved?" Increasingly it meant, "Have you decided to be saved?" Such questions missed the whole issue: How is a Christian to live a righteous life in his social world?<sup>48</sup>

Christian communities want God to accept their worship and offerings, but only on their terms. Therefore, acceptance or rejection of this teaching will affect the future of our life as individuals, congregations, and larger church movements. As long as the Church maintains this isolation from one another, we are not living the true image of Christian community. This isolation is more than simply a matter of location. "Isolation is not merely an issue of geography; it is rooted in one's perception of life."<sup>49</sup> For instance, several members of the Northside Church of God in Jacksonville (a predominately White congregation) drive past the Greater Jacksonville Church of God (a Black congregation), when they go to church. Although both congregations would consider themselves a neighborhood church, their respective members are isolated from one another, even though sharing relatively the same location.

The message of the prophets is still relevant today. Our outward appearances of health and prosperity in the church are not what God asks or desires from us. God desires that we become a just and righteous people in the fullest understanding of that term. He desires economic justice, fair treatment for those who would easily become outcasts, and a model of community life that reflects God's character, not the character of the world. Pretense is not an option. Mere images will not suffice. "We want to see ourselves in a better light. But we would

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<sup>48</sup> Beals, 146.

<sup>49</sup> DeYoung, 8.

rather rest in the ideal of ourselves than in the reality of ourselves."<sup>50</sup> God's call is to face the truth about the injustice in our society, our denominations and movements and within our congregations and individual lives. Until we do we are failing to represent and reveal the character and nature of God.

So far we have looked at Old Testament images of God's character and social teaching. Does the perspective change when we enter the New Testament era? As we examine the mission, ministry and message of Jesus let it be understood that I view Jesus as the fulfillment of God's role in the covenant ceremony described in Genesis 15 that we discussed earlier in this chapter. Believing that God accepted the role of both covenant guarantor and the one who assumes the penalty for the breaking of the covenant; Jesus then becomes the sacrificial price paid for our failure to live by God's standards. Regarding racial reconciliation, this is an important understanding. Before real reconciliation can begin, "A sacrificial price must be paid to right the wrongs."<sup>51</sup> For Christ the price was his life. The question for us will be, 'How much are we willing to give so that true reconciliation can be realized?'

Christ had a mission that he clearly understood and clearly articulated. Humanity did not always want to accept the mission on Jesus' terms, but that does not mean it was obscure in either his mind or his teaching. In Luke 4:16-21 we read:

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ronald Landfair, "A Dysfunctional Heritage," *America*, Nov. 20, 1999, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Beals, xiii.

<sup>52</sup> Luke 4:16-21 (NRSV).

This declaration of Jesus ministry does not contain any elements of temple worship. One element refers to a healing ministry, but the main thrust has a social justice outlook: good news to the poor; release to captives; and freedom for the oppressed. I believe the mission of Christ was not to revitalize temple worship or confirm one of the various Jewish sects trying to redefine what it meant to be a Jew, rather, Jesus mission was to enter into personal relationship with the ones being beaten down, trodden under foot, and emasculated by the powerful.

I have listened to many preachers try to spiritualize this text. Many of them try to whitewash its focus on social justice by claiming Jesus referred to freedom from sin, the opening of our spiritual eyes, or the poor as a reference to those who are spiritually poor. Bartimaeus was not spiritually blind and I do not think he asked Jesus to open the eyes of his heart. The woman caught in adultery was not just bound by her sin. She was held captive by men who wanted to see her blood flow and who never stopped to examine their own complicity in her bondage. Neither did they accuse her male partner, who under the law was also guilty. The Samaritan woman was not held down by demons from the spirit world, she was tied up by religious and ethnic prejudice. Her life was a ruin because of masculine sexuality that defined her as an object and not a person. She was isolated and alone until Jesus asked her for a cup of water, then gave her a life-giving stream. Jesus aimed his mission at real needs in real lives and he answered those needs with forgiveness, healing, acceptance, and love. He went where people lived and touched them in their isolation. "Look at Jesus. The world did not pay any attention to him. He was crucified and put away. His message of love was rejected by a world in search of power, efficiency and control."<sup>53</sup> However, the few who were the recipients of his love, and responded positively to it, never seemed to forget what his real mission was.

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<sup>53</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, In The Name of Jesus (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2000) 23.

Jesus ministry had a clear focus on the margins of his society. He touched lepers, hung out with sinners and publicans (synonymous terms for a first century Jew), and even spoke with and ministered to women (probably the most marginalized group in the society of his day). In contrast to his dealings with religious and political leaders, Jesus showed a clear preference for the outcasts and marginal. While most Jewish religious leaders saw the mature life of faith as walking among your own kind and remaining within the comfort of familiar practices and comfortable relationships, Jesus chose to go to, and beyond, the margins of societal structures. The Pharisees viewed maturity as the exact fulfillment of the legal code, "[b]ut Jesus has a different view of maturity: It is the ability and willingness to be led where you would rather not go."<sup>54</sup> Jesus could always be found among the powerless and marginalized. Where will people find us? "If we claim to follow *the real Jesus*, our reconciliation work will set individuals free, one by one, and dismantle the systems of injustice that oppress people."<sup>55</sup>

No clearer picture illustrates Jesus ministry than his work with the Samaritan Woman. In this portrait of Jesus' ministry, we find him crossing at least four distinct boundaries that typically isolated persons in his day. He crossed an ethnic boundary (Jew to Samaritan), a gender boundary (male to female), a religious boundary (Temple to mountaintop), and a social boundary (holy man to sinful woman). Notice that in terms of the structures and institutions of that era, every boundary he crossed was from the center of power to the margin of powerlessness. This has profound implications for White/ Black relationships. Power issues are at the core of our racial separation. Those who possess the power must be the ones to cross the boundaries. From Jesus' example, reconciliation is not two groups meeting in the middle.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>55</sup> DeYoung, 77.

Reconciliation is one group who has the power and resources coming all the way to the other and then letting go of that power and those resources in order to make the two into one.

Community emerges in the midst of diversity when all are invited, embraced, accepted, and included...*Jesus intentionally shattered boundaries instituted by society and fashioned a new understanding of community rooted in the grace of God.*<sup>56</sup>

This community is the immediate result of Jesus ministry to the Samaritan Woman. The village people who would not share the well with her would listen and accept her because of Jesus.

They would likewise come to know him, first through her, and then directly as savior and master.

All of this because Jesus was willing to cross some boundaries others viewed as either uncrossable or insignificant.

If Jesus mission was focused on the poor, oppressed, and captive, and if his ministry was actually lived out among them, then we must next ask, did Jesus specifically teach his disciples to follow social justice as a guiding principle? Jesus did teach a great deal on this subject and one of his most profound statements of judgement and reward is centered on issues of social justice. Matthew relates this story of Jesus in the following manner,

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 165.

was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' " He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."<sup>57</sup>

This passage is not merely the juxtaposition of good versus evil. "The difference is not that one group did good and another, evil. The difference is that one group did good and the other did nothing."<sup>58</sup> Just like White Christians today who refuse to acknowledge there is any racial problem, the "goats" in this story were blind to both the demands of their faith and the opportunities to reflect a Christ image through their social practice. This is not an image of the world and the church standing in front of God for judgement. The ones condemned are clearly expecting some kind of reward and are flabbergasted at the judgement and condemnation they receive. This picture portrays persons who believe themselves to be 'in the faith,' but who lack any sensibility of the needs of others around and among them. Manuel Ortiz speaks of this when he says, "The Christian life is one of sacrifice. Sacrifice, is not wanting things your way. In cross-cultural ministry we are challenged to consider others and their needs ahead of our own."<sup>59</sup>

Notice also that the groups are separated purely because of social justice issues: food, clothing, health-care, and personal presence. The measure of both the reward and the punishment is based on each group's treatment of the "least." This passage by no means conveys the idea that some are of lesser value than others. It is merely a statement that some will have access to resources and others will not. Those who do have such access are responsible to make it available to those who do not have it. For the task of reconciliation, we must not only see the need, we must also believe it is possible to make a difference for, " . . . unless we believe that

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<sup>57</sup> Matthew 25: 31-45 (NRSV).

<sup>58</sup> Steve Harper, Praying Through the Lord's Prayer (Nashville: Upper Room, 1992) 35.

<sup>59</sup> Ortiz, 104.

reconciliation is possible, there is no reason to pursue it."<sup>60</sup> For the Church of God, we must acknowledge the problem and its consequences, as well as see the possibility of changing the status quo.

In the Gospel of John, we find Jesus teaching something new and radical. Jesus offers a new command to his disciples intended to shape their relationships and their message. In John 13:34-35 we read:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.<sup>61</sup>

Not only does Jesus command them to love one another, but he defines love by the example of his own life. Such love will identify the disciples to the world and the identity of the disciples is communal, not individual. Love is both the measure of our relationship with Christ and the proclamation of that relationship to the world. Like Christ's love, our mutual love comes with a price tag. Love stands in direct opposition to human bondage (slavery, oppression, and economic tyranny) but, "however much the law of love contradicted human bondage, that law would prevail only as men bore a cross for it."<sup>62</sup>

Matthew 24:10 describes the exact opposite of this love commandment when he records Jesus saying, "Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another."<sup>63</sup> Jesus words in these two examples portray two opposed attitudes: one is mutual care and cooperation, the other hatred and betrayal. One is true discipleship, the other apostasy. What this says about racism is that any attitude or action that divides persons from one another

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<sup>60</sup> DeYoung, 62.

<sup>61</sup> John 13:34-35 (NRSV).

<sup>62</sup> Beals, 68.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew 24:10 (NRSV).

or that creates hatred and betrayal of another's humanity is wrong. "In theological terms, racism is demonic. There is no place in God's kingdom for racism."<sup>64</sup>

One other specific teaching of Jesus we need to consider is found in Luke 14:12-14. This teaching is given during a dinner in Jesus' honor. It seems to be aimed at the host of the dinner and is addressing the host's apparent desire for recognition that he has honored Christ.

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."<sup>65</sup>

In this lesson, Jesus teaches true hospitality as that which is offered to those who are not in a position, or even likely, to return the favor. Hospitality, as shown in this passage, is not free, but rather it has to cost. Thus, for us to gain the hospitality of heaven, Jesus had to pay his life. Jesus sacrificial death was more than a matter of hoping God would stop the evil being done, but rather it is an active engagement of self in the battle to undo injustice and overcome evil by emptying himself in order to meet the needs of others.

The cross itself demonstrates that triumph. Jesus allowed the fullest gale of sin and evil to blow over him; He was betrayed, unjustly condemned, rejected as the Messiah and the true Son of God by those He came to save. But they did not, could not, change Him, and the Father had the last word-Jesus was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven.<sup>66</sup>

The reconciliation of Blacks and Whites in our society and in our churches is a resurrection event. Becoming "one" across all the boundaries that separate us reveals the true power of Christ's life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection. Are we ready to risk everything in order to see the unity God designed for us? Will we pay the price of our life in order to really live it and then gain eternity?

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<sup>64</sup> Choy-Wong, 49.

<sup>65</sup> Luke 14:12-14 (NRSV).

<sup>66</sup> Mattie Greathouse, "My Story." Asbury Herald vol. 112, #2&3, 2002, 9.



Practicing this kind of hospitality begins with an honest evaluation of our place in society. "If we are in a privileged position in society because of our race, gender, socioeconomic status, or any other reason, a part of what it means to take responsibility is to acknowledge that we are privileged."<sup>67</sup> Jesus never denied who he was or where he came from. He chose to move into the world of the "other" in order to restore them to their true identity as children of God. Knowing his power and position in the Father's plan did not become a barrier to outreach. Instead, it became a steppingstone to real ministry to and with others.

This kind of hospitality also demands that we not lose hope or patience in the task of reconciliation. Many will not want to listen to what we say or participate in what we do. Some will be openly antagonistic to what is attempted. We must be reminded that Jesus faced the same situation.

In addition, the great majority of followers who had heard Jesus' sermons, watched his miracles, saw the love he extended—the great majority shut him out of their world. However, Jesus did not say, "Forget it. I'll exclude you from my world too." No! He just kept on extending his love—even to those wicked leaders who encouraged the crowd to shout, "Crucify Him!"<sup>68</sup>

Are we willing to begin the task and pursue the goal in spite of criticism, resistance, and lack of appreciation? Anyone willing to pursue reconciliation is likely to find it a hard task. Whites will resist it as unnecessary, unwanted, and too troublesome. Blacks may be afraid to commit themselves to the task because of so many failed promises and weak efforts that resulted in tokenism, or mere semantics. The message, ministry, and mission of Christ leave us no other option.

Within the structural context and doctrinal framework of the Church of God Reformation Movement we continue to teach unity of all believers, yet our churches can still be divided into

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<sup>67</sup> DeYoung, 95.

<sup>68</sup> David Mains, Healing the Dysfunctional Church Family (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1992) 21.

distinct groups based on ethnicity and skin color. This is not to say that there are no multiethnic churches within our movement. What is disturbing is that as a movement we are not intentional about planting and building more multiethnic churches, even in our cities, and that too few persons seem to feel the need to change the status quo. In the development of Church of God congregations across the United States, we tended to plant and build in small towns and villages. Our corporate "flavor" became white and rural. As individuals and structures surrendered to the secular realities of segregation and separateness, we began to accept a pseudo-spiritual policy of "separate but equal." The problem with this development is that it is not consistent with our doctrine of unity and, just like the secular version, we were separate, but not equal. Blacks have become models of success in urban ministry, yet are represented in our leadership in little more than token numbers. When any measure of reconciliation and greater cooperation is achieved, white folks are often quick to accept those measures as enough. These and other symptoms indicate that we still have far to go if we are to realize the ideal of what we teach.

Is our theology and teaching on unity valid and biblical? Does our heritage as a Wesleyan Holiness movement, really shape our identity and mission? If our teaching and beliefs are valid, how can we apply them to the life and practice of our congregations, state organizations, and national ministries? I will leave specific applications to the next chapter, but before completing these theological reflections, I want to examine the specific Church of God understandings of Unity and Holiness. Because of the nature of this project, this examination cannot be exhaustive, however I provide a thorough review of key biblical passages that in turn support the validity of our teachings.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Further and more exhaustive study of Church of God doctrine can be found in Dr. Gilbert Stafford's, Theology for Disciples (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1996). For an historical review of our teachings you might look at, A Time To Remember Teachings, ed. Barry Callen, (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1978).

It is possible to understand unity in at least two ways. For some, a unified group means one that is homogeneous or almost homogeneous in thought, attitude, style, and personal preference. A definition like this is actually a barrier to true unity because there is always some difference between individuals in a group and it becomes increasingly more difficult to draw the lines around what is acceptable without arbitrarily excluding those at the margins. In fact, this type of thinking tends to get narrower and narrower. There are biblical standards and limits on behavior, but many of the rules we use to exclude others, like worship style differences I discussed earlier, are simply matters of preference or convenience. The second understanding of unity is to acknowledge that Christians are diverse and yet we choose to maintain a common identity. This second understanding is by far the most difficult because it must be intentional on the part of every participant and it requires that Christians celebrate and dialogue about the very differences that could become divisive.

For any work in reconciliation between Blacks and Whites, in the Church of God as well as other denominations, only the second understanding will serve as a usable model. Recognizing and celebrating ethnic and cultural distinctives within the Church, while being intentional about inclusive fellowship models reconciliation to the secular world. The fact is we are different. Just within the congregations of the Church of God in Northeast Florida, you will find some of the following contrasts:

Whites:	Blacks
1. Leadership by democratic consensus.	1. Leadership by pastoral authority.
2. Formal education and training predominates.	2. Some formal education, but mostly on-the-job training and experience.
3. More structured worship services.	3. More spontaneous worship services.
4. Staff ministers called and hired from other places.	4. Ministry staff raised up and trained from within congregation and community.

These characteristics are by no means comprehensive and the list could go on, however, they are indicative of real differences that must be dealt with. For instance, in trying to schedule a community worship service, most of the Black pastor's simply instruct their parishioners to attend and a large segment of their congregation will do so. For a White pastor to be that authoritative would lead people to at least avoid attending, and probably cause them to make some critical remarks about the pastor's demanding attitudes. This is a common crisis when such a service is scheduled at the location of a Black congregation or where the speaker may be unknown to the Whites. Real efforts at unity and reconciliation must start with an admission that we are different and that those differences will sometimes cause tension between the various groups. True unity will also require that we keep trying to be reconciled and keep working at unity, in spite of those tensions.

Jesus' prayer, found in John chapter 17, provides us with a starting point for our reflection on unity within the Church. Jesus is reaching the end of his pre-crucifixion ministry. He has taught his disciples what they need to know and provided them with personal experiences in ministry to the world through healing, preaching and spiritual deliverance. Now it is time to leave the physical work in their hands. Listen as he prays:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may

know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. "Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."<sup>70</sup>

Notice that Jesus states explicitly that he has been given "authority over all people," and that the reason for this authority is to bring them back to the Father. Jesus' states, "They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world." In my opinion, this statement tells us that we can understand that we are not to find our identity in worldly realities such as division and segregation, but rather in the character of a loving God who was revealed through Jesus Christ. Too often in dealing with the racial tensions in the United States we will hear people saying, "that is just the way things are." Jesus' words to his Father for those he was sending out indicate that worldly realities, such as prejudice and bigotry, were not acceptable definitions for our identity. Jesus' words about being sanctified and set apart are also consistent with this idea.

The ultimate message of Jesus' prayer, however, is not only that the disciples he was sending out would be one, but also that "all those who will believe in me through their word," would be one. The combination of Jesus' prayer for us to be sanctified (literally: "set apart") and his desire that we be "one," provide us with an understanding of the church as clearly reflecting and living different realities than the world of secular belief and modalities. Where the world is divided by differences, the church is unified in spite of them. Where class, social status, and personal privilege structure the world, the church is structured around unity, oneness and the authoritative power of the living Christ. I do not believe this ideal of unity can be perfectly achieved, because we will always be dealing with human beings who are resistant to change and perhaps unaware of God's desire and call for unity and oneness. In fact, a great deal of our

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<sup>70</sup> John 17:1-4, 15-26 (NRSV).

resistance to change is found in our unwillingness to submit to Christ's authority and an ignorance of our responsibility to love and care for one another.

The inner conflict against slavery that arose in the minds of individual Christians stems from the struggle that every person has in wanting to be more than everybody else. Ultimately, one desires to be God himself.<sup>71</sup>

Reconciliation requires that we surrender both to Christ as Lord and Master and to each other as called out disciples with a common mission and common identity that stands above, but not in place of, our ethnicity. We do not have to stop being Black or cease to be White in order to be one. We just have to recognize a higher calling and purpose than just our ethnicity. Such inclusiveness cannot be used as an excuse to avoid the biblical prohibitions on certain human behaviors. Inclusiveness is not a demand that the church allow persons to continue in sin just so they can be part of the community of faith. In fact, the biblical concept of community calls us to hold each other accountable for behavior and attitudes.

This unity must be grounded in our common salvation through Jesus Christ. This salvation and the consequent unity are not just something for our future eternal life with God. In the Wesleyan understanding, our salvation and unity are to be experienced as both a present reality and future hope. "The salvation of the Lord which qualifies us for heaven makes us one on earth. A religion of divisions will deceive the soul."<sup>72</sup> I am not saying that there will be no differences in organization, worship style, or even specific doctrinal teachings. What I am saying is that we should not allow our differences to become contentious standards that divide and separate us from one another.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer watched his country, and specifically, the Lutheran Church, try to redefine their identity based on political, economic, and ideological goals. Not only was the

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<sup>71</sup> Beals, 13.

unity and goodwill of humanity fractured by this thinking, but also the church itself took on the role of spiritually approving hate, bigotry, and genocide. Bonhoeffer saw a different reality; one based on our identity in Christ. He believed it was so important that he chose to risk and lose his own life to see it at least begin. In writing on our Christian unity he says, "What determines our brotherhood is what man is by reason of Christ. Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done for both of us."<sup>73</sup> If the Lutheran Church in Germany was to have any influence against the racist policies and practices of the Nazi's, it would have to stop reflecting and supporting the hatred and racial division the Nazi's produced. Dare we dream and live as boldly and as sacrificially as Bonhoeffer proposes? To see Jesus' prayer fully realized we have no choice but reconciliation.

Jesus' prayer alone is a call to unity and shared ministry. However, other teachings can help shed light on exactly what unity means. In Mark 9:50, Jesus is recorded as saying, "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other."<sup>74</sup> This text, and its parallel in Matthew 5:13, are often viewed through the understanding that salt is a preservative. From the context of both passages, the more accurate interpretation is that Jesus is referring to the flavoring properties of salt. By referring to the flavor enhancing quality of salt and then calling on his disciples to, "have salt in yourselves," Jesus is asking them to flavor their world with the very things that make them unique. In my understanding, this text is calling us to place value on and to celebrate our diversity, not use it as a reason for division. My world is more flavorful and far less bland because of my interaction and fellowship with Black brothers and sisters. "Reconciliation is not

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<sup>72</sup> Daniel Sydney Warner, "The Experience of Oneness," in A Time To Remember Teachings, ed. Barry Callen (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1978) 15.

<sup>73</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, trans. by John Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper, 1959) 25.

having everybody do everything the same way. Assimilation is cheap reconciliation. It blocks genuine efforts at coming together."<sup>75</sup> Pluralism, without mutual accountability, is just as dangerous, because it allows the selfishness of extreme individuality. God wants us to take our differences and unique characteristics and let them create a more enticing and flavorful witness. This witness will be characterized by an accountable and loving diversity.

Jesus made this even more evident when he said to "be at peace with each other." This characteristic of our "salty" fellowship highlights our creative approaches to interaction and cooperation. It is more than just choosing to be together. It is realizing that our fullest identity and imago dei is found in relationship with each other. "God has created us to need each other. Reconciliation is centered in relationship that empowers *all* parties involved."<sup>76</sup>

This type of empowerment can be seen in the early history of the Methodists in England. As John Wesley developed his societies, bands, and classes, those who had been marginalized by both English society and the Anglican Church found a place to belong and participate. In describing the effects on miners and workers of Wesley's day, Oscar Sherwin records, "Whatever they were in the mine or mill, here in the chapel they were men-with worth and dignity in the eyes of God and their brethren-free and equal."<sup>77</sup> The lesson of early Methodism needs to be relearned by the church in the United States today. Too much talent is being wasted and too many resources are being thrown away at the altars of pride and fear. "There is potentially great opportunity to learn from one another in a multicultural society. Unfortunately, the country is experiencing intercultural war."<sup>78</sup> Even if society as a whole refuses to begin and sustain racial reconciliation, the true church has no such choice. We must live and minister in solidarity with

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<sup>74</sup> Mark 9:50 (NRSV).

<sup>75</sup> DeYoung, 21.

<sup>76</sup> DeYoung, 74. (Emphasis added)

<sup>77</sup> Oscar Sherwin, John Wesley, Friend of the People (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1961) 37



each other, regardless of our race or ethnicity, as unique and powerful cells of the great Body of Christ in the world.

Such unity is not just the teaching and expectation of Jesus. Paul, a Jew, worked and lived in cross-cultural ministry. Many of his letters to the early churches deal with problems that arose as the result of cultural clashes within the church. In his letter to the Romans, Paul uses the analogy of the human body in order to describe how we live and function together as the church:

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.<sup>79</sup>

Here again we find the theme that our unity and life are centered in Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer goes so far as to say, "Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ."<sup>80</sup> For Bonhoeffer and for Paul the Apostle community can only be defined as unity or one body. This is more than just an important theological understanding. It is also a measuring tool, by which we can evaluate our fellowship and body life. Are we one? Do we function, organize, and cooperate as a single body made up of many parts, each with a unique contribution? For each individual, or even each denomination, to view themselves as part of a larger entity will increase our experience of community and our witness of community to the world around us.

Such an understanding of our body life is built on mutual respect and complementarity. It is viewing my role and your role from the perspective of the whole body's functioning, not just from the viewpoint of singular importance. This complementarity must be more than just getting along and not making waves. To live in such a state of reconciliation, means that we will

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<sup>78</sup> Pannell, 77.

<sup>79</sup> Romans 12:4-10 (NRSV).

intentionally engage our heart, mind, and physical presence with others and learn to value, cherish, and love them for the sake of Christ. In the entire cooperative working of our gifts and graces, the foundation is still love: Not just an interior feeling or attitude, but an expressed affection for one another. "The norm of reconciliation is God-centered love, which makes us responsible to God for our neighbor."<sup>81</sup>

The book of Acts describes some early expressions of such community. In Acts 2:46-47 we find the early church in Jerusalem described like this:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.<sup>82</sup>

The description of eating together and breaking bread in their homes is significant. Breaking bread in people's homes was a characteristic of Jesus' personal ministry. "Jesus intentionally crossed the boundaries established by society and created relationships with those who were devalued by the community."<sup>83</sup> In the context of first century Palestine, to share a meal with someone was to acknowledge you had accepted that person as your friend and responsibility. Just as Jesus had done, the early church used hospitality and the shared meal as a message about their loyalties and affections. In a society that was full of persons marginalized by physical weakness, spiritual ignorance, gender, nationality, and even occupation, such a message of inclusive fellowship had a powerful impact.

Feagin and Vera in their examination titled, "White Racism" point out that; "The preparation and sharing of food in the United States have long had socioreligious meaning."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Bonhoeffer, 21.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>82</sup> Acts 2:46-47 (NRSV).

<sup>83</sup> DeYoung, 54.

<sup>84</sup> Feagin and Vera, 59.

This can be seen in the Western church's understanding of holy communion, our almost universal habit of carry-in dinners and potluck suppers, and even in the tradition, if not the actuality, of the first Thanksgiving meal shared between the Pilgrims and Native Americans.

The portrait painted by the text in Acts, is one of ongoing fellowship throughout the daily routines of life. More than occasional gatherings, the early church simply lived together in shared worship, shared meals, and shared ministry. Their body life was characterized by public recognition and numerical growth. It was also full of gladness and sincerity. It is my understanding of scripture that such a view of our corporate life is not an ideal, but an imperative. We have already seen that Jesus prayed for such a life and that Paul encouraged it. Here in Acts is a description of unity and oneness lived out joyfully and effectively. It seems more appealing to pursue such a life, in spite of the cost, than to go on living an isolated or homogenized existence. Even in the tensions between Jewish and Greek Christians, there appears an ongoing dialogue between the two groups. A Church of God theologian affirms:

A church group that does not pursue interconnectedness with *all* other Christians functions in fragmented fashion. For one tradition of Christians to disregard other traditions means probably one of two things: either it believes the other is not Christian, or it disregards the crucial importance of its interconnectedness to the whole church, in which case, sadly, it lives in contradiction to New Testament calls for unity.<sup>85</sup>

In the Church of God, we seem more eager, as a movement, to face the need for solidarity with other denominational traditions than to face the fragmentation, based on race, that exists within our own structures and attitudes. This is not a solitary and isolated description of this community in Jerusalem either. Much happened later in the churches history that did fragment this church, but that should not hide the fact that for several decades the church existed in an unusual state of harmony and mutuality. It should also be considered that the entry of selfish

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<sup>85</sup> Gilbert Stafford, Theology For Disciples (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1996) 277

prerogatives and prideful indulgence were probably the cause of their fragmentation, not a symptom of it.

Some time after Acts chapter two, the church was still functioning with a high level of cooperation and interconnectedness. In Acts 4:32-35 we read this description:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.<sup>86</sup>

This appears to be an evolution of the description we read in 2:46-47. The church has become even more interconnected. Not only is their sharing and worshipping in common, now we see a common purpose and common will. I see this as a picture of the church when we are truly pursuing reconciliation. As stated earlier, reconciliation is not just getting along. Instead, "It is a radical transformation in the way we relate to each other in society."<sup>87</sup> These are the characteristics of a truly unified church. The common purpose and will are both a prerequisite for and a by-product of our unity.

Where relationships are positive, affirming, supportive, and harmonious, we say there is a strong sense of community. Where they are marked by suspicion, mistrust, tension, and discord, we acknowledge that community is lacking. We find there no unity of vision, mission, purpose, or direction.<sup>88</sup>

Currently in the Church of God, the second series of adjectives are more descriptive of our Black/White relationships within the Church of God. Blacks and Whites do not share the same vision and purpose, there is distrust and suspicion of one another, and we share little, if any, experience of community. It is rather a paradox, but before we can see the fullest expression of

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<sup>86</sup> Acts 4:32-35 (NRSV).

<sup>87</sup> DeYoung, 76.

<sup>88</sup> Edward L. Foggs, Christ Compels Us (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1996) 49.

mutuality and interconnectedness we must begin to live as if it already exists. We must develop a common vision, purpose, and direction that will draw us into community.

An important aspect to consider is the idea of communal resources. This notion was discussed earlier when we looked at Old Testament scriptures and themes. In this notion, we find a radical, anti-establishment choice to share and provide for each other. However, before one capitalist screams, "communism!" it is important to note that this economic state of affairs was by joyful generosity, not an enforced socialism or communism. Without entering an entirely new discussion on economics, let me point out that most of our modern church congregations meet people's needs out of an evaluation of resources and their availability. In this description of the early church, resources were shared based on people's needs. Rather than being budget and availability driven, the early church was need driven.

Finally, in this text we see a church group characterized by powerful witness and graceful living. It is my own conjecture, but I cannot help but believe such power was the fruit of their generosity and mutuality. I also believe it was the natural by-product of their Christ-centered outlook.

The intended unity among Christians is not based on the achievement of full agreement on all theological questions. Rather, it is based on a common membership in the church through the grace of God and is anchored by a common commitment to the centrality of Christ and the authority of the word of God.<sup>89</sup>

Dare we refocus our hearts, lives, and ministries on the risen Christ and experience again his joyful and sacrificial presence in our common life together as Christians? Perhaps more to the point, dare we call ourselves Christians if we refuse to embrace such a focus and lifestyle? To continue to focus on, and be separated by, our differences is to miss the joyful experience of living in interconnectedness and solidarity with each other. Kathryn Choy-Wong describes her

understanding of such unity from the context of unique giftedness. In her work about building cross-cultural bridges between people groups she says:

In God's eyes, there are no differences that separate us from one another, but only unique gifts and abilities that can be used to glorify God. The joy and excitement of multicultural ministries is not in finding out how different we are, but *how alike we really are*.<sup>90</sup>

Are we willing to discover the truth of how much alike we really are when we define our identity by Christ's sacrifice and gift for our sakes?

The clear witness of both the Old and New Testaments is of a God who seeks to enter the life of humanity and not only reconcile us to God, but also to reconcile us to each other. These descriptions from Acts not only indicate the ideal of such reconciliation; they highlight the possibility of achieving it.

Simply stated, to be a Christian, by definition is to be involved in the ministry of reconciliation. If reconciliation is God's one item agenda, then we must rediscover the power exhibited by the early church that transformed individuals and society.<sup>91</sup>

It is beyond mere human ability to create such unity. However, we can and must affirm the existence of such unity and keep pointing to its power. For a world being shattered by conflict over racial, ethnic and religious identity, our goal must be truly to mend relationships.

Since the issues surrounding slavery in the United States, and the ongoing issues of racism, are rooted in the understanding that persons are essentially unequal, let's look at what the Bible says on such issues. Two scriptures that are pertinent to this discussion are Galatians 3:28 and Philemon 15, 16.

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Gale Hetrick, Laughter Among The Trumpets (St. Louis, MI: Church of God in Michigan, 1980) 13.

<sup>90</sup> Choy-Wong, 1.

<sup>91</sup> DeYoung, 59.

<sup>92</sup> Galatians 3:28 (NRSV).

Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother--especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.<sup>93</sup>

Although both of these scriptures take for granted the existence of slavery per se, neither allows the relationship between master and slave to exist as it did before Christ's entrance into the individual's lives. "By showing both master and slave were brothers under one master-Jesus Christ-the New Testament blasts the foundation of slavery built on any alleged essential inequality of people."<sup>94</sup> In recognizing and living out this new quality of relationship, the only possible conclusions are that slavery and racism no longer work, at least for persons and institutions dedicated to bringing in the reign of God. The only option left open is forgiveness, fairness, mutuality, and respect. Forgiveness means we must let go of our human desire for vengeance because of past or present wrongs. Fairness requires us to share the abundant resources God has provided. Mutuality means simply that we will do it all together. Respect involves placing value on the other and proclaiming that value to each other and to the world around us.

Because of the level of brutality, and the rape of human dignity that has characterized slavery and Black/White relations in the United States, the task of transforming our relationship will not be an easy one. Although I believe the hardest task will be for Whites to release their power, pride, and prejudice, Blacks will have to make some risky choices. Onesimus, the slave that Paul is speaking of in Philemon, must go back to a master who holds Onesimus' life in his hands.<sup>95</sup> All he has to protect him is a letter from Paul asking for mercy. Out of the need to survive, Blacks have built defensive structures that help nurture and maintain their dignity, self-

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<sup>93</sup> Philemon 15, 16 (NRSV).

<sup>94</sup> Beals, 17

<sup>95</sup> Philemon 1:12

esteem, and ethnic identity. In order to be reconciled with Whites they will have to step outside some of those defensive structures and risk themselves, just like Onesimus did in returning to Philemon. Whites will have to acknowledge and confess the many ways they have kept racist systems and thinking in control of their own lives and the lives of Blacks. The heart of the struggle will be the constant discovery of new attitudes and actions that separate us from each other. Every new discovery will require a new level of commitment to the task as well as new trust and new risk-taking. This risk and commitment applies to Blacks and Whites, as well as other ethnic groups who dare to live out the biblical model of community.

One final topic of theological reflection is that of holiness. Although holiness is often taught and preached in the Church of God, we have continued to struggle with our understanding of what it means to be holy. At some points in our history one will read of persons claiming some singular encounter with the Holy Spirit that purged them of base affections (lust, greed, carnality) and immorality. At other times holiness seems little more than a list of rules by which we should live, mostly of the "thou shalt not..." kind. Relative to the subject of racial reconciliation, the rules kind of holiness is dangerous. It can become a method to exclude persons who do not go by our rules. Viewing sanctification and holiness as a singular event in our spiritual life can also be dangerous, because it does not allow for any ongoing revelation of personal sin. Believing we are already "holy," we cease to be able to acknowledge areas in our life that fall short of the standard we claim to live by.

Since it is not the purpose of this project to offer an exhaustive examination of holiness doctrines, let me give my working definitions of the terms "sanctification" and "holiness." Sanctification is the concept of being set apart from the world. In the context of scripture and the scope of this work sanctification begins with the work of the Holy Spirit within the lives of



persons and institutions. There is also an element of human response to this Holy Spirit work. Although the power and presence are strictly from God to humanity, persons and institutions are free to accept and cooperate with, or reject and resist the Holy Spirit. This personal and institutional free will means that we will also bear the responsibility for injustices that go unredeemed and for ongoing acts of racism that we refuse to confess and deal with.

Bearing our responsibility for racism and the wounds that exist does not mean that we place blame. This is often a misunderstanding between people who are trying to heal relational wounds. It may mean we accept the blame that lies on our own shoulders, but I believe it is never productive to place blame on others, even if they are at fault. What we must do is accept and confess our personal, corporate, and historical failures to live as one people. Then we must each determine what we can do to heal the wounds, forgive the sin, and make right the relationship. Curtiss DeYoung calls this "no-fault reconciliation" and says:

No-fault reconciliation is at the core of our faith as Christians. The cross reminds us that we must forgive and request forgiveness. It also reminds us that we must restore trust, reestablish truth, and, with justice, repair the social and economic rupture in society.<sup>96</sup>

For the task of reconciliation, only this type of approach will truly model the message of the cross.

The message of holiness is more than just a style or expression of Christian thought and belief. It is a biblical command and call for Christians. Paul wrote to the Ephesians church and taught them about a new and different life as Christians. In Ephesians 4:22-24 we read:

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> DeYoung, 111.

<sup>97</sup> Ephesians 4:22-24 (NRSV).

The simplest contrast for us to look at in this scripture is the difference between a life guided by lust and desire and a life lived "according to the likeness of God." In working toward reconciliation we must be changed people who cease to behave, think, and feel like our old selves. "A better world cannot be built by bad men, and a friendly world cannot be formed by people who hate. A Christian world can only be built with Christ like character."<sup>98</sup> Paul wanted the Ephesians to understand that they were to be fundamentally different in character, intention, and action. If the old self was hateful, then the new self will love. Where there was pride, there will now be humility. If our previous character was marked by self-serving then our new character will be signified by self-sacrifice. The measure will be the "likeness of God."

In writing of the expected return of Christ, Peter was also concerned that Christians live holy lives in contrast to the world around them. As he speaks of Christ return he says, "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives."<sup>99</sup> Peter is not just calling on people to make final preparations because the end was near. Instead, he seems to want the Ephesian church to live godly and holy lives because judgement is a reality and only eternal things will endure. I do not believe Peter is referring to mere outward actions and professions of faith. He does not ask them, "how shall you act?" Peter asks, "What kind of people should you be?" Holiness and godly character are the fundamental essence of our being as Christians. The actions, words, and intentions are second order effects of this essential character.

The pervasive nature of racism within society and the church can be viewed as something that frustrates and inhibits real community. The author of Hebrews was aware of how sin can keep persons in bondage and prevent them from obtaining their goal. Using the imagery of the

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<sup>98</sup> Beals, 153.

<sup>99</sup> 2 Peter 3:11 (NRSV).

Greek Olympiad, the author exhorts Christians to, "throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."<sup>100</sup> In order for us to pursue reconciled relationships between Blacks and Whites in the Church of God, we must divest ourselves of the sins and character traits that sustain and encourage racism. This means changing behavior patterns in personal relationships as well as institutional structures and policies that hinder cooperation and empowerment. In a fundamental sense, it also means a new understanding on the part of Blacks about the unrealized and unhealed wounds in Whites because of their domination and oppression. "True reconciliation also implies that the one who feels victimized needs to understand the severe pain found deep inside the oppressor that produces the desire to dominate."<sup>101</sup> As we seek forgiveness of both past and current sins against Blacks, white people will come face to face with deep-seated wounds that are the result of our sin and foundational instabilities in our character. These feed our desire for racially based domination. If, on the other hand, either party chooses to ignore the deeper issues and focus only on superficial matters then reconciliation will fail due to the entangling threads of those unresolved issues.

The disruption of community often results from petty and trivial matters growing out of jealousy, envy, selfishness, stubbornness, insensitivity, misinformation, misunderstanding, suspicion, fear, ingratitude, ineptness, impoliteness, unforgiveness, and just plain childishness.<sup>102</sup>

In my personal experience, this has been one of the fundamental failures at reconciliation within the Church of God. Blacks have accepted apologies from white brothers and sisters, but have not made any allowance for the wounds among Whites as a result and fundamental cause of their racism. Whites have settled for superficial confessions and refused to believe that anything

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<sup>100</sup> Hebrews 12:1b (NRSV).

<sup>101</sup> DeYoung, 96.

<sup>102</sup> Foggs, 56.

deeper in their hearts and minds must be dealt with. I believe this is related to our legalistic view of righteousness and sanctification. Remove the issues of behavior and then everything is supposed to be all right. The problem is that unless fundamental character is transformed, those same sins will manifest again, possibly in less overt ways, but just as deadly to real community.

Holiness is central to reconciliation because it is the inward and outward revelation of the presence and power of God. "Racism per se denies the presence of God and produces misery, hate, and alienation in the body of Christ."<sup>103</sup> These are not characteristics of the reign of God as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Since Jesus' life, message, and work are to be our example then any behavior, attitude, thought, or belief that is in opposition to his message, mission, and character must be seen as un-holy. As we surrender the racism within our personalities, structures, and institutions, we will become "a company on mission to the world and a fellowship being developed into the image of Christ."<sup>104</sup>

The development of holiness in Christians is not an internally powered dynamic. Quite the contrary, the New Testament has some explicit teachings about our power source for Christian living being the Holy Spirit poured out in human lives. In Luke 24:49 Jesus told the disciples to "stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."<sup>105</sup> Luke continues the discussion of power as an external phenomenon from God in Acts 1:8. In this passage, he records Jesus promising the disciples: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."<sup>106</sup> Power for reconciled living is the effect of receiving God in the person of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>103</sup> Oglesby, 41.

<sup>104</sup> Stafford, 475.

<sup>105</sup> Luke 24:49 (NRSV).

<sup>106</sup> Acts 1:8 (NRSV).

This kind of power is fundamentally different from the power exercised by Whites to oppress and dehumanize Blacks. The two forms of power can be contrasted by imagining oppressive power as pushing downward on persons and crushing them beneath its weight. Holy Spirit power wells up under a person and lifts them out of the pain, oppression, and suffering caused by oppressive power. Merely human power is always a temptation to abuse and use others. "What makes the temptation of power so seemingly irresistible? Maybe it is that power offers an easy substitute for the hard task of love."<sup>107</sup> True Holy Spirit power will always be characterized by love. Both meaningful repentance and heartfelt forgiveness will characterize this love. It will not settle for what DeYoung calls "cheap reconciliation."<sup>108</sup> DeYoung sees reconciliation and the loving power behind it as a difficult task, but not as one to be avoided. He describes the difference like this:

Cheap reconciliation is unity without responsibility, forgiveness without repentance, equal treatment without restitution, harmony without liberation, conflict resolution without relational healing, peace without God.<sup>109</sup>

Are we willing to face the hard theological task of reconciliation? Are we even willing to admit there is a fundamental problem with race relations in our homes, churches, and societies? We stand at a turning point in the history of our nation and church. A moment when we reveal the presence of God through a radically transformed fellowship of Blacks and Whites, living in cooperative and loving engagement through ministry to the real world of sin, sorrow, and inhumanity. As E. Hammond Oglesby says, "the Macedonian call for justice today, on the part of people of color, may require more than what the dominant power structure in America is willing to give, and more than what the hurting ones can any longer take."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Nouwen, 59.

<sup>108</sup> DeYoung, xviii.

<sup>109</sup> DeYoung, xviii.

<sup>110</sup> Oglesby, 55.

Biblical holiness is at the heart of healing our racist culture in the United States. The only place biblical holiness can begin is in the body of the redeemed through their surrender to the will and commands of God for justice, liberation, and love. In fact, no other efforts at reconciling divided people have a chance at permanent success. "All efforts at union but that of God's holiness is as pounding cold, crooked pieces of iron against each other. The more blows the more crooks and differences."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Daniel Sydney Warner, "The Experience of Oneness," in A Time to Remember Teachings, ed. Barry Callen (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1978) 16.

## Chapter Four Recommendations for Unity

In the preceding chapters, I have discussed the history, nature, and theological reflections on the problem of racism. Racism pervades our society, as a secular institution, and the church, as a supposedly sacred one. I believe that this discussion has been exhaustive enough to convince the reader that the problem exists and that it is neither God's will nor God's desire for the church of Jesus Christ. For some of us at least, this has been an introduction to an alternate reality that makes us both uncomfortable and eager to resolve the difficulty. We now have two choices, "either retreat into dysfunctional denial that it exists, or confront it squarely."<sup>1</sup> Even to face the problem squarely we will be presented with the choice of either challenging growth or retrenchment into fear and the subsequent hatred. If we choose to accept the challenge of growth and change we need to be willing to pay the cost of self-sacrifice and that of being misunderstood and rejected. However, to retrench into fear and hatred will cost us our very lives. "Once you learn to live with hatred, some part of you dies."<sup>2</sup> My choice is to confront racism in my own personal life, within the church and community where I live, and within the faith tradition of which I am a part, The Church of God Reformation Movement.

It is not enough, however, to simply talk about the problem and discuss it from a biblical and theological perspective. To truly confront the reality of our racism we must offer some tangible and workable alternatives to the status quo. For white Christians the starting point must be acknowledging the existence of racism within our institutional structures, our personal thoughts and feelings, and within the larger secular society that surrounds us. No amount of denial will cover the problem. The result of denial is an exacerbation of the oppression and

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Landfair, "A Dysfunctional Heritage," in *America*, Nov. 20, 1999, 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

isolation. We must realize, "that the first step towards our racial reconciliation is acknowledging the different realities in which we live."<sup>3</sup>

Although it would probably be a significant step to simply admit the current injustices, I think we must also face our history as a society and as the body of Christ. All too often Christians want to believe that simply admitting the problem or acknowledging our sin is enough. We want to go on with life as usual making no substantive changes in our outlook, actions, or relationships. This is not a new situation in the history of our collective racism. Most of the Christian renewal movements in our history as a nation have failed to adequately address the issue of White dominance over Blacks. Even during the great revivals of the late 1700's there was little attempt to deal with issues of real, as opposed to merely spiritual, liberation.

The so-called Great Awakening of the mid and late 18th century inspired a belief in spiritual equality and increased the number of Negro slaves in Christian fellowship. Yet, revivalism did not prompt pleas for their emancipation as a matter of course.<sup>4</sup>

As we approach the task of reconciliation, we must not forget the history of our racist decisions, attitudes, and praxis. We must acknowledge that we have been and continue to be racist in our thinking, beliefs and structures.

Acknowledging the problem is especially important within the church. "[U]ltimately racism in any form is an ideology, which is why it is so difficult to counter with facts."<sup>5</sup> When fighting an ideology it is necessary to be purged and cleansed of its influence within our own structures and organizational life. Within the Church of God we have experienced racism, not only at the level of individuals, but also at the local church level where we fail to fellowship together and remain in unity in our structure and membership. We have also been racist at the regional or state level where we have operated, and in many cases continue to operate, with

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<sup>3</sup> Jay Hanson, SM602 Case Study (Orlando, FL: Asbury Seminary, 2002) 1.

<sup>4</sup> Ivan A. Beals, Our Racist Legacy (Notre Dame, IN: Cross Cultural Publications, 1997) 11.



divided leadership, separate ordination committees, and separate conventions for our adults, our youth, and our leaders.

For most, if not all, of our history as a nation the bulk of the organized church has not only undergirded and supported the oppression of Blacks, we have also provided a theological rationale for such oppression. This is neither God's design for his people, nor a true model of our heritage.

Nineteen hundred years ago, the church's lessons were strong enough to bring the weight of Roman society and politics tumbling down upon it and to shatter the accumulated traditions of an ancient faith. Into a world where class, power and ancestry divided rich from poor, free from slave, men from women, came a society that welcomed all who bore the name of Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

This is our true heritage and the one that should draw us into meaningful relationship across the cultural, ethnic, and gender barriers we have allowed to divide us. It is this model that will be the guiding vision for the recommendations I am making. It is a model that shapes individuals, congregations, and the larger movemental and denominational structures of the church.

Having acknowledged that we have a problem with racism in our nation and within the church, how do we go about removing the problem and dealing with its latent effects? E. Hammond Oglesby states, "I think, therefore, that racism in the United States has to do, fundamentally, with the 'habits of the heart.'"<sup>7</sup> Since this a matter of our essential being, rather than just the actions we perform, then, "What is needed, I think, is the sort of courage that leads to confession and repentance."<sup>8</sup> In the movement toward reconciled relationships and structures, there will be a great deal of corporate and congregational confession as well as acts of repentance and restitution, but the true change will begin within the lives of individuals. Kathryn Choy-

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<sup>5</sup> William Pannell, The Coming Race Wars (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993) 45.

<sup>6</sup> Manuel Ortiz, One New People (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996) 9.

<sup>7</sup> E. Hammond Oglesby, O Lord, Move This Mountain (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998) 38.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

Wong asks, "How can we unlearn racism in its various forms?"<sup>9</sup> She then begins to answer that question by stating, "We must start with ourselves. We must examine our own lives."<sup>10</sup> This will be more than just a tearful admission of guilt. True confession will lead to repentance, which means we must work to restore the justice we have denied. "The process of reconciliation begins when an individual accepts God's invitation to make things right."<sup>11</sup> This is the most concrete difference between a simple acknowledgement of guilt and true confession of sin. Too many White Christians want to say "I'm sorry" and leave it at that, while injustice remains and persons continue to be oppressed. In order to avoid that trap we must choose to respond with justice to the situations and actions we confess.

One of the first active steps we can take in restoring justice is to engage in dialogue with each other and then stay there. "In fighting the parochialism of white racism, anti-racist whites actively seek out interaction with people in other racial groups."<sup>12</sup> This dialogical engagement must be an ongoing activity because of our tendency to pull away from what is uncomfortable and threatening. At the same time, we must maintain an atmosphere of freedom and release to others. No one must feel coerced into relationship, but both parties, or all parties, must choose freely to keep the lines of communication open. It is always tempting to pull out when we have the freedom to do so, but our willingness to keep fully engaged with others and our choice to keep listening will go far toward mending the breaches in our relationship.

This is especially true for those who call themselves 'Christian.' If we are going to be in relationship, we must be willing to talk about what it means to be Black and what it means to be White. In the very process of talking, listening, and sharing together, we will come to appreciate

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<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Choy-Wong, Building Bridges (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998) 52.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Reconciliation (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997) 46.

<sup>12</sup> Joe R. Feagin and Herna'n Vera, White Racism (New York: Routledge, 1995) 180.

each other in new ways. "We chip away at the polarization when we listen to the stories of those we consider different."<sup>13</sup> Such learning becomes the catalyst for greater understanding, increased awareness, and improved communication. Having learned each other's stories, "[t]hen we need to learn to retell those stories."<sup>14</sup> Learning and retelling requires that we do more than just memorize. We must learn to listen with compassion to the pain of those who have been victims of injustice and to the guilt of those who have perpetrated that injustice. Each of us must learn to suffer with the ones who are suffering.

This dialogue can begin, not with the ideal, but right where we already are. What is best about the relationships we now have? How do we affirm what we are already doing right? How do we discover what we are doing right? As critical as I have been so far of my own faith movement, The Church of God, it is not because I believe or perceive us as being totally out of touch with the reality of our situation. In preparing for this project, I sent out questionnaires to twenty-five Black leaders in the Church of God and twenty-five White leaders. Although only a few were returned (2 by Whites and 3 by Blacks), there is significant commonality in their response to the question, "What activities are Blacks and Whites doing within the Church of God in terms of racial reconciliation?" Of those responding, all mentioned the following four items as positive signs in our movement:

- 1.) Acknowledgement and confession of the wrong(s).
- 2.) That dialogue is happening at the local, state, and national levels of the church.
- 3.) Some states with formerly separate governing bodies have achieved re-unification or unification of those bodies.
- 4.) The planting of ethnic and multi-ethnic church congregations.

Although several other comments were made, these were common to all the respondents. The next move will be to affirm and then build on these successes. In order to pursue this, "We need

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<sup>13</sup> DeYoung, 97.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

to accept the challenge of mission, rather than seeking to withdraw or escape."<sup>15</sup> The mission is not just the evangelization of the world around us, but rather the primary task of living in unity and solidarity. Building on what we have, and doing so together, we can develop new strategies for unity, multi-ethnic outreach and united worship that both reflects our diversity and celebrates our unity in Christ Jesus.

One of the most difficult tasks for reconciling relationships within the Church of God is working with those who choose not to cooperate or who actively resist reconciliation. "Part of living in a reconciled community is the ability to live in the tension."<sup>16</sup> In a congregational polity, like that of the Church of God, there will be individuals and groups who will remain unwilling to accept and deal with the tension of living reconciled lives. Without forcing compliance or excommunicating members, how do we work with those who choose to deny the problem or seek to resist reconciled living? For most leaders and pastors, our only recourse will be to keep reconciling persons regardless of those who resist. Jesus did not wait until we wanted him to come. He did not require that we live obediently before he could forgive and redeem us. "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us."<sup>17</sup>

For those who choose to live in reconciled community we must realize that, "Living in the tension means agreeing to disagree and respecting each other as people of faith while doing the best we can to comprehend the complex issues."<sup>18</sup> Those complex issues will include, but are not limited to, matters of structure and polity, different methods of teaching and discipleship, and general attitudes and praxis about outreach, missions, and church planting. In addition, there will be countless issues of style, taste, and personal preferences that must be addressed in

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<sup>15</sup> Ortiz, 14.

<sup>16</sup> DeYoung, 128.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 5:8 (NRSV).

<sup>18</sup> DeYoung, 128.

ongoing dialogue. For too long the Church of God has wanted to appear as if Blacks and Whites are in concert with each other, yet the differences still create formidable barriers that keep us separate. Within my own regional setting, the North East Florida Churches of God, we meet every year for a series of services we call "Indoor Campmeeting." In spite of intentional efforts to balance our program, music, speakers, and even locations, there continues to be disagreement about our program, music, speakers, and locations. The very issues we spend the most time on have, in many cases, become the points on which we disagree. Both Blacks and Whites must learn to give up some 'turf' in order to see real reconciliation happen. This is especially true of Whites who have held a monopoly on resources and leadership. "To face racism honestly the church must admit its fear of excessive social contact with blacks and other ethnics."<sup>19</sup> In responding to the dominance of Whites, Blacks have also created structures and leadership of their own. These persons and powers will have to become part of the new and reconciled structure of the Church of God. In matters of structure and polity, "[t]he Black people in the Church of God need a united voice to produce significant reappraisal of the hiatus between where the people of God are and where God wants them to be in this country."<sup>20</sup> For instance, the Florida General Assembly of the Church of God has united our governing bodies and Credentials Committees (the committees who approve and administer ordination). Yet, our state office is almost exclusively white. Elected and volunteer positions are intentionally mixed racially, but paid and staff positions are, at the time of this writing, White. How will we change this structure? Will true reconciliation demand that we hire someone less qualified in order to model racial mixing, or do we just put the best person in the job? This highlights just one of the problems of structure and polity we must deal with.

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<sup>19</sup> Beals, 165.

Most of our Black pastors disciple leaders, particularly pastoral leaders, through direct and intensive day to day presence. Dr Harry Cleveland, as Sr. Pastor of the Beverly Hills Church of God in Jacksonville, spent several years developing Brother Johnny Legous, the current pastor. Rather than expecting him to attend college and or seminary, Dr. Cleveland taught him by example and personal experience. When Dr. Cleveland retired, Johnny (now Reverend) stepped almost seamlessly into the position of Sr. Pastor. Not only did he personally disciple Rev. Legous, he also raised him up as a leader from within the congregation. White pastors, on the other hand are encouraged, if not expected, to attend one of our church colleges and/or seminary. Not only is it unlikely that they will ever pastor a church in which they were raised, in many cases such pastoring is believed to be impossible. Which model of leadership development will prevail in our reconciled community? Are there strengths in each model that could be combined in a more effective synthesis?

Matters of discipleship and instruction, as well as our structures and polity, will affect reconciliation in this generation and those that follow.

We in the church (and in society) need to encourage our most creative thinkers to seek remedies for the various forms of injustice and division that exist. We need to support innovative attempts to develop ways for diverse peoples to live together as members of the household of God and as citizens of planet earth.<sup>21</sup>

Feagin and Vera believe a program of cultivating and empowering our best and most creative thinkers and workers, " . . . could get rid of racism in one generation."<sup>22</sup> Such an ideal may be wishful thinking, but how we do discipleship and the material we include in our development of leaders is vitally important. One pastor in our regional fellowship thinks we talk too much about reconciliation and that we should get on with the business of saving souls. The weakness in this

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<sup>20</sup> Sawak Sarju, Black and White in the Church of God (Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1973) 17.

<sup>21</sup> DeYoung, 105.

belief is that we have no credibility in the world unless our own house is in order. It also fails to consider that the task and mission of the church is reconciliation.

This brings us to considerations of attitude and praxis. What should we be thinking and how will we put it into action? DeYoung says, "[w]e must come to the task of relational peacemaking with certain attitudes and ways of thinking. We need a reconciliation mindset."<sup>23</sup> If we are to maintain our persistence in the face of criticism and resistance, we must have such a mindset to keep us on track with our mission. Out of this mindset will flow our activity, organization, and growth. "When we truly take responsibility for disunity, we engage in efforts to remove the barriers that exist and restore the original unity intended for the human family."<sup>24</sup>

If we are to begin and remain in dialogue about the issues of reconciliation one of our first tasks will be to rewrite our history as a church. I do not mean that we should gloss it or revise out politically incorrect concerns. Quite the opposite, we need to rewrite our history to include much that has been ignored and hidden. Although D. S. Warner may have been the first of our pioneering leaders to proclaim the call of God to scriptural Christianity and holiness, he was not the only one. The Church of God grew as much by the combination of other groups believing the same theology as by evangelism and outreach. The story of the Wimbish's and the development of the West Middlesex campground are a case in point. The Wimbish's and others came to believe the same doctrine and theology as Warner, yet were not influenced by his work or even aware of it. In seven years of education at a Church of God college and after nearly twenty years as a Church of God pastor, I did not know the Wimbish's story until researching for this paper. "One of the first things that must be repaired if trust is to be restored is truth."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Feagin and Vera, page 184.

<sup>23</sup> DeYoung, page 62.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 102

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 103.

I grew up thinking and being told that West Middlesex was started by Blacks because they did not like the way we (Whites) worshipped. No one ever spoke of the confrontation in Anderson during the 1917 Campmeeting. When I asked about our divided fellowship and divided state organizations, I was told it was because the Blacks wanted it that way. Such untruths and misunderstandings must be dealt with through historical accuracy, even when it means we must admit we were wrong. Our holiness beliefs cause us to shy away from any admission that we failed or are guilty of wrongdoing. However, this way of thinking will not repair our division. "Often isolation is based on a simple lack of information about the lives of others, and this ignorance, if left unaddressed, can reinforce stereotypes and insensitivity."<sup>26</sup>

A new history of the Church of God Reformation Movement will include all the various streams of renewal that fed our "River of Peace."<sup>27</sup> Such a history will include our joys and pains, the paths of both Blacks and Whites, and our successes and failures. When the fullness of our heritage is known we will have a broader picture of how God worked and is continuing to work in the lives of men and women to see his kingdom realized in the hearts of humanity. Our more limited understandings have blinded us to the vast movement of God throughout our one hundred and twenty-year history. "I believe that we limit the greatness of our Lord when we know God only as a local God who speaks our language and understands our conditions alone."<sup>28</sup>

The following recommendations are aimed specifically at Church of God structures, policies, activities, and relationships. Although most will be universal in dealing with matters of reconciliation, some may only apply to the Church of God. Because I admire the strengths and the message of the Church of God, I truly believe, "[t]he church should take the leadership in

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>27</sup> D. S. Warner, "River of Peace," in Worship The Lord, ed. Arlo Newell and Randy Vader (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1989) 485.

<sup>28</sup> Ortiz, 13.



these matters of justice and reconciliation."<sup>29</sup> Reconciliation must be more than just the latest fad in Christendom. If all we do is talk about it then we have done little more than create guilt reducing rhetoric, with no substantive changes in persons, attitudes, or organizations. "A first step in transforming the patterns of relationships as they presently exist in society is to give birth to a community of the reconciled."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, we must do more than talk. We must make individual, congregational, and organizational changes in order to bring this reconciled community into existence. Beginning with our national level structures and policies and moving through state, local, and individual levels, I will make recommendations on how we might create such a community.

One of the first and most difficult, but I believe most necessary, changes will be to dissolve both the General Assembly of the Church of God (overall governing body) and the National Association of the Church of God. This is costly, and to some may appear drastic, but, "Just as the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile was broken down only after Jesus had suffered on the cross, our attempts at unity may require a similar sacrifice. Reconciliation is costly."<sup>31</sup> This move is well worth the cost because it will eliminate most chances for either Blacks or Whites to hide from the process of reconciliation. "Any partial, *status quo* approach weakens the gospel's reconciling effect."<sup>32</sup> This means both groups will have to die to some dreams and goals they have held in isolation from each other.

Such a unifying gesture must be no-fault. If either party sees the other as demanding such a sacrifice it will become an obstacle to what it was meant to achieve, reconciliation.

"Costly reconciliation calls us to not only forgive but to repair the wrongs committed, whether or

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>30</sup> DeYoung, 127.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 56

<sup>32</sup> Beals, ix.

not we were the offending party."<sup>33</sup> The goal in this endeavor is to eliminate the bad taste of memories linked to our past organizational relationship. It is not a matter of one organization being wrong and the other right. The problem is that too much of separation has been lived out in the context of two organizations representing two different people groups within the larger Church of God movement. Although many in the General Assembly see that body as being the single entity representing all, the fact is it does not.

This drastic and costly change will force us to restructure our corporate entities for unity and solidarity. If we fail to change, it we will only perpetuate our injustice and lack of reconciliation. Trying to force one group to move into the other group's structure, polity, and atmosphere will only create resentment and distrust. In addition, by allowing the possibility of unjust sections within either organization we run the risk of undermining the process of building a reconciled community. Any structure, person, or system that perpetuates injustice, ". . . will attempt to undermine people who take action on a vision for reconciliation and social justice."<sup>34</sup> Our restructuring, on the other hand, will create new opportunities for mutuality, respect and cooperation in officers, support staff and even field personnel.

This unified organizational entity will also create a realignment of our resources. "It seems impossible logistically, but it is empowering spiritually."<sup>35</sup> Our financial, educational, support, and missional resources will become more cooperative, integrated, and effective. Where our institutions have been focused on survival and individual credibility, they can now become mutually supportive elements in a larger evangelistic and transformative movement. Such realignment will shift our focus from social standing and individual identity to mutuality

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<sup>33</sup> DeYoung, 103.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 139

<sup>35</sup> Ortiz, 63.

and communal identity. "The Church as a whole must find common ground to build bridges across the cultural and skin color gap."<sup>36</sup> By setting the stage at the national level for a unified community structure, we lay the groundwork and example for every state, local, and individual level of reconciled living.

A second recommendation at the national level is to find, support, and implement working models of multiethnic ministry. In his systematic presentation of Church of God theology, Dr. Gilbert Stafford asks, "Do we have structures that facilitate the intentional and vigorous pursuit of interconnections with those Christian traditions with which we feel great comfortability as well as with those which cause us great discomfort."<sup>37</sup> Before the events at Anderson Campmeeting in 1917, several of our Northern, urban congregations were multiethnic, or at least biracial. These churches were effective and growing. The surrender to worldly social realities led to more homogenous assemblies that ceased to witness the oneness of all believers that both Whites and Blacks continued to preach.

With a congregational polity, such centralized focus on multiethnic models may be an exercise in futility. The question that must be asked by national level leadership is whether they are going to lead or just do what is expedient? For our national leadership, as well as pastors and workers at the local level, an attitude of reconciliation must be developed and maintained. Such leadership is essential because:

Leadership determines the future of the multiethnic church. This means that the experiences, training and spiritual maturity of those key individuals will decide the outcome and effectiveness of a multi ethnic ministry that is biblically founded and is sociologically aware of the community in which it has decided to serve.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Beals, 151.

<sup>37</sup> Gilbert Stafford, Theology for Disciples (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1996) 279.

<sup>38</sup> Ortiz, 107.

Since our national officials have little influence in the daily operations of our congregations, the support and changes they make must be through other avenues than simply dictated policy. By teaching, supporting financially, and by developing multiethnic leaders our national level ministries can begin creating a new paradigm for Church of God structures and mission.

Our national offices already provide a great deal of vision and direction for our educational institutions and the training and equipping of our pastors. Therefore, one of their most profound influences may be in providing and requiring cross-cultural experience for ministerial ordination. After interviewing Craig McMullen, the pastor of a multiethnic church, Manuel Ortiz states, "He (McMullen) believes that a pastor who has no crosscultural experience is a pastor who will probably develop a homogenous church in a pluralistic community."<sup>39</sup> The best answer to this is to include educational opportunities for crosscultural ministry in our college and seminary curricula, and make such experience a recommended, if not required, prerequisite for ordination. Such programs already exist in several of our college settings. Their only weakness is that they are electives, not core requirements.

One such program, available at Anderson University, is called Tri-S (Study, Serve, Share). This program sends students out to crosscultural settings within the United States and in many foreign countries. These experiences include work camp opportunities, evangelistic work in crosscultural environments, and teaching experiences. Credit is available and the cost is reasonable for most students.

Another worthwhile program, that was originally affiliated with Warner Southern College, but now is an independent organization, is HEART in Lake Wales, Florida. HEART is an acronym for Hunger Elimination And Resources Training. The campus is set up as a typical

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 59

third world village. During a sixteen week semester students live on-site. They are required to grow, preserve, and prepare their own food. The curricula include academics related to cultural anthropology and missions, as well as small animal husbandry, sanitation, technology, and language studies. Teachers and instructors come from careers in missions, medicine and academia, but all have crosscultural experience.

Why not take these programs and others like them and let them be standard parts of our pastoral and theological training? Other options could include semesters spent in crosscultural internships, and shared study at universities and colleges that are predominately non-white. Another option would be mentoring of ordinands by multiethnic teams who could help shape the development of our pastors and church leaders. This could be extended to our continuing education program by counting short-term mission trips and crosscultural work as fulfillment of our continuing education requirements. Not to put too strong a point on this, but those unwilling to be part of such experiences should not be considered for ordination and those already ordained who resist should not be recommended to congregations for placement as pastors and staff.

A third and final recommendation I would make for national level reconciliation is to establish a new national convention that is truly multiethnic. The location could be alternated between Anderson and West Middlesex or located at a different site every year. I can already hear the supporters of Anderson International Convention moaning their despair. Most Whites in the Church of God believe the Anderson Convention truly represents the entire Church of God movement. Although many Blacks attend Anderson Convention (or Campmeeting, as it is usually referred to), most of the worship services, programs, and events are planned by and led by Whites. The flavor of our worship is that of White, middle class churches. Similarly, West Middlesex has always been open to Whites but very few actually attend. Most Whites view

West Middlesex as a Black Campmeeting. The recommendation of a neutral site or alternating site is the only answer that will prevent either group from defending their turf at the cost of alienating the others.

True unity will look different from the way we are living now. There is little desire for true reconciliation and cooperation between Blacks and Whites. In bending to the social realities of racism and segregation, the Church of God has deformed its vision of God. We have become isolationists along racial and ethnic lines. Our latent racism is not only the cause of this deformation; it is also the worst symptom of the disease. We isolate ourselves, then rationalize the isolation. With a narrower view of God's kingdom, we grow ever narrower in our understanding of God and more prone to isolate ourselves from those with a broader or different view. However, God intends something else. As Curtiss DeYoung contends:

A healthy relationship with God produces the desire to be at peace with our sisters and brothers in the human family. When we have been truly reconciled with God, we hunger for a restoration to a primitive unity that was spoken into existence at the beginning of human history.<sup>40</sup>

Are we willing to draw so close to God that we will surrender ourselves to the blessed unity God designed? Isn't reconciliation worth the cost of letting go of our seemingly sacred places so that no one is isolated and no one has an excuse to not be a part of what God is doing?

I could offer many specifics that would describe how this more unified convention would appear. Let me offer just one: shared meals. For many of us, this may seem simple and not even spiritual. I beg those critics to look at the number of times a shared meal became the arena for Jesus to minister. Leaving aside consideration of the Last Supper, there is the breakfast at the Sea of Galilee;<sup>41</sup> the meal that was interrupted by the woman who washed Jesus feet;<sup>42</sup> and the

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<sup>40</sup> DeYoung, page 47.

<sup>41</sup> John 21.

<sup>42</sup> John 12:3.

descriptions Jesus gave of the Kingdom of God being a banquet.<sup>43</sup> I am not speaking of dining hall meals shared by thousands in a rush to get through. I mean small groups sharing intimate fellowship around picnic tables, restaurant tables, and kitchen tables. Slow time spent getting to know one another and listening to the stories of God's work in our various lives. "Food provides an excellent avenue for education and breaking down walls."<sup>44</sup> Such events characterized the early church as described in Acts 2:46. Not only do people relax more and find sharing easier while eating together, but also, "For some racial/ethnic/cultural groups food is a symbol of friendship."<sup>45</sup> The same feelings of oneness and togetherness that characterize family meals and celebrations can become the uniting force we build through collective preparation and consumption of food.

Shared meals may seem more of a recommendation for congregations and small groups, but I think it is an important component of corporate worship on a big scale. In Deuteronomy 14:22-27 the Lord commands the Israelites to bring together their first fruits of oil, wine, and grain, as well as the firstlings of their flocks and herds, then eat them together with their families and servants. He even commands them to provide for the priests and Levites. This is nothing less than a picture of corporate worship experienced through a shared feast or meal at a national gathering.

Moving to the state and regional level of our organization and structure, the recommendations will be related to the credentialing of pastors, the planting of churches, and ongoing support of multiethnic initiatives between congregations. Some of our state organizations have never had separate credentials committees for ordaining pastors. Of those

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew 22.

<sup>44</sup> Choy-Wong, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 9.

that do, several, including my own state of Florida, have already re-united those bodies. This should be the first step or part of the first step at the state level. In addition, any separate administrative and leadership organizations should be reconciled as well. For the same reasons as a new national organization, state leaders must set the example of what God desires of his people.

In terms of paid staff and elected leadership in each state, our officers and staff should reflect the racial diversity of our church community. Are these quotas? Yes, in the political sense it is. It is also empowerment, and if there is one common theme played out in the Church of God it is that Blacks are not admitted to positions of power in ways that reflect their contributions to the church. In my attendance at Asbury Seminary over the last three years I have had no less than three professors quote Church of God preachers in their presentations. All of the Church of God authors and speakers quoted are Black and none hold significant positions of influence and power within their own church movement.

Such change will be costly, because it will require persons now holding authority and power to voluntarily step down and make room for others. It will mean the realignment of resources, just as the national level changes require realignment. In essence, all of the changes amount to resource reallocation. We will be shifting our power base, our financial resources, and our missional focus.

One of the most distinct characteristics of racism within the United States is the material inequality between Whites and Blacks. "If racism is to be eradicated, material inequality in the United States must be fundamentally changed."<sup>46</sup> Likewise, our movement is characterized by major inequalities in material and leadership resources. The only way out of the cycle of racism

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<sup>46</sup> Feagin and Vera, 186.



is a radical reallocation of those resources. Such reallocation will include congregational financial support, funding and leadership for church-planting, and the resources to train pastors both for and in ministry. Since most of our leadership development and resource allocation takes place at the state level, it is necessary that most of our reallocation of resources take place at this level.

The second major area for change at the state and regional level is to begin planting and establishing truly multiethnic churches. This means more than just the token presence of various ethnic groups within the church membership. "Presence of the multiethnic community in the local church is a given if mission is applied, but presence without incorporation limits the process of biblical discipleship."<sup>47</sup> As churches are established with a multiethnic presence they must include multiethnic leadership models, multiethnic planning, and multiethnic participation at all levels of church activity and programming. These congregations can either be new church starts in multiethnic neighborhoods or altered structures and missions of existing churches in the middle of neighborhoods in transition. Although the second model is the most difficult of the two models to establish, due to traditions and habits of existing membership, it is probably the most necessary model for our congregations in rural areas that are now becoming suburban and, consequently, more diverse. In transitional neighborhoods, "[a] church can keep other people out of its church, it can relocate and move into a more homogeneous community, or it can reach out to new people groups in the community."<sup>48</sup> I like to abbreviate these three options by saying a church can resist, run, or reach. By starting where we are with what we have and deciding to reach the people that are around us, we can eliminate the high cost of establishing new

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<sup>47</sup> Ortiz, 90-91.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 75.

congregations. The cost will be paid in having to surrender traditions and power for the sake of outreach and mission.

The state offices and service personnel are invaluable in this process because they can provide the depth of leadership and resources needed to implement these new models of congregational life. Since most of our church planting is handled through state level programs, they become the guides for success in multiethnic ministries. By providing demographic studies of the area and by helping the local congregation build relationships across ethnic and cultural lines, the state organization can become the starting point for successful multiethnic ministries. In addition the state can teach clergy and laity about the opportunities that surround them and provide transitional leadership and support as the ministries are being established.

This multiculturalism within the church will not be a quick fix. Simple tolerance of each other is not enough. Neither is an idealistic retreat into the jargon and rhetoric of political correctness. "Repentance for racism or ethnocentrism requires intolerance for sin."<sup>49</sup> We must be willing to stand together against the ideology of segregation and racism that has permeated our structures and mission. "Opening the doors of a church or a theological seminary to embrace cultural diversity will not be ecclesial busing. It is a struggle to live out truth and justice and compassion as fellow members of the body of Christ."<sup>50</sup> State leaders can provide a firm example and disciplined experience for congregations and persons struggling to escape patterns and climates of racism and segregation.

This brings us to the third level of recommendations, the local congregation. Since the Church of God has a congregational polity, this is where the real work of reconciliation must occur. Even in the lives of individuals, their struggles with racism are lived out in the context of

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<sup>49</sup> Ortiz, 10

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 11

their congregational life. Reconciliation requires an empowerment of disenfranchised persons and groups. Curtiss DeYoung gives three approaches to such issues of empowerment that can be used in the local church. (1) "Those in power offer to repair the wrong they or their ancestors have caused."<sup>51</sup> Such efforts would be like Affirmative Action. Although helpful to some extent in redressing wrongs, such efforts rarely create a shift in the balance of power.

(2) "Development of partnerships."<sup>52</sup> This approach is when one or both congregations or groups initiate a dialogue and develop shared ministries, fellowship, and spiritual disciplines. My own congregation, the First Church of God in Middleburg, and Rev. Rene Evans' congregation, the Greater Jacksonville Church of God, have developed such a partnership. Rev. Rene and I swap pulpits on regular occasions. Our churches worship together, eat together, and are now planning some shared youth activities and mission trips. Of the three approaches, this second one is probably the appropriate choice. (3) "The powerless themselves repairing identified wrongs."<sup>53</sup> Although there are several successful examples of this approach, it is my opinion that this is counterproductive for true reconciliation. Although justice is done for the oppressed, the oppressor is isolated and the issues that created the injustice are not completely dealt with. This leaves systems and structures in place that continue to oppress.

Assuming then that ministry partnerships are the most viable approach, pastors and significant congregational leaders can become the catalysts for reconciliation. Pastors, in particular, must take the initiative in establishing meaningful and long-term relationships with other pastors of differing ethnicities. "Our witness loses credibility when we attempt to build

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<sup>51</sup> DeYoung, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 108-9

bridges from afar."<sup>54</sup> Pastors cannot be posturing figures full of good words but empty in terms of real crosscultural relationship.

Christian leaders cannot simply be persons who have well-informed opinions about the burning issues of our times. Their leadership must be rooted in the permanent intimate relationship with the incarnate Word, Jesus, and they need to find there the source for words, advice, and guidance.<sup>55</sup>

With our primary relationship found in Christ Jesus, our crosscultural relationships become the expression the love of God lived out in a hurting world. When pastors and leaders are grounded in the love of Christ, then reach out to one another in deep interdependence, the groundwork is laid for congregational reconciliation.

Our interdependence must also be communicated clearly. "It is important for this church to speak about people needing each other. The leaders need to understand that many in the African-American community may be very hesitant to say that they need white people."<sup>56</sup> As church leaders and pastors communicate their need for each other in tangible and specific ways, others in the church will learn that we do need each other and will find an environment that is open to the admission of mutual need. This can be between Church of God pastors, but should also include pastors of other denominations within our neighborhood and towns. Rev. Rene Evans and I have found that our congregations are willing to do whatever they have seen us model. If we share a meal together, they are willing to do so. If we pray, worship, talk, and travel together, they find the motivation to do the same. By being intentional and sincere in our example, we have initiated some connections between youth leaders, musicians, and other members of our congregations.

The next step for local churches is to regularly schedule unity services with multiethnic

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 140

<sup>55</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen. In The Name of Jesus (New York: Crossroad Pub., 2000) 31.

<sup>56</sup> Ortiz, 104

elements. This may seem like an overly obvious suggestion, but the fact is that when we are not intentional about these services, they do not happen. "[H]ow do people who do not come in contact with each other reconcile?"<sup>57</sup> This is the perennial challenge for pastors and leaders. The only answer is for pastors and leaders in reconciled relationships to find creative ways to bring people together so that relationships can take root and grow. One month the White church can pack up and go to the Black church for worship. Perhaps in this setting, the Blacks will provide the leadership for the song service and the White pastor will preach. Next month the Blacks will come to the White church. The Black pastor will preach after a worship service led by the White church. At either site, there should be food, fellowship, and conversation time, either before or after the service. Brad Berglund speaks of this phenomenon of shared worship when he says, "So, creativity in worship isn't about making our church more special or asking some elite group of artists to do their thing! It is fundamentally about the act of birthing a new creation."<sup>58</sup> An even more appropriate model would be to develop a combined multiethnic worship team that is comprised of musicians and leaders from both congregations. Include various styles that appeal to both groups, and either group. Let the stage reflect the makeup and composition of the gathered assembly.

Within the context of these unity services, leaders and others need to talk about reconciliation. Personal confessions, when truly inspired and sincere, can move persons and groups into fellowship and communion that heal the accumulated hurts between persons and groups. Personal testimonies and stories can open the doorway to reflective conversation among members of the churches. Out of these conversations can grow our aims, purpose, and vision for reconciliation. Such stories can be celebrations of each other's strengths. "Unity is not about

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<sup>57</sup> DeYoung, 76.

<sup>58</sup> Brad Berglund, Reinventing Worship (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2001) 8.

making blacks and whites and Hispanics and Haitians the same. Our strength and our beauty is in our distinctiveness."<sup>59</sup> Worship events like these can also be times when we support each other in areas of weakness or failure. Such times may be necessary because of our move toward reconciled living. In the process of reconciling two or more groups of divided people there will always be criticism from persons in the surrounding culture that object and are resistant to what is happening. At such times, the mutual support of those committed to the task of reconciliation must be maintained. Other shared support may be financial resources, educational opportunities, and the shared presence in times of grief or celebration.

Having worshipped, fellowshiped and shared together, the next logical step for people in the process of reconciliation is to begin working together to confront racism and related issues in their community and world. Shared ministry is both a by-product of reconciliation and a seedbed for justice and truth. In speaking of the early days at West Middlesex campground, Brother Joseph Crosswhite says, "Saints were edified, souls were saved in most every meeting, the sick were healed and each one felt, 'this is my work, I am part of it and what can I do to make it better?'"<sup>60</sup> This same type of shared responsibility should permeate the work of Christians involved in kingdom work. As churches worship, pray, and learn together they will become more aware of their responsibility in society and to those individuals most in need. "Such a church questions the injustice in society and accepts its responsibility to change it."<sup>61</sup>

This shared life and shared work are two sides of one coin. Either one alone is meaningless and empty. "Reconciliation efforts need to create a space where all struggles

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<sup>59</sup> Daniel Harden, The History of Human Relations in the Church of God (Lake Wales, FL: Shining Light, 1999) 4

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Crosswhite, cited by Katie Davis, Zion's Hill at West Middlesex (Corpus Christi, TX: Christian Triumph Press, 1957) 55.

<sup>61</sup> Ana Maria Pineda, "Pastoral de Conjunto," in Mestizo Christianity, Editor, Arturo Banuelas, (New York: Orbis Books, 1995) 129.

against injustice fuse together in a fresh experiment of community. Hopes for lasting reconciliation will be dashed if efforts to create a just society and more unified community are isolated from each other."<sup>62</sup> Any such efforts that can come from political pressure, judicial rulings and educational efforts lack the moral backbone necessary for this combination of unified community and social mission. The church that follows the example of Jesus Christ and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit is the only organizational entity that can achieve this necessary balance. The only question is, will we do it?

All of these recommendations are useless without the resolve of individuals to be truly reconciled. Therefore, I conclude this chapter with some recommendations for individuals within the church. Curtiss DeYoung gives four guidelines for individuals to consider in a movement toward reconciliation. The first of these is, "Reconciliation begins with self-examination."<sup>63</sup> We have already discussed self-examination at the beginning of this chapter, but let me review some points of it in speaking to individuals. As persons we must consider and be aware of our own prejudices and biases. Out of this awareness, we need to grow some sensitivity to the issues of racism, hurt, injustice, and oppression. Our sensitivity should motivate us to seek to remove guilt and to begin to really love those we have oppressed through acts of commission or omission.

The second guideline is that "Reconciliation is holistic and consistent."<sup>64</sup> Issues of injustice and liberation are not just about Black/White relations. We must develop a consistent attitude and praxis on matters of gender, class, ethnicity, social standing, and any other form of overt or covert oppression. We must be committed to healing all social and personal

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<sup>62</sup> DeYoung, 65.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 62

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 64

relationships. Because of the widespread implications of our reconciliation mindset, we must also be aware of the third guideline: "Reconciliation requires persistent resolve."<sup>65</sup> Because the task is great, we must nurture an attitude of perseverance that will not wither in the long haul task of redeeming relationships.

The fourth guideline is simply; "Reconciliation is centered in relationships."<sup>66</sup> If we do not allow ourselves to know and be known reconciliation will not occur. Within the context of these relationships will be a constant exchange of seeking and offering of forgiveness. "Confession and forgiveness are the concrete forms in which we sinful people love one another."<sup>67</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. seems to have grasped this same dimension of the link between relationships and justice. He said, "For some strange reason I can never be what I want to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be."<sup>68</sup> By establishing relationships that empower and provide mutual support and edification, we can build a more just society within the church and then spread that justice into our communities, nation, and world.

In building relationships between Whites and Blacks, there is a need to change and adjust our mental outlook towards each other and our heart attitudes about each other. Such a change can be motivated and fueled by rituals and symbolic acts that represent the new state of relationship to which we aspire. One such ritual is practiced regularly in most Church of God congregations. This ritual is footwashing. Our faith tradition recognizes this ordinance as an imperative because Christ not only washed his disciple's feet; he also told them they should wash

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 66

<sup>66</sup> DeYoung, 69

<sup>67</sup> Nouwen, 41

<sup>68</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," in The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King Jr., ed. by James Melvin Washington (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986) 269



each other's feet.<sup>69</sup> Such a gesture in the context of racial reconciliation portrays our desire for submission to and care for each other's most humble needs. "Since reconciliation requires that our hearts and minds be repaired, we should never underestimate the power of symbolic gestures."<sup>70</sup> In this act we humble ourselves as individuals before another human being and choose willingly to touch, cleanse, and dry the lowest part of their body. Even in a day of socks, shoes, and regular baths, such an act requires personal humility at a level that is rarely experienced in relationships. Henri Nouwen says:

In our world of loneliness and despair, there is an enormous need for men and women who know the heart of God, a heart that forgives, that cares, that reaches out and wants to heal. In that heart there is no vindictiveness, no resentment, and not a tinge of hatred.<sup>71</sup>

In the experience of footwashing Whites and Blacks can symbolically share their mutual submission and care. In practicing this ordinance together, walls and barriers to reconciled community can be pushed down. By sharing such intimate care, persons can understand and develop a new desire for unity, relationship, and healing.

The development of our relationships as individuals will involve two forms of very active listening. The first is that we listen long and closely to the word of God found in scripture. The Church of God has a tradition of looking to and trusting in scripture for guidance and direction for our common life. Unfortunately, this has often degenerated into mere head knowledge or in some case to simple rules for living. Both misunderstandings of scripture fail to view scripture as a living and dynamic entity in the ethical and spiritual life of our community. What we need is an understanding of scripture that is rooted in a right heart. A heart right with God and right with our brothers and sisters on Christ. Such an understanding develops as we explore God's

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<sup>69</sup> John 13:5-15

<sup>70</sup> DeYoung, 110.

<sup>71</sup> Nouwen, 24.

word together and learn from each other a fuller understanding of what has been said and what it means for us today. This will be a relationship of mutual empathy. Two diverse individuals or several diverse persons in small groups engaged in a joint search for meaning and application of biblical truth. For the task of reconciliation, "Transformation ensues when we are mentored by persons who are different from us."<sup>72</sup> Such a theological and biblical dialogue will strengthen, as well as broaden our understanding of the implications and applications of biblical truth.

The second form of active listening is to pay close attention to each other. Our individual stories and faith journeys should all be heard. "We need to learn to listen as individuals from outside our realm of comprehension describe their life experiences."<sup>73</sup> Not only must victimizers hear and understand the pain of the victims, but also the victims need to know the stories of those who have actively or passively oppressed them. By really hearing the history and development of our respective outlooks and life experiences we lay the foundation for a new order of relationship and community. The natural result of such listening will be the twin responses of rejoicing and mourning. Romans 12:15 says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."<sup>74</sup> As we share our hurts, victories, and experiences with racism, we must also share the emotions and feelings that are the result of those experiences. What should also flow out of this experience of listening is the request for and offering of forgiveness. "Forgiveness repairs the relational damage that results from separation. It produces a change in the heart and an attitude adjustment for both the one offering it and the one receiving it."<sup>75</sup>

Small groups are one of the most effective ways to foster and build such mutually caring and mutually accountable relationships. Mixing at the congregational level is important, but it is

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<sup>72</sup> DeYoung, 78.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 77

<sup>74</sup> Romans 12:15 (NRSV).

<sup>75</sup> DeYoung, 100.

still too easy to hide from one another in a congregation size gathering. At the opposite pole, the thought of one individual approaching another individual in order to establish a relationship may be too threatening emotionally. Small groups can provide a balance of comfortability and vulnerability. To center our reconciliation in relationships is necessary, but they need to be nurtured in the context of shared mission and shared accountability. "Reconciled relationships can occur only when each individual believes and perceives that he or she is an equal partner and in need of the other."<sup>76</sup> Kathryn Choy-Wong has developed an excellent model for such crosscultural small groups. She describes this model in her book, Building Bridges.<sup>77</sup> Her model is of relatively small groups consisting of eight to ten individuals with as much diversity as possible. This is unique in a time when so many small group gurus advocate for homogeneity in small group settings. Her recommendation is also that this diversity should extend to the planning, structuring, and implementation of these groups, not just the participation. In her own words, "[B]ring together a diverse team to plan and design your experience. Do not design your experience, then invite persons from other racial/ethnic/cultural groups to participate."<sup>78</sup> Such cooperative planning and implementation can itself become a reconciling experience.

The locations and contexts for these groups should be as diverse as the makeup of the persons involved. This can be achieved through an alternation of settings, homes, and other locations. They can be part of the multiethnic congregational gatherings discussed previously in this chapter. In those settings, they can serve as a prelude to such large gatherings or as a follow-up. In building crosscultural ministry within our community the presence and activity of culturally diverse small groups serves as a less threatening environment for persons being invited into the community of faith.

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<sup>76</sup> DeYoung, 74

<sup>77</sup> Kathryn Choy-Wong, Building Bridges (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998) 5-38.

These groups can also be the formative environments for congregational change, community change, and larger change within the state and national structures of our movement. By making friendships in such groups and then inviting those new friends into our congregations, we can begin to shape our churches into the open and intimate fellowship that God intended. Because individuals are comfortable with us, they can be more relaxed around the larger assembly of the congregation. This can become the catalyst for multicultural outreach and ministry. This is the kind of community Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes in Life Together: "So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians."<sup>79</sup>

None of the recommendations I have suggested are easy. They will cost us financially, emotionally, and numerically. Furthermore, some will resist such changes to the point of leaving our fellowship. The changes that reconciliation requires will be a price they are not willing to pay and their choice will be to leave. No one can make them stay where they do not want to be and no one can force spiritual, mental, and relational change on any one else. However, these costs should not lead us to surrender our attempts to live in reconciled community. For both Blacks and Whites there will be many tears because, both groups will have to surrender their pride for the sake of the other. Locations and institutions, which we hold nearly sacred, will have to be sacrificed for the sake of reconciliation and unity. However, the question is not just one of cost. We must also consider the new community of faith that will be birthed by such efforts. Blacks and Whites praying, singing, sharing, crying, laughing, and working together to bring about the reign of God. To see such a community is to see Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream come to life. To live in such a reconciled community is to witness the truth of our

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<sup>78</sup> Choy-Wong, 8.

<sup>79</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, trans. John Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper, 1954) 18.

doctrine lived out in ways it never has been before. This community will be a healing, growing, nurturing, evangelizing, and discipling presence in a world gone mad with greed, possessiveness, and overachievement. Such a community is well worth the price we must pay.

## Concluding Remarks

In the preceding chapters, I have examined racism as a problem that continues to exist in society, in the church at large, and specifically within my own faith movement, the Church of God. Much of my motivation for this work came from my personal experiences with reconciliation and a deep love for the tradition in which I was raised. I write these words with a sense of shame, because I do not want to believe we have failed in our task of unity and holiness. Nothing I have read or studied in the course of this project leads me to believe our teachings and doctrines are invalid. In fact, this study only confirms what I have been taught since I was a child: God's desire and plan is for the persons who make up the body of Christ to live in oneness of heart, oneness of purpose, and oneness of community. I also write these words with a sense of joy at the awesome possibilities that await us as members of Christ's body. It is my hope and prayer that we as a movement will rise to the challenge of reconciliation and live the unity we have taught for so long.

Racism is costly. "On reflection, many whites can recognize some of the waste of black talent and resources brought about by discriminatory barriers, but few realize how great this loss is for African Americans."<sup>1</sup> The costs for Blacks include matters of economics, empowerment in society, and issues of individual and cultural self-esteem. In addition, there are personal injuries felt through the rejection and alienation imposed on Blacks by Whites. However, do we realize the cost that Whites have had to pay for their own racism? Do White persons in society, "realize the huge amount of energy and talent that whites themselves have dissipated in their construction of antiblack attitudes and ideologies and in their participation in racial discrimination?"<sup>2</sup> How much more will we pay before we realize we are bankrupting ourselves spiritually, emotionally,

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<sup>1</sup> Joe R. Feagin and Hernan Vera, White Racism (New York: Routledge, 1995) 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

relationally, and in all the other ways we pay for isolation and segregation? "The eradication of racism is vital not only to the interests of African Americans but also to the long-term interests of white Americans."<sup>3</sup>

Reconciliation is clearly God's plan and design for the Church. In Curtiss DeYoung's book, Reconciliation, the author compares reconciliation to Dietrich Bonhoeffer's discussion of "cheap grace" and "costly grace."<sup>4</sup> DeYoung states; "Costly reconciliation is the incarnation of God."<sup>5</sup> How we deal with racism and the level to which Whites and Blacks are truly reconciled is the measure of how well we reveal God to the world around us. To fail in the task of reconciliation is to block the world from a real vision of God. If we fail to live and act as the reconciled body of Christ, we can expect nothing more than a rejection of our evangelistic efforts by the world and society at large. "It (the church) must be a catalytic agent for righteous change in society."<sup>6</sup> In order to become such a catalyst we must first live out truth in our own faith community. We could pursue reconciliation for reasons other than theological ones. A growing world economy, the multicultural face of the United States, and the simple expedient of getting along is less expensive to us than not working together. However, none of these reasons should be enough for Christians. "This is the reason we are concerned about racism-not only for our own selfish reasons (healing of our own brokenness or hurts), but because it is God's will."<sup>7</sup>

Reconciliation is a process that must happen in the church. It is also a process that becomes increasingly real as we move toward the goal. "The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and

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<sup>3</sup> Feagin and Vera, 165.

<sup>4</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (1937; reprint, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995) 44, 45.

<sup>5</sup> Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Reconciliation (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1997) xviii.

<sup>6</sup> Ivan Beals, Our Racist Legacy (Notre Dame, IN: Crosscultural Publications, 1997) 158.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Choy-Wong, Building Bridges (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1998) 50.

purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us."<sup>8</sup>

This is a dynamic that can not be known through talking about the problem or by extensive writing on the subject. We will only experience this process as we initiate it and commit ourselves to the tangible action demanded by the call to be reconciled.

Whether we take small steps or large leaps, reconciliation is a process. We can state the problems with precision, proclaim the biblical mandate with eloquence, and commit ourselves to the principles, but unless we actually engage in a process, we will never experience reconciliation.<sup>9</sup>

This project is one of those items that are outside the actual process, but I am engaged in the process through my relationship with Black pastors and through an increasing engagement in the lives and ministry of Blacks within my community and the Church of God.

In the early years of the Church of God movement it was customary to refer to division within the body of Christ in terms of the story of the tower of Babel, found in Genesis 11:1-9. The early pioneers of our movement did not see themselves as starting a new denomination within the church, but calling the divided church back into a primitive and Holy Spirit controlled oneness. I see our call and mission as unfulfilled in this generation and I close with this question asked by D. S. Warner in an early hymn he composed for the fledgling movement:

Oh, for consecrated service, mid the din of Babel strife;  
Who will dare the truth to herald, at the peril of his life?<sup>10</sup>

It is my choice to pay the price for unity. It is my prayer that others will hear and answer the call of God to be one in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>8</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together, translated by John Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper, 1954) 26.

<sup>9</sup> DeYoung, 87, 88.

<sup>10</sup> D. S. Warner, "Who Will Suffer with Jesus?" in The Songs of the Evening Light (Moundsville, WV: Gospel Trumpet Co.) 160.



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