

**DIVIDED HOUSEHOLD: ANALYSIS OF A RACIALLY FRACTURED
EVANGELICALISM**

by

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*To my parents, who made my education possible;
to my wife and daughter, who sacrificed much;
to my friend Aubrey Spears, who has faithfully represented the Christian Faith in pan-
ethnic terms.*

ABSTRACT

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Evangelicals represent the largest and fastest growing group of Christians within the contemporary United States, and yet the churches within evangelicalism remain largely segregated by race. It is not uncommon to see and/or hear racial adjectives like “black” or “white” modifying the word “church.” How did this situation originate? Why does it continue to exist? Is there a possibility for change in this area? In what ways are contemporary evangelicals addressing this issue? An increasing number of scholars and activists, both from within and from outside evangelicalism, have criticized the reality of segregated worship as being inconsistent with the earliest expressions of Christian faith. Historical, sociological, and theological sources are collated and woven into a coherent narrative to analyze the reality of segregated worship among contemporary American evangelicals.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph. 2.19).

And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand (Mk. 3.25).

Throughout United States history, beginning in the Civil War era, Protestant churches have remained largely segregated along racial lines. Utilizing the research done by others, I have not attempted to compile any new statistical analyses here. What I have done is to gather the fruit from the careful research and ideas of sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, historians, and theologians. In taking a multidisciplinary approach to this subject, I hope to contribute something by way of a new basket for this fruit, as it were. That is, the attempt is made below to assemble a paradigm both for viewing the reality of segregated churches and also for affecting change. Several clarifications are in order before continuing.

To begin with, while broader implications may certainly be drawn, the principal view of this paper has been limited in some important ways. First, I have limited the analysis to evangelical churches. For the purposes of this paper, the sometimes elusive term *evangelical* will be used to describe Protestant churches and Christians who are theologically conservative. The term, as used here, also excludes what may be termed pseudo-Protestant groups, non-Catholic traditions following a different historical track

than that of mainstream Protestantism (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses, Churches of Christ, Latter-Day Saints, United Pentecostal Church). Evangelical churches, by this definition, include the Southern Baptist Convention, the Assemblies of God, churches born out of the nineteenth-century Holiness Movement (e.g., Church of the Nazarene, Church of God, Wesleyan), independent Bible churches, Calvary Chapels, independent Baptists, mainline churches that remain theologically conservative (Presbyterian/Reformed; Episcopal/Anglican; Lutheran; Methodist), and non-denominational Charismatic groups.

A second limitation involves the breadth of the term *segregation*. In this paper I focus on the reality that many evangelicals think and speak in terms of "white churches" and "black churches." I have researched and written in terms of black and white for two main reasons. Constraints on time, funds, and the length of this paper require a degree of specificity. Also, while additional ethnic groups may also worship separately, there are normally other factors involved (e.g., language) that are well beyond the scope of this presentation. Finally, I think that it can be convincingly argued that the racial divide in the United States is defined largely in terms of black and white. In fact, statistics continue to demonstrate that "the degree of separation between blacks and nonblacks is far greater than between any other two racial groups in the United States" (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 12).

Finally, without question, there are issues relating to structure and power that factor into the reality of segregated worship for which Marxist/neo-Marxist thought may provide valuable insights. However, many Marxists see religion as purely a social construct and most often a tool of the oppressor used to soothe and distract the oppressed (cf. Marx, 1964, pp. 43-44). As will be seen below, there have certainly been times and

sectors where evangelical religion has functioned in this way (e.g., white evangelicalism during slavery). Toward the end of this thesis, there will be cause to mention some of the issues surrounding power in church leadership. Without necessarily succumbing to economic determinism, Marxist theory has much to add to this discussion on the structural level. However, such broad analyses are well beyond the scope of this thesis.¹ Instead, I have chosen to limit the present thesis to the attitudes and perspectives that have existed *within* evangelicalism with regards to segregated worship.

Thus, the present thesis is chiefly a cultural/historical analysis that selectively utilizes social theorists. A Durkheimian perspective is adopted toward religion, which is seen as a powerful cultural/social force in its own right (Durkheim, 1965, p. 466). Much use is made here of researchers like Bellah and Wuthnow, who have specialized in the intersection between religion and society, and Putnam, who has dealt extensively with the loss of community in the United States. In short, I have chosen to utilize those theorists who treat the power of religion *for good or bad* as a major emphasis and who tend to grant religion at least some measure of potential apart from socioeconomic pressures.

In analyzing the reality of segregated worship in contrast to significant beliefs and practices of the earliest Christians, I have used a context/reality model partially based on sociologist Robert Bellah's distinction between "institutions" and "organizations." The former refers to "the patterned ways Americans have developed for living together," while the latter are simply specific manifestations of the institution in question (1991, p. 4). If we want to see change in the organizations, Bellah argues, we must work for

¹ For a more comprehensive discussion of issues on the structural/economic level relating to ethnic division in churches, see Emerson and Smith (2000). However, it should be noted that Emerson and Smith conduct their analyses without reference to Marxist thought. Marxist theory has long been employed in black liberation theology; for more on this perspective, see Cleage, Jr. (1972), pp. 121-190, and Fields (2001), pp. 70-74.

change in the institution that embraces those organizations. Bellah further provides useful examples of this distinction by contrasting the institution of marriage as opposed to individual marriages, and the American institution of the corporation as opposed to individual organizations in the corporate world (1991, p. 11).

In my adaptation of Bellah's distinction, I refer to the paradigm of the earliest Christians with regards to ethnicity and Christianity as the "context" – i.e., their theology served as the framework for their practice of a pan-ethnic community that they called the *ekklesia*, "church." Segregated worship among evangelicals is the contemporary "reality" that represents, based on the analyses of several evangelical and non-evangelical researchers, a departure from the earliest Christian context. The implication meant to be drawn from this model, and expressly highlighted below, is that such a reality could only exist within a significantly *altered* context.

Over sixty years ago, Gunnar Myrdal wrote about the inconsistency between professing the value of human equality while simultaneously perpetuating forms of racism. This reality in the United States was conceptualized by Myrdal as the "American dilemma" (1944). The altered Christian context within which evangelicalism functions has produced what may be called the *evangelical dilemma*, as contemporary evangelicalism continues to suffer from the same type of dissonance that characterized Myrdal's America.

Just as Bellah's institutions must change before real change can occur in the organizations, even so this altered context must change if the reality of segregated worship in local churches is to change. It is the depth and ethic inherent in the recovery

of the earliest Christian context that will provide the basis for communal memory and hope, Royce's "provincialism," among evangelicals:

Awareness that a tradition's memories and hopes must be enlivened in concrete settings will blend with conviction that loyalty to them requires a special giving, one recognizing that the right ideals are never totally fulfilled on earth and, yet, that effort toward them intensifies life's significance.... For a wisely provincial religion understands that humankind is more than just the sum of its parts. They are relativized by power that transcends them for the good, and in whose service it is the proper task of finite beings of the world to labor (Roth, 1989, p. 77).

Biblical faith, as Bellah himself notes, is inseparable from consistent behavior (cf. Jas. 2.14-26; 1 Jn. 2.3-6). What this means, in religious terms, is that most evangelicals have lost the earliest emphases of Christianity simply because they are out of touch with their own Scriptures and with early Church history. One of the results is that "evangelicalism has unwittingly contributed to, supported, and used arrangements and methods that propel congregational racial separation" (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 136). Evangelicals are beginning to argue that the reality of segregated worship will change only when evangelicals begin to form integrated communities committed to both teaching and demonstrating the earliest emphases of the Christian context in which they profess to live and move:

The creation of truly confessing communities is *crucial to the recovery of the church's lost identity*. Confessing Christ in ways that are authentic and biblically faithful will emerge as the daily existence of the Christian

community becomes a countersign to American wealth and power (Wallis, 1983, pp. 190-191, emphasis mine).

Acknowledging that American individualism is “cancerous,” Bellah criticizes the American perspective (including religion) as failing to honor tradition and community (1996, p. 65). Nevertheless, Bellah mentions “other strands” in religion that perhaps “we can renew and build upon.” Specifically, he mentions “an organic conception of the religious institution *for which the defining metaphor is the Pauline image of the body of Christ*” (Roth, 1989, p. 78, emphasis mine). While contemporary evangelicals remain largely inconsistent with the earliest Christian context they can yet recover that early context – one of those “other strands” in religion – in their communal memory.

II. ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT: CHRISTIANITY & RACE

In asking why segregation is a reality among evangelical Christians, it is very important that it be understood what is really being asked and the specific religious context in which this question is framed. A growing number of Christians have maintained that Christianity, biblically and historically considered, simply does not allow for the segregation that exists across the contemporary evangelical landscape. This is demonstrated below, and it is this contention that provides the backdrop for the “why” question. While the historical and cultural roots of segregated worship are surveyed below, this is *not* the focus of the question. Rather, what is being asked is this: Why, *given the teachings of the New Testament and the traditions of the early Church*, do Anglo-American and African-American evangelicals continue to worship separately?

A second question being asked builds on this first presupposition-laden question. If the reality is non-reflective of the defined religious context in which it so consistently appears, *what can be done to change it?* The primary assumption attending this second question is that it *should* change, given the inherent contradiction between the religious context and the observed reality. As Liston Pope wrote over four decades ago, “the very existence of the Negro church reinforces the caste system and establishes certain vested interests in the maintenance of the status quo” (1957, p. 116).

That is, the inconsistency between Christianity, historically and biblically defined, and the perpetuation of segregated worship emasculates contemporary evangelicalism. Further, using categories that draw upon Robert Bellah’s careful distinction between

institutions and organizations (Bellah, “We Live,” 1991, pp. 10-11), it is my contention in this paper that the religious context (Christianity) *has* been changed in American society and that its earliest emphases must be recovered if the reality in question (segregated worship) is to change.

Third, I ask whether or not this situation *is* changing. Looking at several case studies from various sources, both positive and negative factors are presented. Things have changed in a number of churches and in a number of geographic locations – this is positive. However, there remains a downside in that individual churches desegregating are just that: *individual* churches desegregating. A widespread problematic reality requires a widespread solution. If we conceive of evangelicalism as an institution, only the occasional organization has changed.

Fourth, I propose a “new” paradigm for change along these lines. When considering the reality of segregated worship, there is much at stake for both evangelical Christians and for the wider society. The required paradigm shift hearkens back to Christianity’s source document, the New Testament, and can be readily observed in early Christian sources. It concerns the very substance of historic Christianity, as well as its concepts of both individual and corporate identity.

Pope, discussing this very topic in 1957, wrote that “When the Christian seeks to understand more deeply the nature of his faith, he has recourse to two sources of authority: the Scriptures and the long history of the church” (1957, p. 145). These two sources, to varying degrees, are recognized across the Christian spectrum; this is especially true among conservative evangelicals. Therefore, I will first establish the

earliest Christian context by examining both the New Testament and early Church history.

ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT: THE NEW TESTAMENT

Putting aside the continual redefining of religion that often plagues the social sciences, what emerges if we simply take Christianity at face value? What if evangelicalism is evaluated within a court of its own design? Evangelicals, by definition, prioritize the Christian scriptures. Defending theological concepts like “inspiration” and “inerrancy,” evangelical Christians view the New Testament as their authoritative source document, nothing less than the word of God Himself. This being the case, an interesting picture begins to emerge when the evangelical criteria of scripture is applied to the reality of segregated worship within evangelical churches.²

Multiculturalism is represented in the New Testament from the very beginning. Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus, writes Baptist missiologist Raymond Bakke, establishes that Jesus “in his own bloodline connects all the scandalous racial groups in the Middle East” (Bakke, 2000, p. 53). Further, the details included by Matthew in his version of the Christmas story point to “an Asian-born Jesus who became an African refugee” (Bakke, 2000, p. 56). In fact, argues Bakke, the scope of the entire gospel narrative is constructed to emphasize racial inclusion, as Matthew ends his gospel by recording Jesus’ commission that the Gospel message be taken to “all nations” (Bakke, 2000, p. 42-57).

Jesus Himself is recorded as beginning to teach a theology of universal kinship that would be further developed in the writings traditionally ascribed to Luke, John, and Paul. Jesus concludes his earthly ministry with the oft-quoted Great Commission: “Go,

² Here I present a necessarily brief summary of New Testament teaching regarding race. A much more comprehensive survey is provided in the Appendix.

making disciples of *all nations* [Grk., *ethnos* = “peoples”]” (Matt. 28.18, emphasis mine). Luke continually emphasizes the inclusion of the Gentiles within the Kingdom of God throughout the text of his gospel (2.14, 30-32; 3.6, 23-38; 4.23-28; 7.1-10; 9.55-58; 10.25-37; 24.47). Given such passages, an increasing number of evangelical scholars argue that Jesus’ own perspective was ultimately universal in scope and that He taught a kind of love that transcends ethnocentric ideas (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 14-20).

Acts, a history of the beginnings of the Christian Church also attributed to Luke, continues the universal theme by being deliberately structured along the systematic ethnic expansion of Christianity (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 20-33). Based on Acts 2, one analysis concludes, “The church was multicultural and multilingual from the first moment of its existence” (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 20). Subsequent events recorded in Acts include the resolution of an ethnic conflict involving Grecian widows (Acts 6), gospel preaching among the Samaritans and to an Ethiopian (Acts 8), the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 10-11), and the beginnings of the multicultural church at Antioch (Acts 11-12). The narrative also includes several pronouncements of universal inclusion with reference to the gospel message (2.17, 21, 39; 10.28; 11.18; 14.15-17; 17.25-30).

When we turn to those portions of the New Testament attributed to the Apostle John, we find another important emphasis that is often missed. The language with which John expresses the universal claims of Christianity is found in the “world/all peoples” passages that run throughout his writings. This theme is evident in John’s Gospel as a recurring emphasis (1.9, 29; 3.16; 4.42; 6.33, 51; 8.12, 26; 9.5; 10.16; 12.32; 14.31; 16.8). Further, this emphasis of universal inclusion is repeated both in First John (2.2;

4.14) and Revelation (5.9; 14.6; 21.24-26; 22.2). John describes one of his visions in especially blatant universal terms:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, *of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (7.9-10, emphasis mine).

More than any other New Testament author, the Apostle Paul systematizes the theology of Christianity in his many letters preserved in the New Testament. Among the themes elaborated on, the universal proclamation so evident in Jesus' ministry also finds prominent expression. Paul's universal declarations in the book of Acts (14.15-17 and 17.25-30), commented on above, remain consistent throughout his epistles as well (Gal. 4.26; Eph. 3.14; 1 Tim. 2.4-7). This often shows up as an emphasis on the inclusion of all ethnicities in the Christian Church (Rom. 1-3; 5.12-21; 11.32; 16.26; Gal. 3.26-28; 4.26-29; 6.14-15; Col. 3.1-11).

In particular, Paul's metaphor of the local church as Christ's "body" with "many members" emphasizes unity in diversity and often specifies this in pan-ethnic terms (1 Cor. 12.12-27; Eph. 2.13-22; Phil'p. 1.27). Even Philemon, controversial due to its setting involving the return of a runaway slave named Onesimus, has been interpreted by both black and white evangelicals as containing an implicit message of inclusion (Lewis, 1991, p. 246; Bakke, 2000, pp. 93-99). While ethnic conflict arises early in the infant Christian churches (Gal. 2.11-21), Paul dealt with it swiftly in pan-ethnic terms.

What I am calling the earliest Christian context is nothing more or less than that evident in the very New Testament writings that evangelicals consider authoritative:

The central message of the New Testament is that Christ, through his life on earth, his death, and his resurrection, has brought reconciliation between man and God *and between men*. Those who accept him as their Lord live in a new dimension and *a new community* in which love and unity are regnant. This unity is not only spiritual; *it pervades life in all its relationships, it continually refashions the life of the church, and it seeks even to permeate and remake human society* (Pope, 1957, p. 156, *emphases mine*).

Those who wrote the New Testament consistently set forth a commitment to the universal brotherhood of humanity by virtue of creation in God's Image, as well as an emphasis on the universal scope of both sin and redemption. Christians were those who embraced Jesus as the *world's* Savior – no one was excluded. Upon entering the household of faith, the family of God, all social/ethnic distinctions were relegated second to the priority of the pan-ethnic body of Christ (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 37).

Given that Christianity was presented in such terms, the New Testament instructions on how Christians are to interact in community with one another take on a special significance. Niebuhr wrote that "The gospel's condemnation of divisiveness among men is one of its most characteristic and appealing elements" (1967, p. 6-7). This is the earliest Christian context as expressed in the New Testament source documents considered authoritative by contemporary American evangelicals.

ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT: THE EARLY CHURCH

Once the universal emphasis of the New Testament is properly understood, it is not surprising to see such an emphasis being replicated by the earliest post-biblical Christians. Using criteria consistent with mainstream Christian evaluations of Church history, the following is a survey of the Patristic period, which stretches from the early 2nd to mid-5th centuries. It is this period that represents the formation of Christian tradition among the earliest post-biblical Christians, as observed in the writings of early leaders collectively designated as “the Church fathers.” Historical expressions of the earliest Christian context within which the early Church existed abound, and it would take volumes to adequately explore them all. However, there are some important representative examples worth noting here.

Aristides (c. 125), one of the early Christian philosophers called “apologists,” wrote that there were “four classes of men in this world: Barbarians, Greeks, Jews, *and Christians*” (Bercot, 1999, p. 551, emphasis mine; Bowden, 1992, p. 7). The significance of this statement cannot be overestimated. Aristides seems to have conceived of “Christians” as a separate group *all their own*, to be regarded as a category parallel to cultural/ethnic divisions. That is, the pan-ethnic Christian Church was regarded as *its own people-group* irrespective of its inclusion of all ethnicities/cultures. This is a concept that appears in many early Christian writings and has been researched extensively by Buell (discussed below).

Writing around 195 A.D., the prolific Clement of Alexandria writes about the patristic understanding of scripture on discrimination:

... it teaches us not to wrong anyone belonging to another race and to bring him under the yoke. For there is no other reason to justify such a thing than difference of race. *But that is no reason at all* (Bercot, 1999, pp. 551, emphasis mine).

Clement's words demonstrate that ethnic differences were recognized and not totally ignored. Yet his comment also shows that the universalizing emphasis of Christianity was consistently followed through to its ethical conclusion. It made no sense, according to the earliest Christian context, to factor race into their treatment of other people. In another passage, Clement writes that Christians "admit that the same nature exists in every race, and the same virtue" (Bercot, 1999, p. 551).

Assistant Professor of Religion at Williams College, Denise Kimber Buell, has researched ethnic reasoning in patristic sources. She examines Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*, finding confirmation of the early self-conception of Christians as constituting a *genos*, a "race," of their own.³ Clement writes: "Accordingly then, those from the Hellenic training [Greeks], and also from the law [Jews], who accept faith are gathered into *the one genos of the saved people ...*" (2002, p. 430). Buell further notes that Clement's reasoning includes all humanity under two ethnic categories (Jews/Hellenes or, alternatively, barbarians/Greeks), from either of which Christians come to comprise a third people, "one out of many," which are rooted in the common ground of their commitment to Jesus (2002, pp. 430, 441).

Buell describes Clement's argumentation in his *Protreptikos* ("Exhortation to the Greeks"):

³ The Greek word *genos* (where English derives "genocide") is basically synonymous with *ethnos* (where English derives "ethnic"), and has the connotation of what contemporary Americans mean when they speak of "race" (Gingrich & Danker, 1983, pp. 39, 55).

... Clement employs aggregative ethnic reasoning within a historicizing narrative that makes Christianness the newest but also the most original form of human existence. He argues that, since the recent historical appearance of Christ, this original human unity can be restored ... (2002, p. 446).

Another Church Father, Origen (c. 185 – c. 254), uses argumentation in his *Contra Celsum* ("Against Celsus") that expands on those of his mentor Clement of Alexandria. Origen sees the many races (*ethnos*)⁴ in the world as constituted within the context of fallen sinfulness, using the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11 as his paradigm. He writes of "the sudden birth of the race of Christians," which he views, according to Buell's summary, "as the means and site for restoration of original human unity" (2002, p. 450). Just as the obedience of Jesus is seen as reversing the disobedience of Adam (cf. Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15), Christianity itself is seen as the reversal of the scattering of races at Babel. A similar perspective is found in many modern commentators, usually setting the idea within a framework contrasting the confusion of languages at Babel with the unifying tongues of Pentecost in Acts 2 (Smith, 1996, pp. 169-191). Significantly, speaking in tongues later becomes, for Black Pentecostals, a sign of the reconciliation of all peoples (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 76).

Origen's inclusive understanding also characterized his more practical exegetical work:

... in his commentary on the Song of Songs, the Alexandrine exegete

Origen staunchly defended the black woman against the haughty

⁴ The Greek word *ethnos* (where English derives "ethnic") is basically synonymous with *genos* (where English derives "genocide"), and has the connotation of what contemporary Americans mean when they speak of "race" (Gingrich & Danker, 1983, pp. 39, 55).

daughters of Jerusalem who despised her lack of descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They should not have forgotten the leprosy God inflicted on Mary (Miriam) for having criticized Moses for his marriage to a black Cushite woman (Numbers 12) (Davies, 1988, p. 5).

While Origen views Israel as a unique God-created *ethnos*, he emphasizes a shift in God's plan from the "individual race" of Israel to the "composite" race of Christians, a concept that elaborates on themes found both in Luke's Gospel and Paul's discourse in Romans 11 (both analyzed above) (Buell, 2002, p. 451). Human ethnicity, in Origen's view, is a mutable characteristic and the challenge to embrace Christianity constitutes nothing less than a challenge "to change one's race by changing one's customs and allegiances" (Buell, 2002, p. 452).

Overall, "Origen positions Christianity as the new corporate piety that restores the original human connection with God" (Buell, 2002, p. 453). Further, he imposes an interpretive grid on religious history by positing a connection between the one "Christian" race and their belief in one God. Origen then contrasts this with a theorized connection between the polytheism of non-Christians and the ethnic divisions found among them. In Origen's theology, Christians represent the one people of the one true God while non-Christians represent the many divided peoples of a plurality of gods (Buell, 2002, p. 453).

Mark Minucius Felix, writing around 200 A.D., contended that "all persons are born alike, with a capacity and ability of reasoning and feeling" and that "we are all born with one lot" (Bercot, 1999, p. 235). Hippolytus of Rome, a contemporary of Felix,

likewise wrote that God does not despise anyone on the basis of class, status, gender, or ethnicity, but “seeks everyone and desires to save everyone” (Bercot, 1999, pp. 235-236).

Lactantius (c. 240-320), an African Christian apologist, wrote much on the themes of justice, equality, and community. One of his main ideas was that “all relations between human beings are corrupted when the proper relation with God is lacking.” Considering it an essential feature of Christ’s command to love our neighbor, Lactantius defined equality as “the practical recognition of the fundamental sociality and interdependence of human existence.” Most important here is that Lactantius was very clear that Christ’s command, and its essential aspect of equality, could only be lived out in community. Further, Christianity alone “with its knowledge of the origin of all human beings in one ancestor, can lay secure foundations for the sociality of human existence.” Lactantius saw the universal brotherhood of human beings as a very real consequence of Christian belief and as the foundation for our existence in community (O’Donovan, 1999, pp. 46-47, 54).

Lactantius wrote much along these lines and the universalism of the New Testament seemed to be one of his chief concerns. He wrote that there is no reason “why we mutually bestow upon each other the name of brothers, except that we believe ourselves to be equal. We measure all human things by the spirit, not by the body.” This goes right back to the Christian concept of locating personal identity fundamentally on a spiritual, rather than a cultural/ethnic, level. Again, after commenting on the restricted access of the philosophical schools of his day, Lactantius writes that “we lead those of each sex, every age, and every race into this heavenly path. For God, who is the Guide of

that way, denies immortality to no human being” (Bercot, 1999, p. 236). The representative perspective of Lactantius is summarized in the following:

If we all derive our origin from one man whom God created, we are clearly of one blood. Therefore, it must be considered the greatest wickedness to hate a man.... For, if we are all animated and enlivened by one God, what else are we than brothers? (Bercot, 1999, p. 236).

Certain 2nd century non-canonical writings, variously revered by the early Christians, set forth these same ideas. The *Preaching of Peter* identifies three distinct groupings based on their worship: Hellenes (i.e., Greeks), Jews, and Christians (Buell, 2002, p. 429). This threefold categorization is also found in the *Epistle to Diognetus* and the *Tripartite Tractate* (Buell, 2002, p. 441). The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* refers to Christians as both “the race of the righteous” and “the God-loving and God-fearing race” (Buell, 2002, p. 431). The *Acts of Andrew* and the *Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne* represent Christians as “a people in competition with both local and imperial identities” (Buell, 2002, p. 465).

Most revealing among the non-canonical works is the *Shepherd of Hermas*, a 2nd century writing highly revered by the early churches and used to prepare new converts for baptism (Bercot, 1999, pp. 336-337; Kelly, 1960, pp. 59-60; Pamphilus, 1990, p. 188). While Buell’s analysis points out some paradoxical elements, it is useful here to note the clear themes of the ninth similitude (vision) from this early writing.

In *Shepherd of Hermas*, the author is designated as “Hermas” and receives a series of allegorical visions from an angel. This final vision includes twelve mountains, the two most extreme of which are brightly and darkly colored. From these twelve

mountains are quarried stones that are then used by spiritual figures to construct a gleaming tower. As the stones are put in place, they are transformed seamlessly to match the tower – the many colors become one. While the vision includes more complex details outside the scope of this paper, the basic interpretation illustrates the conception of Christians as their own pan-ethnic race. The twelve mountains are “the tribes that inhabit the whole world,” while the tower being built by agents of God is the “race of the righteous” (Buell, 2002, p. 454).

Hermas’ query about his vision is significant, weaving together the themes of the universalism, identity, and community of Christians:

“Why, though these mountains were so various, when the stones from them were put into the building did they become bright with a single color ...?” “Because,” he said, “all the *ethne* [races] that dwell under heaven, when they heard and believed, were *called after the name of God*. So when they received the seal they had *one understanding* and *one mind*, and *their faith became one*, and *their love one*” (Buell, 2002, p. 455, emphases mine)

The symbolism of diverse peoples as “stones” that are being joined together is a thoroughly New Testament image found in 2 Peter 2.5: “... you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood ...” It is interesting that this verse occurs just before Peter’s description of Christians as “a chosen generation” and “a holy nation” meant to “proclaim the praises of Him who called [them] out of darkness into His marvelous light” (2.9). While Buell seems to have missed this connection entirely, the

Hermas/Petrine parallel is rendered complete by verse 10 of 2 Peter 2: “who once were not a people but are now the people of God.”

Another apocryphal work, the *Gospel of Philip*, contains ethnic reasoning of the sort employed by Clement of Alexandria and Origen (Buell, 2002, p. 445). The author of this work employs imagery in a similar way to the author of the *Shepherd of Hermas*:

The Lord went into the dye works of Levi. He took seventy-two different colors and threw them into the vat. He took them all out white. And he said, “Even so has the son of man come [as] a dyer (Buell, 2002, p. 455).

A clarification is in order here to avoid confusion. Both *Hermas* and *Philip* employ color imagery that posits “white” as the new color of the redeemed. Contrary to some modern theories that locate racism within linguistic metaphor, American black/white tensions cannot be superimposed on such early Christian imagery. As will be seen below, there was no disdain among Christians for darker skin. This imagery is almost certainly drawn from Old and New Testament passages that picture the brightness of God’s revelation invading the hidden darkness of sinful humanity as a whole (e.g., Jn. 1). Thus, while the early Christians sometimes used “whiteness” and “blackness” to designate “good” and “bad” themes, this imagery “cannot be presumed to carry the same freight that they have acquired in modern definitions of race” (Buell, 2002, p. 458). Davies is even stronger, asserting that “Such a charge would have seemed absurd to every generation [of Christians] except the current one” (1988, p. 7).

Buell also mentions Justin Martyr (c. 100–165), Athenagoras (2nd century), Melito of Sardis (d. 180), and Tertullian (160–220) as employing varying forms of argumentation that constitute Christians as a group distinct from competing social/ethnic groups (2002,

p. 445). As Buell suggests, it seems fairly common to find among the early Christians “a dynamic view of race/ethnicity that allows them to define becoming a Christian in terms of changing one’s race and to develop universalizing claims that all ought to join the Christian people” (Buell, 2002, p. 431). Additionally, Buell notes the overlapping “kinship”/“family” terminology employed continuously by the early Christians, a theme that overlaps and anticipates the idea of Christianity as a “race.” Rejecting the notion that such terminology is mere metaphor, she sees no reason for us to conceive of these concepts as anything other than literal to the early Christians (Buell, 2002, pp. 433, 436).

In a sense, the earliest Christian context simply did what many contemporary groups socially defined in the United States as “races” have done. In the U.S., for instance, “Hispanic” is a *pan-ethnic* term that actually encompasses several different nationalities/races into one unified identity. Likewise, “African-Americans” actually constitute a *pan-ethnic* group defined according to skin color, ancestral heritage, and historical experience. With this Buell agrees, citing the research of Michael Gomez (2002, p. 467). Likewise, ingroup/outgroup biases can become negligible when other group memberships overlay them (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 157). Educational affiliation, gender, socioeconomic status, and profession are all group memberships that often bring together black and white on various levels. The earliest churches elevated “Christian” to the top of their group membership list. Thus, while the Christian basis for a pan-ethnicity differs, the structuring aspect of the concept is actually already in use in secular spheres of society.

It was the theology of Christians as “new creatures” that propelled the earliest Christian context:

The action of God by which trust was aroused in the life of man was looked upon by the early Christians as a restoration of life to its primeval unity. The unification which looked toward the future had its reference in the past also. Here again the close connection which Christians traced between redemption and creation was important (Gordh, 1962, p. 79).

It is significant that Frank Snowden, an African-American professor at Howard University and a leading researcher of ancient attitudes toward blacks, has determined that the early Church came nowhere close to racism in its teaching (D'Souza, 1995, p. 39). Author Forrest Wood, actually writing *in favor of* the idea that Christianity is essentially racist, nevertheless admits that "early Christians did not, in fact, exhibit a negative attitude toward black people generally" (D'Souza, 1995, p. 43). This should not be surprising for, as African American pastor William Dwight McKissic, Sr. points out, not only is there an easily identified African presence throughout the text of the Bible, but "At least nine of the eighteen or twenty most prominent leaders of post New Testament Christianity were African.... Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Dionysius, Athanassius, Didymus, Augustine, and Cyril" (1990, p. 38).

D'Souza summarizes the early Christian paradigm, what I have termed the earliest Christian context:

For Christians, the primary distinction was between the believer and the infidel. As Saint Augustine (who was himself an African) emphasizes, distinguishing between the "City of God" and the "City of Man," it is through the instrument of conversion that all may be equal as children of God and as citizens in Christian civilization. Indeed the religious

commitment of the early Christians generated a passionate universalism.... *For the convert to the faith, racial and even cultural differences were superseded by Christian brotherhood.* No group was excluded: as Martin Bernal has pointed out, early Christian and medieval illustrations routinely portray one of the magi who came to worship the infant Christ as black (1995, p. 43, emphasis mine).

Similarly, Dudley and Hilgert write that the early Church was a “counterculture movement [that] had a revolutionary vision of the social order, where all people worshipped one God, *where differences were transcended in the miracle of Jesus Christ*” (1987, p. 136, emphasis mine).

Christianity’s earliest context, a pan-ethnic universalism rooted in a new identity, can be established with reference to both the New Testament and the subsequent history of the earliest Christians. Pope made this same observation over fifty years ago:

Both the Scriptures and the totality of the Christian tradition support the conclusion that racial distinctions have no validity in the Christian community and that discrimination on the ground of race or color is a sin in the eyes of God (1957, p. 145).

This perspective was also expressed in the writings of scholars like Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1954) and H. Richard Niebuhr (1967). Increasing numbers of contemporary scholars are coming to similar conclusions, and from a variety of perspectives: sociological (e.g., Wuthnow, 1993; Emerson & Smith, 2000; DeYoung et al., 2003), historical (e.g., Davies, 1988; Keillor, 1996; Jenkins, 2002), political (e.g., D’Souza, 1995; Salley & Behm, 1995; Wallis, 1997; Storkey, 2005), religious studies (e.g., Pagels, 1995; Buell, 2002; Gruchy,

2002), theological (e.g., Cone, 1995; Hauerwas, 1995; Rhodes, 1998; Peart, 2000; Fields, 2001; Bosch, 2002; Clarke, 2002), and pastoral (e.g., Perkins & Rice, 1993; Hayford, 1996; Bakke, 2000; Woodley, 2001; Broek, 2002; Carter, 2003; Wilson, 2005).

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT: IDENTITY & COMMUNITY

To the outward view the Church may appear to be merely a rather queer gathering of very miscellaneous men and women, inexplicably preoccupied with old fashioned ceremonies, strangely excited about apparently irrelevant issues, and patently failing to live in accordance with the ideals of human life in which they profess to believe. *But in its inner reality the Church is the re-created human race.* – E.L. Mascall, 1958 (Custance, *volume III*, 1975, p. 316, emphasis mine).

It should be immediately obvious that certain prominent features of U.S. culture necessarily militate against the earliest Christian context as established above. Further, it is fascinating, given the prominence of the Religious Right and the emerging Christian Left, that these cultural features embrace both conservatives and liberals. Three concepts are especially important in this connection.

First is the propensity for U.S. citizens to conceive of both themselves and others in terms of race, a concept that seems to thoroughly permeate every area of American society (cf. Kilker, 1993; Dyson, 1996, pp. 101-104; Putnam, 2000, pp. 279-280; Morning & Sabbagh, 2005). The fact that this way of labeling and understanding others has been absorbed by evangelicals is obvious by the very subject of the present thesis, the reality of segregated worship in evangelical churches. This is equally evident in commonly used terms like “the Black Church,” “black churches,” and “white churches.”

Although a bit more complicated, ethnocentric theologies are also symptomatic of the absorption of such a paradigm. The point here is simply that the earliest Christian context, according to the earliest Christian sources, can never exist so long as Christians maintain the same view of “race” as those in an increasingly secularized society.

Second is the individualism that is so characteristic of life in the United States (Bellah et al., 1996, pp. 142-163; DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 4). This is a development that is so woven into American political philosophy that it may seem almost impossible for Americans, evangelical or otherwise, to think in any other way. Emerson and Smith have pointed out that a serious consequence of evangelical individualism is the “ahistorical” perspective that prevents white evangelicals from understanding the implications of American history for African Americans (2000, pp. 81-82, 100-101). That is, there exists a propensity for white evangelicals to place blame on African-Americans for both religious and social problems, and to ignore explanatory references to a history of minority oppression by the white American majority. This is why white evangelicals will often characterize African Americans as living in the past or perpetuating segregated worship due to cultural preference.

Further, it is important to realize that individualism has also necessitated the refashioning of Christianity in such a way that a central tenant of the earliest context – “love your neighbor as yourself” – is only selectively applied by evangelicals today:

... Protestant individualism nourishes the temptation to regard the church as an association of individuals rather than a distinctive fellowship having its own fundamental character and commission from Christ (Pope, 1957, p. 144).

The concept of the church as *an interdependent conglomerate body* has been lost for most of U.S. history, while evangelicals have accepted “church socials” as the substance of the biblical concept of fellowship, a definition that is severely emasculated. In fact, white evangelicals are typically more individualistic than other white Americans (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 96). Theologian Emil Brunner chided American Protestants for focusing so much on “the personal dimension of faith” that they neglected the *Ekklesia*, “the social form of faith.” Brunner went on to insist that the early Christians saw these two dimensions as inseparable, that personal faith should result in “a solidarity among persons of faith” (Evans, Jr., 1992, p. 127-128).

Sociologist S.D. Gaede explains why individualism attracts human beings even though we are essentially social animals:

If I do not need others, I have thereby insulated myself from the possibility of rejection, and therefore others cannot hurt me. If I can decrease my dependence on others, I can exercise greater control over my own life for I then become free to implement my will more effectively. Unfortunately, along the way I will also give up a portion of my humanity and the ability to enjoy or appreciate God’s created order (1985, p. 136).

Because the strength of the local church consists in interdependent relationships, the individualism of U.S. society weakens the institution so vital to Christianity (Roof & McKinney, 1987, pp. 244-251).

Indeed, it becomes impossible under individualistic circumstances to apply all of the New Testament’s “one another” exhortations mentioned above. Such are the “individualistic illusions” that have affected the outlook of American evangelicals on

racial issues (Davies, 1988, p. xi). It is significant that individualism sabotaging efforts at racial reconciliation is acknowledged by many evangelicals, as demonstrated in the national survey and hundreds of personal interviews conducted by Emerson and Smith (2000, pp. 75-76).

By way of clarification, there is much social action emanating from churches in connection with evangelistic efforts. Yet church members themselves often remain rooted in a Sunday morning *event* rather than, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, an ongoing “life together” (1954, pp. 26, 121). Part of the problem here is the lopsided theology of many evangelicals throughout history, where priorities like evangelism and discipleship are made out to be individualized, otherworldly concerns. Defined in such ways, these activities have often precluded any type of significant counter-cultural influence by evangelicalism (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 21-22).

The earliest Christian context sets forth a different type of individuality that cannot exist apart from community:

For Christian faith the individual is self-determining but not self-sufficient. His life is essentially bound with the lives of others. This is true because of his own true nature. And his own nature is what it is because of the character of God whose image he bears (Gordh, 1962, p. 134, emphasis mine).

Again, evangelical churches have missed this essential dimension of their faith largely because they have adopted a cultural maxim that contradicts the earliest context – American individualism and life in community often exclude one another.

One thing that allows American Christians to maintain this tension between American individualism and Christian community is the neglect of community in both pulpit and pew that stems from American culture. This is accomplished, albeit probably unconsciously in most cases, through the categorization of religion. The individual Christian sees “church” as a category like “work,” “school,” or “home.” Sociologist Erving Goffman’s “frontstage behavior” comes into play as Christians act the part at church much like they act the part in other arenas (Kendall, 1996, pp. 180-182). In this way, “Christian” becomes a role to be played and the idea of a faith that embraces all of life to be lived out with others is lost. Thus, through a type of cognitive dissonance, contemporary evangelicals are able to pursue one set of values (e.g., consumerism, individualism) throughout their week while externally embracing a very different set of values on Sunday morning (e.g., living in community, caring for the “least of these”). Through this categorization of their religion, the issue of community is circumvented and the result – by biblical and historical standards – is a theological oxymoron: *the individualist Christian* (Bellah et al., 1996, pp. 143-144, 232-248).

Further, an individualized faith is severely limited in its ability to impact society. Emerson and Smith highlight this:

... despite having the subcultural tools to call for radical changes in race relations, [evangelicals] most consistently call for changes in persons that leave the dominant social structures, institutions, and culture intact. This avoidance of boat-rocking unwittingly leads to granting power to larger economic and social forces. It also means that evangelicals’ views to a

considerable extent conform to the socioeconomic conditions of their time (2000, pp. 21-22).

These researchers go on to state that these factors sometimes cause evangelicals to “fail to evaluate *whether the social system is consistent with their Christianity*” (2000, p. 22, emphasis mine).

Third is the immense value placed on “culture” as a reified entity used for the purposes of explanation and conceptions of personal and group identity. It has become commonplace to define ourselves by our culture, a concept that is simultaneously elusive and all-embracing. Culture can mean almost everything about someone or virtually nothing at all, depending on whom you consult. For instance, some people believe that whites and blacks remain segregated in churches because of their “cultures.” The problem is that such an idea assumes a static view of culture as something that is self-existent. To the contrary, culture is merely the expression of identity, and can never be the basis for identity itself (Wuthnow, 1993, p. 20; Evans, 1995, pp. 118-121; Rhodes, 1998, pp. 112-115).

If black and white evangelicals were to embrace the earliest Christian context, they would potentially be embracing concepts that outlive their distinctive cultures in either direction because these concepts would be seen as transcendent realities rooted in realities beyond themselves:

Christian faith speaks soberly of the requirements of redemption and hopefully of its resources. In the cross of Christ it sees a price paid, so to speak, by God in his identification of himself with men. *And it sees the*

need for such identification to be repeated by his followers (Gordh, 1962, p. 166, emphasis mine).

African American minister Anthony Evans explains this, from the evangelical perspective, with reference to black Christians:

... Black people (or African Americans if you prefer) do have an identity rooted in God. To the degree that we reject or accept the root of that identity is the degree to which we can know who we are (McKissic, Sr., 1990, p. 6, emphasis mine).

Of course, the same holds true for Christians of every ethnic origin (Willard, 1997, pp. 125-126). Cornel West points to the original Christian context in his own conception of Christianity:

...for me the best of the Christian tradition is a fundamental starting point for looking at the world – looking at the world through the lens of the cross; looking at the world from the vantage point of the least of these; looking at the world in such a way that you never lose contact with the fact that other individuals are unique and created in the image of God; looking at the world in such a way that you are going to promote a love that is daring, a love that is challenging, but a love that makes genuine connection with other people (2000, p. 11).

In contrast, if Christians continue to root their essential identity in temporal realities (everything from discipline of children to what is eaten and what type of music is enjoyed) subsumed under the term “culture” they will continue to be restricted by those categories in ways that are sometimes inconsistent with their own faith.

By altering the earliest Christian context to accommodate the surrounding culture, the Christian community ceases to be a cultural change-agent and ultimately loses the very focus that makes it a *competing* institution. In the United States, this process has resulted in the loss of the concepts of transcendent identity and community (corporate identity) that were part and parcel of what the earliest Christians embraced from the *moment of conversion*.

These are the very concepts that together are the key to the entire issue of segregated worship. The earliest Christian context, drawn from both the New Testament writings and the earliest Christians, exalts the idea that human identity is to be found in the spiritual realities of creation, fall, and redemption. The practical workings out of such foundations are staggering simply because *everybody* shares in the first two, creation and fall, and *all Christians* share in all three (cf. Wolters, 2005). This is why, for the earliest Christians, there were no ethnic divisions because personal identity was not seen as being rooted in ethnicity or culture. Christians found their identity *in Christ*, and existed in community as something *altogether different* from the competing cultures that surrounded them (Willard, 1997, pp. 125-126). As demonstrated throughout this thesis, both the earliest Christians and post-biblical theologians have acknowledged these two facets of the earliest Christian context in a variety of ways.

Harkening back to New Testament passages like Galatians 3.26-28 and Colossians 3.11, Clement of Alexandria stressed both the corporate and individual identity of Christians:

Moreover, the whole Christ, so to speak, is not divided: there is neither barbarian nor Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, but *a new human*

transformed by the holy spirit of God (Buell, 2002, p. 449, emphasis mine).

In this same connection, consider the words of O. Hallesby, author of *Why I Am a Christian*: “If I had to tell you in one short sentence why I became a Christian, I think that in order to be as simple and clear as possible, I should say that I did it to become a man” (Custance, *volume III*, 1975, p. 344). For the consistent Christian, conversion amounts to fulfillment as a human being.

Yet contemporary American evangelicals, by and large, continue to locate their identity in their culture and history, whether it is the Eurocentric Christian who imagines his/her culture to be the truly “Christian” one or the Afrocentric Christian who thinks along the same lines. If ethnic factors determine identity, humanity is forever damned to navigate shifting sands. The early Christians had recourse to factors that, according to Christian belief, are immutable. Christian conceptions of self and identity were rooted in realities that transcend human culture, ethnicity, and even temporal historical events (Berger, 1967, p. 158; Willard, 1997, pp. 125-126). This, of course, does not mean that ethnicity and culture mean nothing at all.

As Buell notes, commenting on the writings of Clement, “Harmony, after all, requires difference.... What makes these different sounds cohere are shared practices and orientation” (2002, p. 448). Far from doing away with all traces of culture from divergent individuals, the original Christian context promises “the possibility of diversity as beneficial within an overarching whole” (Buell, 2002, p. 448). This “overarching whole” was envisioned by the early Christians as the constitution of another “race” entirely. She explains Clement’s overall perspective: “The appearance of Christ, the

eponymous ancestor, now makes it possible for the ‘whole human race,’ ‘both barbarians and Greeks,’ to be (re)unified as the one *genos* that they actually are” (Buell, 2002, p. 449).

Dudley and Hilgert express this same perspective, writing of the early Church:

The threshold of doubt and assurance of faith provided a barrier within which the believers knew who they were, and who they were not. In the enthusiasm of their new identity, they drew others to themselves. Further, in the community of the resurrected Jesus, *they left behind the social hierarchy of the secular society* (wealth, education, gender, nationality, etc.). Cognitive dissonance made community pluralism possible because *a more powerful experience gave them unity* (1987, p. 96, emphases mine).

Robert W. Jenson, Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College, describes a philosophical rationale that seems to point in this same direction:

... men are those of God’s creatures who have their own true selves not as possessions but as challenges. My humanity is not a set of characteristics that I may be counted on to exemplify: like being vertebrate or brown haired or sapient. My humanity is rather something that happens, and happens exactly as the event of choice and action in which I become something that I was not before.... If I am to discover this peculiar sort of fact, if I am to discover that my selfhood is an opportunity and not a given, somebody else will have to tell me. The challenge to find what I am by becoming other than I am can only come from someone other than me, by

some person who is new and strange to me and communicates that strangeness. My humanity is our mutual work (1995, pp. 28-29).

Jenson calls this the “*view of man suggested by the Christian message*,” the implications of which go straight to the heart of the Christian identity crisis of which segregated worship among evangelicals is symptomatic (Jenson, 1995, p. 30, emphasis mine).

Jenson’s words are nothing less than a contemporary affirmation of what Buell has described in her research. Further, he locates the search for human identity squarely in community, clearly emphasizing that this is no individualist venture. Gaede discusses the failure of Christians to recognize the importance of community:

Like many others in our society, Christians sometimes emphasize the individual over and above the human family. For Protestants in general, this may come from an emphasis on individual choice and religious freedom. For evangelical Protestants, it may be due to the stress placed on the individual’s need for salvation. For others, it may simply result from the influence of Western individualistic values. Whatever the case, there is nothing biblical about a picture of humanity that is ultimately individualistic. The *essential* (ultimate, fundamental, or whatever) character of humanity is social. (1985, p. 100).

If Gaede’s strong assertion is taken at face value, then Jenson’s emphasis cannot be taken lightly. It seems clear that an integrated Christian community built around this paradigm fulfills Jenson’s vision of community beautifully. Who would be more “new” and “strange” to one another than African-Americans and Anglo-Americans? Ironically, is not such social distance one of the often-cited reasons that the two groups continue to

worship apart? Jenson's ideas identify this claimed negative as not only a positive, but as the *essential ingredient*. If segregated worship is inconsistent with evangelical faith, integrated worship becomes consistent when black and white begin to see their humanity as a "mutual work."

True community, said American philosopher Josiah Royce (19th century), is inseparably connected with loyalty:

... Royce suggested that there is a basic relation between a life of loyalty and a life of religion. Briefly stated, this relation hinges on the fact that the religious life seeks to find and experience a basic communal dimension in all existence. In this community of being, the lives of individuals are to be unified, harmonized, and fulfilled in an altogether meaningful totality. Royce argued, therefore, that the genuinely religious life will be one of loyalty, because the religious person will recognize that he or she has a vital role to play in the establishment of such a community and that loyalty to loyalty is crucial for its actualization (Roth, 1989, p. 73).

It is worth noting that Jenson calls this entire enterprise "a risky bet," an interesting choice of words because it so well identifies one of the central barriers to living out the earliest Christian context (1995, p. 29). Both black and white evangelicals worship where it is safe, while the earliest Christian paradigm requires the element of risk. As will be discussed in more detail below, the choice of evangelicals to become intentionally multicultural in their churches is a choice fraught with humility and sacrifice (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 142-150).

As Gaede points out, the biblical world view recognizes in fallen humanity not only estrangement from God, but from one another as well; the task of Christianity is not simply a “personal relationship with Jesus” that is emphasized to the exclusion of relationships with each other (1985, p. 102-103). In light of the individualist agenda of much of contemporary evangelicalism, Charles Marsh asks:

Is there anything then left of the church, of the spiritual community’s interrelatedness or worldly presence, not to speak of the Pauline doctrine of the church as the mystical body of Christ? It seems unlikely. What could link together these spiritual items [i.e., individuals with a “personal relationship with God”] in a common identity and shared conviction? (1997, p. 109).

In a brief but profound explanation for the reality of segregated worship, Marsh identifies what must be the linking factors in an individualized Christianity: “the accidents of race, class, and custom” (1997, p. 109).

Sociologist Robert Bellah explains the difficulties that Americans in general have with community:

The very freedom, openness, and pluralism of American religious life makes this traditional pattern [religious community] hard for Americans to understand. For one thing, the traditional pattern assumes a certain priority of the religious community over the individual. The community exists before the individual is born and will continue after his or her death. The relationship of the individual to God is ultimately personal, but it is mediated by the whole pattern of community life. There is a givenness

about the community and the tradition. They are not normally a matter of individual choice (Bellah et al., 1996, p. 227).

Likewise, Dudley and Hilgert contrast the early and contemporary churches:

The early church ... developed a communal life style that allowed them to be both intimate in their personal relationships and institutional in their organization. In the contemporary church we have often separated and alienated these essential processes. Among the first Christians, they happened early and together (1987, p. 11).

If Christians deny, or remain ignorant of, the community factor in the earliest Christian context and contemporary efforts within evangelicalism to revive this factor, then they will imbibe the social elements that surround them in any given generation instead. In the case of contemporary evangelicalism, such elements include the proliferation of racial labels and stereotypes, the reification of culture, and the perpetuation of individualist religion.

Christianity, as conceptualized and promoted by the earliest Christians, features as its essential elements both vertical (God-ward) and horizontal (man-ward) dimensions. Increasing numbers of evangelical authors are insisting that such a realization demands that its adherents put themselves on the line – ethnically, racially, culturally, historically – to actively pursue healing relationships that end the circumstances of human alienation (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 147-180). Identity and community are inseparably linked, and such a vision of Christianity can be sustained only by elements of memory and hope located in the history of a faith that lay far beyond the reach of the racialized context that

dominates the contemporary United States. A commitment to this strand of Christianity requires both abstract and practical dimensions.

John K. Roth describes the views of Royce:

Royce believed that a community exists just to the degree that persons share memories and hopes, which include ethical commitments and collective responsibilities. Those memories and hopes typically contain elements that are broadly philosophical and even universalizing in their religious dimensions. Royce believed such elements were crucial, but he insisted that ethical commitment and collective responsibility are never abstract. Without commitment to a particular cause, which entails practical work at definite times and places, loyalty exists in word alone (1989, pp. 68-69).

Royce's perspective highlights what real community is while at the same time leading us away from supposing that merely existing together in a group constitutes community.

Royce's philosophy prefigures the distinction which some Christians, concerned about segregated worship, make between mere integration and genuine reconciliation:

"Integration and reconciliation are not the same and should not be confused; *reconciliation assumes equality and is a higher calling*" (Perkins & Rice, 1993, pp. 9, 17, emphasis mine). Royce's "particular cause" returns us to the issue of identity.

Originally, Christians did not define themselves, individually or corporately, along ethnic, political, or class lines. Rather, they were all one "in Christ" and committed to the practical agenda entailed by this transcendent touchstone (Willard, 1997, pp. 125-

126). Note Paul's transition from identity to community, with specific reference to ethnic distinctions, in his letter to the Colossians:

... the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all. *Therefore*, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection (3.10-14, emphasis mine).

As Bellah summarizes: "In this traditional Christian view, what connects one self to another is the objectively given reality of their creation as God's children and God's own continuing presence in the world in Jesus Christ" (1996, p. 156).

This idea of the Christian as something altogether new, finding identity in transcendent realities beyond notions of race and culture, has also been expressed theologically. For instance, the late anthropologist/theologian Arthur C. Custance expressed in his writings the idea that Christians actually represent a new kind of humanity entirely:

... we who have been chosen to be members of the blameless family of God...are members of a fundamentally different species.... The Body of the Last Adam.... Being a great host of cells, we are yet one body, though we do not, for all that, lose our identity as individuals.... Nor is there any

question of special privilege due to race or color of each cell, for Jew and Gentile believer can with equal propriety become cells in this single new Body (Custance, *volume III*, 1975, pp. 348-349).

More recently, Reformed theologian Andrew Sandlin has expressed this same theology via the concept of “the royal race of the redeemed” (1997, p. 3). Sandlin writes that “*the ultimate racial issue of mankind is the issue of covenant headship – one is united to the race of the depraved (Adam’s seed), or the race of the redeemed (Christ’s seed)*” (1997, p. 3, emphasis his). In other words, within the Christian framework, the principal human distinctions are predicated not on factors like ethnicity or socioeconomic status, but on the theological concepts of sin and redemption. Echoing Buell’s reading of patristic sources, Sandlin states that “God has graciously called to himself not only a covenant seed, but *a new race*, a race not of ‘ethnicity,’ but of covenantal redemption and obedience,” and that this new race is “elected from all nations, of all colors and languages and dialects” (1997, pp. 3-4, emphasis mine).

Likewise, popular evangelical theologian John Stott repeats the same understanding:

Salvation in the Bible is never a purely individualistic concept. As in the Old Testament, so in the New, God is calling out a people for himself and binding it to himself by a solemn covenant. The members of this new society, reconciled through Christ to God *and one another*, are *being drawn from all races and cultures*. Indeed, *this single new humanity – which Christ has created and in which no barriers are tolerated – is an*

essential part of the good news (Eph 2:11-22) (1996, p. 185, emphases mine).

Many other prominent evangelical theologians, past and present, would agree with Stott (e.g., Grudem, 1994, pp. 456-459; Willard, 1997, pp. 125-126). This idea of the Christian community as a “new humanity,” if not always evident in ecclesiastical practice, is the typical understanding employed by evangelical on a theological level.

Temporal criteria of humanness, like ethnicity or culture, are considered mutable in the earliest Christian context. A Christian’s identity is found in humanness under God and in Christ, not in mere physical or cultural characteristics. This does not destroy one’s culture entirely – the innumerable company of the redeemed pictured in Revelation 5 are shown in all their diversity as well as in their unity of faith – but neither does it reify culture by making it a self-authenticating, all-embracing factor. Further, the individual Christian’s identity is lived out within nothing less than a type of kinship network that is Christian community. This is the substance of Jesus’ philosophy that those who “lose” themselves are the ones who will “find” themselves (Matt. 16.25/Jn. 12.25). Roth explains this same idea in sociological terms:

Persons become by acting, pursuing interests, and striving to achieve. The self will either be fragmented or unified in direct proportion to one’s success in finding and actualizing a life pattern that can be consistently and harmoniously pursued through time.... Such a pattern entails a chance for the discovery, expression, and cultivation of talents and abilities. It also involves recognition that individuals who try to secure their own ways alone are far more likely to lose themselves than those who do their

best individually to help others. Just as coherent individualism requires caring relations that reach far and wide, interdependence is a condition that makes independence possible. Personal initiative that does not serve others impoverishes the communal spirit that gives it birth and vitality (1989, p. 72).

Christianity provides such fulfillment when its substance is defined biblically and historically. The recovery of the original Christian context in a reconciled community of memory, one where black and white Christians conceive of themselves as members of both Christ and one another, would represent a form of the "enlightened provincialism" that Royce wrote about. This concept, Royce argued, would transcend "narrowness of spirit [and] jealousies between various communities" by fostering "loyalty to loyalty" (Roth, 1989, p. 74).

Liston Pope brought together these elements of identity and community when he contrasted the earliest Christian context with a culturally altered Christianity:

The most serious factor helping to preserve segregation in the churches is a deficiency on the part of the churches themselves – *a deficiency in their understanding of the true nature and purpose of the church*. To use biblical terms, the church is the body of Christ, the new people of God, a redeemed Israel. *Social distinctions of whatever kind have no place in this new community....there is no biblical basis for them and very little basis in twenty centuries of Christian experience. All true believers are equal before the altar and at the communion table. All are equal before God.... The churches in America ... affirm all these things easily enough, but they*

do not seem really to understand the implications. The more common view of the local church is that it is some kind of social club.... congeniality appears to be valued more in a congregation that common fidelity to a single Lord (1957, pp. 122-123, emphases mine).

It is not at all clear that white Christians in the United States, generally speaking, have ever understood the implications of Christian universalism. This will become apparent as the origins of segregated worship are examined in the next chapter.

III. ESTABLISHING THE REALITY: SEGREGATED WORSHIP

American churches have generally run counter to the earliest Christian emphases on pan-ethnicity and universal Christian identity formation (Kelly, 1960; Niebuhr, 1967; Gonzalez, 1984; Davies, 1988; Bercot, 1999; Buell, 2002). Anthropology texts are rife with accounts of missionaries who identified their Enlightenment notions of “civilizing the heathen” with bringing the Gospel to a people (Bosch, 2002, pp. 262-345). An exhaustive treatment of the discriminatory realities that have plagued the U.S., to say nothing of the institution of slavery, are well beyond the scope of this thesis. Yet, moving to present day observations, it is interesting to note that black and white Christians, for the most part, continue to worship separately from one another. Has it always been this way? When and where did this American reality of segregated worship have its beginning?

Segregated worship finds its origins very early in United States history. These origins are important to examine, as nearly 87% of African American Christians labeled as “black strong evangelicals” favor integrated churches (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 125). Despite contemporary evangelical opinions to the contrary, the situation does not represent a mutual arrangement but is owing to definite historical factors (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 39). However, before examining the historical situations that led to contemporary “white” and “black” churches, it is necessary to look at some cultural-religious currents within pre-U.S. Christendom that served as precursors to racial

attitudes among white Christians. The paradigm of the earliest Christians began to erode in various ways long before the United States existed as a nation.

Unfortunately, the early Christian emphasis on equality in community began to erode during the Crusades (13th century), when it was rationalized that it was “permissible to enslave pagans but not Christians” (D’Souza, 1995, p. 101). Alan Davies describes the situation during the Middle Ages:

... to the medieval Christian imagination it was entirely appropriate to conceive of a white Christian realm (Europe) *encircled by menacing pagan realms that were both literally and figuratively darker* ... (1988, p. 8, emphasis mine).

By the 15th century, European Christians were reacting to Jewish unbelievers by theorizing that “Jewish blood was a hereditary taint which could not be eradicated by baptism” (D’Souza, 1995, p. 35). This idea was especially popular in Spain, where those of Moorish descent (black) were included along with the Jews as lacking *limpieza de sangre*, “purity of blood,” and “remained aliens in spite of their baptism” (Davies, 1988, pp. 10-11).

Things came to a head in the famous debate between the Spaniards Bartolome de las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepulveda over the issue of slavery (16th century). Sepulveda invoked “natural law” in his argument that the Indians must be enslaved due to their sin of idolatry. Most interesting is that Las Casas based his entire rebuttal on the earliest Christian context:

Las Casas argued that every human must be nurtured and instructed, and that this must be done in all instances with a sense of humility and

compassion. *In short, his understanding of Christian theology provided him with a basis for challenging the racist doctrine advanced by his opponent* (Kivisto, 1998, emphasis mine).

While some admitted that the arguments employed by Las Casas were superior, Sepulveda won the day by appealing to the baser political and economic ambitions of the kingdom (Kivisto, 1998). Thus it was that “‘race’ as a social construct arose in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to justify the overtaking and enslaving of whole people groups” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 8).

From this point forward, the early Christian emphasis on a pan-ethnic people of God was deemphasized to varying degrees across cultures and centuries. Theories were developed, adapted to varying historical situations, which supported ethnocentric ideas inconsistent with the universalism of the first four centuries of Christianity. In both the Church and the world, the concept of race “continues to exist only insofar as it is recreated” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 8).

With the beginnings of the United States came the slave trade:

From 1562 British seamen took part in the slave trade that supplied the Spanish colonies. African slaves were first offered for sale to the British colony in Virginia in 1619. In 1644 Boston merchants organized an expedition to import slaves from Africa. The slave traffic into the British colonies expanded rapidly in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Between 1680 and 1700 more than 300,000 African slaves were imported into the British colonies (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 28).

Unfortunately, this trade in slave labor found waiting a pliable form of Christianity – made sensitive by political and economic factors – ready to be synchronized with it.

THE RELIGIOUS RATIONALIZATION FOR SLAVERY

In the United States, the institution of slavery was supported on the religious front by use of a biblical teaching which Dinesh D'Souza has called an “innovation in biblical exegesis” and a “dubious interpretation” (1995, p. 101). Having started with the idea that enslaving Africans was a sort of missionary activity that would introduce them to Christianity, American evangelicalism had to subsequently justify – or at least romanticize – the continued enslavement of the converted Africans. One of the biblical arguments created to support this was what has been called “the Hamitic Myth,” that Noah’s curse upon his son Ham’s descendants (cf. Gen. 9.18-27) was to be understood as a curse upon the Africans (Peterson, 1978, pp. 41-49, 70-84; Haynes, 2002, pp. 65-104; Marsh, 1997, pp. 92-93; Genovese, 1974, p. 245; Garrett, 1989, p. 58).

In the narrative, the Old Testament Patriarch Noah becomes intoxicated and falls asleep in his tent. One of his three sons, Ham, sees him lying in the tent naked. While the exact nature of Ham’s sin is unclear, his son Canaan is cursed by Noah when he awakes, the curse being that of servant-hood to the descendants of Noah’s other two sons, Shem and Japheth. Ham is generally recognized, even by commentators not subscribing to the Hamitic Myth, as the ancestor of dark-skinned peoples. This conclusion is based on the genealogical information in Genesis 10, and is generally conceded by both black and white commentators (e.g., Custance, *volume I*, 1975, pp. 101-112; Yamauchi, 2004, pp. 19-33; Felder, 2002, pp. 7-13). Thus, this “curse” was applied by U.S. slaveholders (and supporters) to the black slaves, enslavement being seen as their destiny.

While traces of the Hamitic Myth can be found among early Muslims and Europeans, it was never fully developed until its promotion in the United States beginning as early as 1670 (Yamauchi, 2004, pp. 22-28). Even then, the doctrine was not in widespread use until the 19th century (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 35). Stephen Haynes has written that “By the 1830s ... Noah’s curse had become a stock weapon in the arsenal of slavery’s apologists, and references to Genesis 9 appeared prominently in their publications” (2002, p. 8). It was Josiah Priest (mid-19th century), a pastor in the North, who most developed the interpretation in his *Bible Defense of Slavery*, published in 1853 and widely circulated (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 28).

Alan Davies writes that this interpretation “played a crucial role in rendering black slavery congenial to Christian morality” (1988, p. 6). The Hamitic Myth was so potent that some have argued that it was imported into African ideology purposely by the West in the 19th century, eventually creating the situation which erupted in the 1994 massacre of the Tutsis by the Hutus in Rwanda (Gourevitch, 1998, pp. 50-53). It was this idea that theologian H. Richard Niebuhr referred to as a “mythological interpretation” of scripture. Whether by this device or through regarding the situation of slavery as simply a “law of nature,” the result was a “mythological anthropology”:

...the assumption of superiority by one group – an assumption which became unquestioned social tradition – has been given the dignity of an impartial natural law and regarded as a self-evident truth. By virtue of the marvellous [*sic*] inconsistency of human reason, it has often been maintained unchallenged alongside of the other self-evident truth that all

men are created free and equal and endowed with the same rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (1967, p. 237).

The many biblical passages, already examined, teaching human equality and pan-ethnic community were spiritualized and treated as eschatological, rather than practical, texts (D'Souza, 1995, p. 104). That is, such realities were represented as being meant for the hereafter rather than the here and now.

In this way, many American Christians came to read the Bible with a great degree of confirmatory bias and interpreted the text through *eisegesis* – reading a meaning *into* the text -- rather than *exegesis* – extracting the meaning *out* of the text (Goings, 1995, pp. 42-43). The Hamitic Myth was not accepted by everyone; some simply pointed to Old and New Testament texts that regulated slavery to argue for the validity of the institution (Yamauchi, 2004, p. 29). Christian attitudes cut across the various justifying theories, ranging from servitude being the African's due to paternalistic sympathy to disagreement without accompanying activism. It should be noted, however, that Darwinian theories of racial superiority, eventually becoming common in the North, were generally rejected by southern Christians as being contrary to the Bible (Wilson, 2005, pp. 30-32).

In any case, the social basis not only for slavery, but also for segregation in its various forms, was created and eventually accepted by most evangelicals of the time. Yet the mere use of Christian scripture cannot be equated with faithfulness to its message:

... one can readily see that those who found support for race based chattel slavery in the New Testament *systematically bowdlerized the message of Jesus of Nazareth in order to make the message fit with the institution they sought to defend* (Elshtain, 2001, pp. 58-59, emphasis mine).

CHRISTIANITY & THE AFRICAN SLAVES

When African slaves were first imported to the United States, there was an initial fear that conversion to Christianity would automatically entitle them to freedom (Niebuhr, 1967, pp. 248-249; Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 23; DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 45). Such fears implicitly suggest that the earliest Christian emphasis on a pan-ethnic community remained evident on some level, even to those who owned slaves. Therefore, many slave holders were against evangelizing their slaves and the spiritual state of the slaves was largely ignored during the 16th and early 17th centuries (Genovese, 1974, p. 185).

Nevertheless, there were some prominent ministers of the 17th century who argued for the spiritual instruction of slaves. Among these was the well-known Puritan minister Cotton Mather (1663-1728), who was “perhaps the best known of the early advocates for African-American Christianization” and held regular Sunday meetings for slaves (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 23). Protestant missionaries from Europe were already coming to the colonies to evangelize the slaves by the early 1700s (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 241; DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 44-45). Given the economic interests in the slave trade, universalistic emphases in Christian Scripture and tradition had to be altered in order to please everyone in the white majority.

Once laws were in place insuring that conversion and/or baptism would in no way grant freedom to converted slaves, many Christian masters began to encourage their slaves to become Christians (Stampp, 1956, p. 156; Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 23-24). There were many conversions, with many ministers working to bring the gospel message to the slaves. It was primarily the Baptists and the Methodists who were the most

diligent, and the most successful, in this task (Stampp, 1956, p. 372). The success of this evangelism was heightened by the introduction of revivalism through ministers like George Whitefield (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 25-26; DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 46-47). Slave conversions began to reach “noticeable proportions” by 1760 (Genovese, 1974, p. 185).

However, social factors forced further repackaging of the Christian message:

The master class understood, of course, that only a carefully censored version of Christianity could have this desired effect [i.e., perpetuating slavery]. Inappropriate biblical passages had to be deleted; sermons that might seem proper for freedmen were not necessarily proper for slaves. Church leaders addressed themselves to this problem and prepared special catechisms and sermons for bondsmen, and special instructions for those concerned with their religious indoctrination (Genovese, 1974, pp. 159-160).

This practice was an indication that the earliest Christian context had already been altered. The early Christians (1st-4th centuries) feared God rather than man, practicing their faith in revolutionary ways that most often put them at odds with the surrounding culture.

In contrast, we see in the early days of the U.S. that there was little difficulty in refashioning religion to maintain the *status quo*:

Most planters initially were reluctant to foster the conversion of their slaves to Christianity because they feared that it might provide them with notions of equality and freedom. Eventually, however, they became

convinced that a *selective interpretation* of the Gospel would foster docility in their subjects (Baer, 1998, emphasis mine).

Even the evangelizing of the slaves played into the agenda of slave holders: "religious services on Sundays kept idle slaves at home and out of mischief" (Genovese, 1974, p. 159). It appears that many ministers were sincere in their concern for the spiritual welfare of the slaves (Keillor, 1996, pp. 52-56, 59-80). However, in their refusal to question the institution of slavery itself, "they unintentionally laid the groundwork for the more advanced nineteenth-century pro-slavery biblically-based doctrines" and, eventually, "the gospel came to be a significant force for social control" (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 24-25).

It is important to recognize that the southern perspective on slavery evolved along economic lines. Before cotton came to play such an important economic role in the South, southern Americans were largely against the continuation of slavery (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 189; Wilson, 2005, pp. 52-55). Afterwards, however, white evangelicals in the South were guided "by the necessity of extorting from Scripture a warrant for the segregation and subordination of half the population" (Wacker, 1995, p. 391). Thus, the social factors shaping Christian opinion in the South included as a main emphasis the desire to reap economic benefits despite having to practice slavery to do it (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 22).

As the African slaves began to adopt Christianity, two fresh conceptualizations were established in their belief system.⁵ First, converted slaves understood the

⁵ There is a debate among scholars concerning the role which traditional African religious conceptions played in the belief systems of the converted slaves. Some maintain that the converted slaves largely maintained their traditional religious beliefs and adapted them to Christianity (e.g., Frey & Wood, 1998), while others argue that most of the converts altered their religious conceptions (e.g., Keillor, 1996). This

universalistic emphases of the biblical text better than much of the white majority wanted them to. For instance, one “former slave recalled the ecstasy he felt when he learned that there was a salvation ‘for every man’ and that God loved black men as well as white” (Genovese, 1974, p. 372). This perspective prevented the “complete dehumanization” of the slaves by presenting “alternative views of their worth in God’s eyes” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 201). However, many white ministers embraced Christian universalism only enough to maintain a concern for the spiritual welfare of their slaves even while simultaneously embracing a dualistic paradigm that denied their slaves social mobility (Blassingame, 1979, p. 269).

In contrast, having benefited from a universal salvation, Christian slaves applied this same universalism in very practical ways. Remarkably, this even included their attitudes toward their white masters. As Genovese notes, “For the slaves, whites lived under God and were brothers in Christ” (1974, pp. 281-282). Further, it was this very attitude that, rooted in the earliest Christian context, enabled the slaves to make sense of their situation by empowering them both to forgive those enslaving them and to judge their enslavement as sub-Christian – an outlook that W.E.B. Du Bois considered superior to that of the white slave holders who professed Christianity (Genovese, 1974, p. 282).

Second, the message of Christ and select passages of the Bible (e.g., Joseph being sold into slavery, the Exodus from Egypt) were adapted to the situation faced by the

debate is largely beyond the scope of the present thesis. The fact that the African American denominations that eventually evolved from the conversions among slaves maintain theological beliefs virtually identical to their white counterparts would seem to suggest that any significant long-term syncretism of traditional African religion and Christianity is an untenable theory. However, this is not meant to deny that there were considerable intersections between some of the beliefs/values of traditional African religion and those of Christianity (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 26). Given that traditional African religious beliefs varied a great deal from one African group to another, with some of the slaves even being Christians and Muslims *prior* to arriving in the United States, it would be almost impossible to guess what influences prevailed where and with whom (Frey & Wood, 1998, pp. 9-10).

slaves almost as soon as they were known. Although developed informally, this was a kind of liberation theology crafted by oppressive experience:

When the black slaves of the New World made [Christianity] their own, they transformed it into a religion of resistance – not often of revolutionary defiance, but of a spiritual resistance that accepted the limits of the politically possible. (Genovese, 1974, p. 254).

The slaves related easily to Bible stories about God's faithfulness in the midst of slavery (Gen. 38-50), God's deliverance of a people in slavery (Exodus), and the innocent Christ suffering at the hands of religious people (the four Gospels) (Genovese, 1974, p. 253; Blassingame, 1979, pp. 133, 145-146; Davies, 1988, p. 106). Overall, "they emphasized the idea of collective deliverance of the slaves as a people by their choice of such heroes as Moses, Jonah, and Daniel" (Genovese, 1974, p. 244). The general effect of this emphasis is described by African American theologian James H. Evans, Jr.:

The conviction that they were the people of God did not descend on them all at once, but came through the unhurried and timely revelation of God. The commonality of their oppression drew them together, and along with this sense of cohesiveness came the revelation that they were also God's people. If the Middle Passage and slavery obscured their history as Africans, they found in the biblical story a sense of themselves as remembered by God. This aspect of the life of the black church is the reason for its tendency toward engagement with the world and social witness (1992, p. 121).

Sometimes converted slaves took their faith more literally than white Christians might have wished. For instance, a black woman was excommunicated from a Baptist church in 1807 after converting. Apparently, she became too vocal, having “acquired the crazy idea that no Christian should hold slaves” (Genovese, 1974, p. 192). Although selective biblical texts urged submission to masters, the very same texts also taught the slaves that their masters had a Master as well and this revelation had a positive affect on the outlook of the slaves (Genovese, 1974, p. 165). For the converted slaves, Christianity came to mean both a spiritual empowerment by which “African-Americans came to understand and reclaim their intrinsic worth as human beings,” as well as a spiritual liberation that “meant walking in the newness of life, no longer fettered by self-doubt and flagging confidence” and “freedom from the sin of slavery as well as the slavery of sin” (Evans, Jr., 1992, p. 17).

What is now referred to as “the Black Church” is an institution that began prior to the abolition of slavery. It was generally agreed that the “best system” was for slave owners to take spiritual responsibility for their own slaves, an ideal that took on various manifestations (Stampp, 1956, p. 162). Some slave holders even built churches on their plantations for their slaves (Stampp, 1956, p. 161), or took their slaves to church with them (Blassingame, 1979, p. 132). Other slaves could only worship in white churches, or in special “black churches” overseen by white ministers (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 24). Other slave holders took only the domestic slaves to church with them (Stampp, 1956, p. 161; Genovese, 1974, p. 189).

While most of the antebellum churches of the south allowed black membership in their churches, all mixed services were segregated by seating arrangement (Stampp,

1956, p. 161). In fact, “Most white churches... had been segregated long before the eighteenth century” (Stewart, 1986, p. 134). The only exceptions were the major historic revivals (e.g., the First and Second Great Awakenings), where black and white typically worshipped together, and often in very similar ways (Stampp, 1956, p. 372). Such interracial gatherings were the result of a “message of racial equality” evident in the preaching of such revival leaders as George Whitefield (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 25-26).

Mainstream Christianity was unable to question the fact of spiritual redemption for the slaves, but it always remained a stratified redemption. The antebellum evangelicals retained a theoretical universalism, but limited the concept to an eschatologically-focused evangelism – i.e., saving souls for the afterlife where everything would then be equalized. The earliest Christian context had been stripped of the *practical* ramifications of identity and community.

SLAVERY & SEGREGATED WORSHIP IN THE UNITED STATES

A survey of historical sources seems to reveal a very confusing picture. This is probably due to the confusion of white evangelicals over how to best bring about the religious instruction of slaves. Converted slaves worshipped within a wide variety of settings:

... with whites, with free blacks, exclusively by themselves, and in private. Slave masters often took house slaves to religious services at white churches, where they were required to sit in separate galleries or in balconies. Although white ministers presided over these services for slaves, the latter often chose instead to hold meetings in their quarters, in

"praise houses" or "hush arbors," or even deep in the woods, swamps, and caverns (Baer, 1998).

It seems reasonable, based on so many different arrangements, that whites did not know quite what to do with converted slaves. On the one hand, most white Christians supported segregation to one degree or another (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 48-49). Slave holders, on the other hand, seemed torn between letting their slaves leave to attend established churches (outside of their supervision) or making them worship in their own "black church meetings" (which might lead to rebellious talk and attitudes). At times, black preachers were even punished or banished for daring not to maintain the *status quo* in their preaching (McAdam, 1999, pp. 91-92). In the end, slaveholders and their supporters sought to maintain control at all times.

Churches that were in existence by the late 1700s are generally considered to be the first black churches in America, founded by early black preachers like Andrew Bryan and George Liele (Bennett, 1990, p. 80). In the South were the African Baptist (Bluestone) Church (1758), a plantation church in Virginia, and the Silver Bluff Baptist Church in South Carolina, founded sometime between 1750-1775 (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 23). In the North were the African Church of St. Thomas (July, 1794), which joined the Protestant Episcopal Church within a month of its dedication, and the Bethel AME Church, founded around the same time in Philadelphia (Bennett, 1990, p. 637). Genovese states that, during this time, a "double push for separation" was taking place that came from both white and black directions, although for very different reasons (1976, p. 235).

It is interesting that, around this same time, some Baptists (even in the South) were opposed to slavery:

The Virginia Association of Baptist Churches in 1789 adopted a resolution which declared slavery to be “violent deprivation of the rights of nature, and inconsistent with a republican government” and recommended to the brethren “to make use of every legal measure to extirpate this horrible evil from the land” (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 192).

Likewise, the General Conference of the Methodist Church was expressing similar views, even excommunicating slave-holding members and suspending ministers who refused to free their own slaves (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 192). The coming exodus of African Americans from the established Protestant churches had little to do with slavery *per se*, a topic that I will examine further below.

Currently the largest African American denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church grew out of the Free African Society, which included among its eight founders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, pp. 80-81). In November, 1787 there was a crucial event that served as the catalyst for both the first two black churches in the North and the founding of the AME denomination.

Richard Allen described this event vividly:

A number of us usually attended St. George’s church in [*sic*] Fourth street; and when the colored people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall, and on Sabbath morning we went to church and the sexton stood at the door, and told us to go in the gallery.... We expected to

take the seats over the ones we formerly occupied below, not knowing any better.... Meeting had begun and they were nearly done singing and just as we got to the seats, the leader said, "Let us pray." We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees ... having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up off his knees, and saying, "You must get up – you must not kneel here." Mr. Jones replied, "Wait until the prayer is over." [The trustee] said, "No, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and force you away." Mr. Jones said, "Wait until prayer is over, and I will get up and trouble you no more." With that [the trustee] beckoned to one of the other trustees ... to come to his assistance. He came, and went to William White to pull him up. By this time prayer was over, and *we all went out of the church in a body, and they were no more plagued with us in the church.* (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 81, emphasis mine).

Absalom Jones and Richard Allen disagreed over how best to proceed after this separation from the established (white) Methodist church. Jones led the majority to found the African Church of St. Thomas as part of the Episcopal denomination, but without the full participatory status afforded the white Episcopal churches. Allen, to the contrary, "demanded full rights in a white church, if possible, and in a black church, if necessary," going on to found the Bethel AME church as an independent black Methodist church. From the Bethel church, the AME denomination was organized in 1816 and Allen was named its first bishop (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, pp. 81-82).

This genesis of the Black Church is crucial to an adequate understanding of the inconsistency between the original Christian context and the reality of segregated worship. To begin with, Allen's group was willing to worship with whites in the same church, and this despite the strict segregation maintained within the church. Even after the horrendous event related above, Allen's priorities remained significant. What he really wanted was "full rights" within the existing churches -- a demand that was entirely reasonable, given the original Christian context. His idea for a "black church" was a *last resort*, to be used only if "necessary."

Allen simply wanted blacks to enjoy equality and inclusion as part of the Christian community. They were told that God loved them just as much as white Christians, but they had to sit, and even pray, in designated areas -- the inconsistency was obvious and blatant. The significance of this analysis is the fact that it was *not* black Christians who initiated the separation, but white Christians. Even after the establishment of the AME, one Methodist historian admits that "From the beginning, this denomination [AME] took a strong stance against segregation in church membership and as a consequence has always counted some white persons among its members" (Norwood, 1978, p. 171). In any case, this early separation between black and white Christians represented a historical situation where "the forces that had been clandestinely pulling against one another finally resulted in the shattering of any notion of a unified church in America," having "established enduring patterns in the social understanding of the churches in the U.S." (Evans, Jr., 1992, p. 120).

In 1796, another group of black Christians separated themselves from the predominantly white John Street Methodist Episcopal church in New York City. The

situation within Methodism that created this division was a reenactment of the same attitudes that created the AME:

... the English-based Methodist societies had taken an early stance against slavery and welcomed African-Americans into their membership. By 1793, however, the proportion of black members had risen to over 40 percent, and the resulting tension and discriminatory treatment in conjunction with the refusal to fully ordain black preachers and allow them to join the conference as itinerants sparked the move toward separation (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1998, p. 56).

The group from John Street was led by a former slave named Peter Williams to begin meeting in a black offshoot of the white church. This church joined with another black congregation in New York City, Asbury AME Church, in 1816. By 1820, the two churches had formed a distinct "African Conference" under the umbrella of the white denomination.

Eventually, the conference "developed into a separate denomination largely through the continued recalcitrance of the parent church over racial issues" (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1998, p. 57). The new denomination, owing to some in-house disputes, refused identification with the existing AME Church and became known as the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1848. The AME Zion denomination produced several key abolitionists, among them Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. This organization would eventually become the second largest black Methodist denomination (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1998, p. 58). The white Methodist groups today realize, with great

sadness, that they have “experienced considerable loss of black membership through the organization of independent black churches” (Norwood, 1978, p. 174).

Baptists in the early 19th century probably came closest to achieving true fellowship between white and black Christians. Of all evangelical groups, Baptists at that time were more prepared to ordain black ministers. Distinguished black preachers of that period were more plentiful among Baptists than any other denomination. Some of these black ministers were pastors of racially mixed, and occasionally even all-white, churches. The great majority of black Baptists were found mixed in with white Baptists until the white paradigm began to shift to accommodate slavery and segregation (Niebuhr, 1967, pp. 246-247). However, given the varying degrees of inequality among all of the Protestant groups, “the association of white and black Christians in the various churches prior to the Civil War is scarcely to be regarded as a demonstration of the Christian principle of brotherhood and equality” (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 252).

By the 1830s, partly due to the slave uprisings Nat Turner and others, southern whites were generally opposed to “negro churches” in the fear that such gatherings might serve as venues for the planning of future rebellion (Stampp, 1956, p. 157; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 25). Lincoln and Mamiya write that “increasingly severe restrictions were placed on [black] religious activities until ‘independent’ became a misnomer where southern black congregations were concerned” (1992, p. 25).

It was the persistence of Christian slaves, considered unresponsive to physical punishments, that eventually led to their being granted some autonomy in their worship (Blassingame, 1979, p. 147). Slave holders and ministers rationalized their compromise in this one area by reasoning that, by “accepting the inevitable” and actually encouraging

black preachers, they could at least retain some supervisory control (Genovese, 1976, p. 260). In this way, white hands remained on the “black churches.” Generally, in the pre-Civil War years, only the North had independent black churches in the same sense in which they exist today; such a thing was forbidden in the South due to the laws against slave assemblies (Stampp, 1956, p. 373). Stewart writes that “as the 1830s opened, every black population center of consequence supported several active congregations” (1986, p. 134).

During the 1830s, both Baptists and Methodists in the South began to reconcile themselves to the idea of slavery, changing previously held policies to accommodate the practice in order to adapt to the surrounding southern white constituency. Such “unstable compromise” among the southern Protestants rendered the subsequent denominational splits “inevitable” (Niebuhr, 1967, pp. 193-194). All three major Protestant denominations engaged in the evangelizing of the slaves – Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists –divided over the issue of slavery by the 1860s (Osborn, 1958, pp. 118-119; Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 34). The Southern Baptist Convention came into existence in 1845, after Baptist advocates of slavery reacted to northern Baptists’ refusal to appoint a slave-holder as a missionary by a deliberate act of separation (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 25; Snay, 1993, pp. 135-136). Recognized as a Southern Baptist pioneer, theologian John L. Dagg defended slavery based on the Hamitic Myth interpretation of Genesis 9 (Barnhart, 1986, p. 130). As late as 1859, Southern Baptist theologian and founder of Southern Seminary James P. Boyce referred to himself as “an ultra-proslavery man” (Marsh, 1997, p. 95). Slavery aside, segregated worship was also generally established:

During the last three decades of the antebellum period Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and others accelerated, both by design and simply taking the path of least resistance, the long-developing trend toward racial separation within the churches (Genovese, 1976, p. 235).

At times, remnants of Jesus' original ethic toward others would resurface, producing what one books calls "historical seasons of reconciliation" (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 42-43). In these times, certain individuals or groups would grasp some aspect of their religion which they had neglected or ignored and begin to work for change.⁶ Even as early as the 18th century, there were Christians who reasoned along the lines of the earliest Christian context:

The evangelical ideal of a true community of believers and the insistence that the conversion experience was open to all people, regardless of race or sex, had profound egalitarian implications. "Christ has shed his blood for all nations," suggested one Virginian in 1774, "and therefore why should we counteract the kind intentions of heaven, by enslaving and making them miserable, and thereby putting an effectual bar in the way of their conversion?" (Snay, 1993, p. 22).

Likewise, a northern Baptist minister spoke for a growing minority in 1770, saying that "We, the patrons of liberty, have dishonored the Christian name, and degraded human nature nearly to a level with the beasts" (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 28).

⁶ I have purposely left out speculations as to how and why this happens to some and not to others. Religious attitudes, some being consistent in moving from the abstract to the concrete and some not, represent a complex reality for which reductionistic explanations abound. A comprehensive survey and evaluation of such theories are beyond the scope of the analysis being presented here. Nevertheless, the fact that some religious people act more consistently with their religion than others is historically undeniable.

In the early 19th century, the commitments of some evangelicals actually led them to set their slaves free (Snay, 1993, p. 22). Many evangelicals, caught between religious ideals and socioeconomic factors, embraced a type of cognitive dissonance on race issues that is evident in historical records. For instance, the Presbyterian General Assembly of 1818 expelled one of their ministers for holding anti-slavery ideas while *at the same time* condemning the institution of slavery as “utterly inconsistent with the law of God” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 29).

It is certainly true that evangelicals produced ardent pro-slavery advocates like James P. Boyce and P.I. Lipsey (Marsh, 1997, pp. 94-95). However, American evangelicalism also gave rise to abolitionists like John Wesley (Davies, 1988, p. xi), Charles Finney (Stewart, 1986, pp. 35, 58) and Jacob Green (Noll, 1995, pp. 120-124). Finney was particularly radical in his denunciation of slavery and racism, refusing to admit slave holders to communion and maintaining that no true Christian could remain neutral on the issue (Dayton, 1976, pp. 15-19; Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 31-32). In the 1840s, white abolitionists were setting up what were called “free churches,” where mixed memberships worshipped free of segregation (Stewart, 1986, p. 134).

It is also necessary to mention the Quakers as one of the strongest Christian influences for abolitionism:

From the first, Quakers stressed the absolute universality of God’s love, the brotherhood of man, and the sinfulness of physical coercion. Such beliefs led some Quakers, including the religion’s founder, George Fox, to conclude that holding slaves violated God’s fundamental precepts (Stewart, 1986, p. 14).

The Quakers were the first Christian group to maintain that slavery and racist policies violated biblical standards, protesting as early as 1676 (Stewart, 1986, p. 15; DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 51). Given this fact, the Quakers were an important witness to the earliest Christian context at a time when many other evangelicals were not.

Not only this, but there were also particular theologians working in their own way to change the prevailing thinking on slavery (Stewart, 1986, p. 15). Many white evangelicals eventually came to consider slavery as “the foulest of the nation’s transgressions” and “an emblem of colonial iniquity” (Stewart, 1986, p. 21; Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 28). In 1836, the Maine Baptist Association publicly aligned itself with this same sentiment, stating that “slavery was the ‘most abominable’ of all the systems of iniquity that had cursed the world” (Snay, 1993, p. 135). Of course, at this same time there were black preachers, both Methodist and Baptist, who championed abolition alongside their white counterparts. These included men like “Samuel D. Cornish, William Allen, Charles B. Ray, Peter Williams, Henry Highland Garnet, Theodore S. Wright, and Samuel Ringgold Ward” (Stewart, 1986, p. 135).

By 1860, thousands of slaves had become professing Christians, learning “the rudiments of Christianity” despite the inconsistencies of the pro-slavery white preachers who instructed them (Blassingame, 1979, p. 130). Richmond, Virginia had four African Baptist churches by this time, though they were all controlled by white pastors and boards (Stampp, 1956, p. 160). Generally, “in the South a large congregation of colored people could lay no claim to sovereignty apart from the white people” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 25). There was, however, an African Baptist church in Georgia that was being led by a freed slave named Andrew Marshall (Stampp, 1956, p. 160).

Anti-slavery voices that appeared among Christians of the period are analogous to the warmth that remains after the fire is put out. Such activists were a manifestation of what researcher Gordon Allport later described in terms of intrinsic versus extrinsic commitment among church goers (Lewy, 1996, p. 101). Those labeled intrinsic had actually internalized their religious beliefs to the degree that it affected the observable course of their decisions and actions, while those labeled extrinsic merely participated in the outward trappings of their religion. Allport's research found that intrinsic Christians were less likely to adopt racist viewpoints, while extrinsic Christians were more likely than even non-Christians to do so. Intrinsic believers only occupied a small percentage of the religious set, and were thus typically voicing the minority position (Lewy, 1996, pp. 101-103). While most southern evangelicals rationalized slavery in one way or another, a minority hearkened back to the earliest Christian context by maintaining anti-slavery positions.

However, an important clarification is in order. While some have pointed out that radical abolitionism began among Protestants, pro-black sentiments among them generally ended there (D'Souza, 1995, p. 103). Abolitionists were against slavery in principle, but were not necessarily interested in practicing their faith alongside their black brothers and sisters (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 28-32). All in all, either directly or indirectly through indifference, American evangelicals were still practicing something foreign to the earliest Christian context, an *altered* Context – what author Mitchell Snay has termed a “gospel of disunion” (1993). One glaring example of this type of cognitive dissonance was Charles Finney (1792-1875), one of the most celebrated evangelical abolitionists. Despite the incorporation of anti-slavery sentiment in his sermons, he

continued to defend the notion that African Americans were inferior and even segregated black from white in his own church (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 33).

Ending slavery because slavery was wrong was a noble achievement, but severely short sighted. Even in freedom, the former slaves were largely treated as second-class members in the established churches. Alexis de Tocqueville epitomized the paternalistic attitude of superiority that attended even the abolition of slavery:

We have seen something absolutely without precedent in history – servitude abolished, *not by the desperate effort of the slave, but by the enlightened will of the master....* It is we who have given a definite and practical meaning to the Christian idea that all men are born equal, and applied it to the realities of this world. (D'Souza, 1995, pp. 104-105, emphasis mine).

Emerson and Smith explain the significance of Finney's inconsistency for determining the general consensus of his day:

If the well-educated and progressive Finney willingly spoke out against slavery, but not racial prejudice and segregation, it is reasonable to suppose that grassroots evangelicals, though perhaps viewing slavery as wrong, were often prejudiced, continued to view African Americans as inferior, and were generally opposed to integration of the races. Although calling for a people to be freed, they did not call for an end to racialization. *This allowed for a new form of racial inequality to spring forth after slavery's demise* (2000, p. 33, emphasis mine).

How could there have been radical Christians holding on to pieces of the earliest Christian context, and yet the situation still have evolved to its present state? Niebuhr explains:

It is true that the church has had its seasons of enthusiasm for brotherhood and courageous leaders, who sought to apply the ethics of the gospel to the relations of the races. But the latter frequently suffered an early disillusionment when confronted with the stubborn obstacles of race prejudice and social custom. The days of enthusiasm passed away and *the church compromised its principle of brotherhood by dividing into white and black groups*, as previously it had compromised by dividing into religious societies of the rich and poor and of the nations (1967, pp. 238-239, emphasis mine).

It would seem that many white Christians regarded previous moral stands (e.g., the abolition of slavery) as fulfilling their responsibility toward black Christians. They subsequently failed to acknowledge the inherent humanity of their newly freed brothers and sisters in significant ways.

This was possible largely due to a kind of cognitive dissonance that allowed many abolitionists to affirm the religious necessity of abolishing slavery while at the same time retaining notions of black inferiority based on either old religious ideas or the new “scientific” ideas becoming popular at the time (Kivisto, 1998). Such ideas included the drift of public opinion away from traditional *monogenesis*, the doctrine that all humans descended from a common set of parents, to *polygenesis*, which proposed varying origins for varying ethnicities (Davies, 1988, p. 11). Some Christians adapted polygenesis to

their theology by inventing the idea of “pre-Adamites,” other races created by God prior to Adam (Davies, 1988, p. 13). Those Christians who felt uncomfortable with the inconsistency between biblical teaching and polygenesis continued to rely on the Hamitic Myth to conceptualize black people as inferior to themselves (Davies, 1988, p. 12).

Several seemingly unrelated factors – “ethnocentric pride, color dualism, physical contrast, religious symbolism, biblical exegesis, theological exposition, purity of blood imagery, scientific classification, polygenesis, craniometry” – were fused into a justifying racist ideology (Davies, 1988, p. 16). The altered Christian context that the United States began with became twisted beyond recognition, a reality that Alan Davies has aptly termed “infected Christianity”:

Slowly and inexorably a metamorphosis was taking place that, once realized, would shatter a host of humane values from the rich store of Western ethics: Stoic natural law, New Testament brotherly love, Roman jurisprudence, medieval Scholasticism, Renaissance humanism, Catholic and Protestant spirituality, Kantian morality, and democratic idealism (1988, p. 15).

Whatever remnants had been left of the earliest Christian context had generally disappeared:

Racism was a tragic product of modernity; it represented the ambiguous and finally sinister side of the disintegration of what was once a great Christian cosmology, and its manifestation was fraught with peril for the future of humanity (Davies, 1988, p. 19).

Believing that slavery was unjust while still holding a fundamentalist racist ideology was not seen as inconsistent:

Anglo-Saxondom...reinforced the opposition of the white church to black gains in the troubled and volatile society of the post-bellum American south. Science as well as scripture, in a rare coincidence of ideas, decreed the submission of the children of Ham to the children of Japheth. It was a subject which flourished in the churches of Protestant Christianity, including their social gospel preachers and leaders (Davies, 1988, p. 84, emphasis mine).

Thus, segregated worship was a reality “even for denominations that had been in the forefront of the abolitionist crusade” (Pope, 1957, p. 108). The only exception to this was the southern Presbyterian churches, which stated in 1867 “that in the judgment of the Assembly, it is highly inexpedient that there should be any ecclesiastical separation of the white and colored races; that such a measure would threaten evil to both races, and especially to the colored” (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 244). In fact, it was the Presbyterians that seemed to have the most success with a truly integrated worship experience in the years before the Civil War. Unfortunately, the Presbyterian impact was generally inconsequential due to the fact that their evangelistic efforts among African Americans were minimal and resulted in only a very small minority of black members. The vast majority of black Protestants had to contend with the segregative policies of Methodist and Baptist churches.

EMANCIPATION & THE SOLIDIFICATION OF SEGREGATED WORSHIP

African Americans were freed from the institution of slavery, but the discriminatory attitudes persisted – even among Christians:

The religious taboos and practices of white Christians in the South were substantially unchanged by the outcome of the Civil War. African Americans were still considered less than human, whether in or out of the church. Some whites saw the breakup of slavery as sufficient reason to be done with the inconvenience of a black constituency. While the more general sentiment was for a retention of the black membership, there was no room for the expectation that they would be accorded anything other than the conventional status of subservience and segregation in all significant aspects of church life (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 61).

Most freed slaves were members of Baptist and Methodist denominations, both of which suffered further division over such racial issues such as segregation and the status of ordained African Americans (Osborn, 1958, pp. 118-119; DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 46-51). For instance, one Methodist body declared that while “the Negro was invited to remain in the church, it was expected he would continue in an inferior and subordinate relation” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 61). Christian theology in many white churches “permitted its central ideas and symbols, including Jesus himself, to be recast in a racist mould” (Davies, 1988, p. 25). Blacks were free, but with a whole new set of social restrictions.

Interestingly, the institution of slavery does not seem to have been the direct factor in the clustering of African Americans into independent, homogenous churches.

Nor do worship styles, forms of church government, or theological factors seem to have been especially relevant: "Though these factors varied, segregation was well-nigh universal" (Pope, 1957, p. 108). *The Encyclopedia of Religion & Society* notes that it was discrimination within the congregations that was dividing black and white Christians even before the abolition of slavery:

Early northern Baptist churches, such as the Joy Street Baptist Church in Boston (established in 1805) and the Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York (established in 1808), appear to have emerged as *protests to discrimination in racially mixed congregations* (Baer, 1998, emphasis mine).

Crucial was the issue of the "unequal and restrictive" participation that African Americans were being given in the churches (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 25). Earlier in history (1787), Richard Allen had gone on record demanding equality in the white churches, stating clearly that, if such proved impossible, a black church would be the inevitable result (Bennet, 1990, pp. 81-82; DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 52). A survey of the *history of segregated worship suggests that, in an important sense, Allen spoke for black attitudes in general. Pope made the following observation:*

After the [Civil] war, the emancipated Negroes were either forced out of the white churches or, as was more often the case, invited to remain under the previous [unequal, segregated] arrangements.... The vast majority of the Negroes preferred to have churches of their own and to manage their own affairs, *rather than be discriminated against inside the church* (1957, p. 114, emphasis mine).

Thus, separation came to be a *necessary* part of the black understanding of Christianity and its implications for the black experience:

... the world the slaves made was shaped by a Christianity that had been transformed from the version promoted by the slaveholders, with its emphasis on quiescence and acceptance of slavery, to one in which Christianity became the primary ideological basis for resisting oppression and for seeking liberation from slavery. After emancipation, with the emergence of a distinct African American community, the church proved to be a center of resistance to the oppressive conditions of the new racial order that emerged after the failure of Reconstruction (Kivisto, 1998).

It is important to recognize this fact, because the notion that black Christians have both created and purposely maintain the situation of segregated worship is an oft-repeated myth:

It is not true that "Negroes prefer their own churches" in the sense in which white people generally use that statement; there is overwhelming evidence that most Negroes oppose segregation as enforced exclusion. But *nearly all prefer their own churches to inferior status in white congregations* (Pope, 1957, p. 115, emphasis mine).

In short, there were no significant changes in the treatment of black church members after the abolition of slavery. If anything, black Christians were now more free than ever to build and lead their own congregations and so partake of the fullness of the Christian Faith, a type of participation denied them by the white churches.

A third black Methodist group originated in the post-slavery South. The restrictions on black participation noted above created a division within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South – a faction formed when the denomination divided over slavery in 1844. This division was different from previous Methodist divisions in that it was officially sanctioned by the predominantly white parent denomination. The denomination both desired and allowed the black members to form their own church under certain guidelines (including the forbiddance of political involvement). This new group, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America, was created in 1870 and eventually became the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church existing today (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, pp. 60-64).

In general, “independent [black] churches proliferated with the demise of slavery,” with nearly 500,000 black Baptists worshipping in their own churches by 1870 (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 25). Congregationalists were the last to segregate, adopting the arrangement in the early 1880s (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 53). During the 1880s, the Holiness movement birthed what is now known as the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana). This denomination embraced multiculturalism from its very inception, its ministers often defying existing segregation laws in holding interracial services (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 53-54). However, this emphasis had waned by the early 20th century and the denomination fell into the white church/black church patterns as other denominations had (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 55).

While the AME denomination already existed in the North and the CME had formed in the South, most of the new black churches coming into existence were Baptist:

Partly as a result of heightened race consciousness, partly in reaction to the discrimination of southern white Baptists and the paternalism of northern white Baptists, the independent church movement initiated among black Baptists in the antebellum period intensified during the Reconstruction and its aftermath (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 27).

One important contributing factor to this fact was the Baptist distinctive of the autonomy of the local church, a distinctive that made the establishment of separate churches easier for black Baptists than for black Christians of other denominations (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, pp. 25-26). This was an important factor even prior to the abolition of slavery:

From the very circumstance of its beginning, the [Black] church was confined to the plantation, and consisted primarily of a series of disconnected units; although, later on, some freedom of movement was allowed, still this geographical limitation was always important and was one cause of the spread of *the decentralized and democratic Baptist faith* among the slaves (Du Bois, 1995, pp. 216-217, emphasis mine).

While several black Baptist associations had formed in the North prior to the abolition of slavery, truly independent associations formed only after the Civil War as black Baptists broke away from the Southern Baptist Convention in protest of the discriminatory treatment they were receiving. The final manifestation of this mass exodus was the large National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., resulting from the merger of three separate conventions in Georgia in 1895 (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, pp. 26-28, 287).

Writing in 1903, African American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois described this time period as one of phenomenal growth for black churches in general:

The census of 1890 showed nearly twenty-four thousand Negro churches in the country, with a total enrolled membership of over two and a half millions, or ten actual church members for every twenty-eight persons, and in some Southern states one in every two persons. Besides these there is the large number who, while not enrolled as members, attend and take part in many of the activities of the church. There is an organized Negro church for every sixty black families in the nation, and in some States [*sic*] for every forty families ... (1995, p. 215).

From 1906 to 1909, there was a Christian revival characterized by the phenomenon of “speaking in tongues” taking place at the Azusa Street mission in Los Angeles. Led by a black Nazarene preacher named William Seymour, the Azusa Street Revival would make history as the being the birthplace of the Pentecostal movement. Ironically, this interracial revival owed its origins to a white Bible school run by Charles Parham where African American students (including Seymour) were required to sit segregated behind a curtain (Blumhofer, *Vol. 1*, 1989, p. 89).

From the beginning, Azusa Street was an interracial venture (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, pp. 76-77, 79; DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 57-59). In spite of the racist attitudes of Parham, there were strong undercurrents flowing into the revival from the black Holiness movement that produced “a strong interracial impulse within Pentecostalism” (Daniels, 1998, p. 19). Originally, the interracial nature of the revival extended to the leadership and there was even some talk of making the racial harmony aspect a key emphasis of the

movement (Daniels, 1998, p. 19). Unfortunately, this emphasis was lost fairly early, with the emphasis on experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit with its attendant manifestations becoming primary (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 59). This emphasis has had an enormous impact on millions of Christians, both black and white, that continues into the present. Imagine, however, what the impact of this movement might have been if racial reconciliation had remained a primary emphasis.

Initial cooperation between black and white Pentecostals was unable to prevent the eventual replication of the segregated worship that plagued other evangelical denominations. As Lincoln and Mamiya observe, “black Pentecostals began not as a separatist movement, but as part of a distinctly interracial movement *from which whites subsequently withdrew*” (1992, p. 76, emphasis mine). This observation may, however, be somewhat simplistic given the complex factors surrounding the relationship between Parham and Seymour.

Apparently, Seymour had assumed a leadership role that Parham was not ready to relinquish. The tense relationship, marked by jealousy and ego on both sides, eventually gave way to racist ideologies. Parham, the same seminary teacher from whom Seymour had received his credentials, suddenly began to write caustic comments about the revival, comments that were laced with racism:

[Parham] proved unwilling to work graciously with a black man, writing cuttingly of Seymour’s Los Angeles mission, where “big buck niggers” prayed with their arms around whites, and where the exuberant worship represented not the Holy Spirit, but “negroisms.” In fact, Parham believed that, among other excesses, “noises as practiced by the negroes of the

Southland” had been “pawned off on people all over the world as the working of the Holy Spirit” (Blumhofer, *Vol. 1*, 1989, p. 91).

Seymour, for his part, began to allow “explicit prejudice to surface in his own ranks: He reserved for ‘people of color’ to be officers of his mission, limiting whites to membership” (Blumhofer, *Vol. 1*, 1989, p. 91).

How much of the separation between black and white Pentecostals was due to this personal animosity between Parham and Seymour is impossible to tell. Of course, as with most social phenomena in history, other complex factors entered into the picture as well. For instance, Lincoln and Mamiya locate the reason for the Pentecostal division in the movement’s fundamentalist reactions to forces such as Darwinism, ecumenism, and the Social Gospel movement, priorities that distracted white Pentecostals from prioritizing their initial commitment to interracial worship:

The antiliberal orientation of the Pentecostal movement led also to the termination of its interracial character as separatist white denominations were organized. As this racial divergence occurred, certain practices evolved in different directions as well (1992, p. 79).

Thus, even before the Azusa Street revival had run its course, Pentecostals were already separating into black and white churches, much like the Baptists and Methodists had done before them.

Largest of the black Pentecostal denominations is the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), which finds its origins in the Holiness Movement of the late 19th century. Charles Price Jones, a Baptist preacher in Mississippi, was led by personal experience and shifts in his theological understanding to organize an interdenominational Holiness

group in 1897. Assisted primarily by Charles H. Mason, the new group was named the Churches of God in Christ (Blumhofer, Vol. 1, 1989, pp. 48-49). Jones stated that it was characteristic of their group to find "black and white, Jew and Gentile [seeking] God together" (Blumhofer, Vol. 1, 1989, p. 49). Once again, with the one exception of Seymour (who seemed driven by personal motives), black Christians are represented in history as maintaining a universalistic openness that their white peers most often lacked.

Attending the Azusa Street revival in 1907, Charles H. Mason left having experienced the coveted "baptism with the Spirit," including the physical manifestation of "speaking in tongues." Upon his return, the wider group was split on the new Pentecostal theology that Mason had adopted. By November of that same year, the COGIC was born as a thoroughly Pentecostal denomination. Although it was a minority of the larger group, Mason "led a substantial percentage of Jones's people into the Pentecostal movement" (Blumhofer, *Vol. 1*, 1989, p. 49; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 81). Jones continued to lead those who agreed with him, adopting the new name The Church of Christ (Holiness), U.S.A. However, "Those accepting the practice of tongue-speaking continued to follow Mason, retaining the name, corporate status, and most of the property of the original body" (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 81).

As with other leaders of black denominations, Mason was concerned about racial harmony within Christianity. One early attempt to foster this was the acceptance of two white congregations into the denomination, one of which later withdrew and became the seed that would eventually blossom into the Assemblies of God denomination (Daniels, 1998, p. 19). While the denomination remained primarily African American in

composition, that was certainly through no fault of the COGIC. The official church manual of the COGIC is still very clear on this issue:

The Church of God in Christ recognizes the fact that *all believers are one in Christ Jesus and all its members have equal rights*. Its overseers, both colored and white, have equal power and authority in the church (Daniels, 1998, p. 19, emphasis mine).

Amazingly, given the racially turbulent times with attendant opportunities for a bitter black Church, the COGIC manual has stated this since 1918. In general, black Pentecostals held firmly to the ideals of the original Christian context even when their white brothers and sisters did not: “Most black Pentecostals believed the ‘cleavage of the races’ was one of Pentecostalism’s chief issues and believed it was ‘sinful and embarrassing’” (Daniels, 1998, p. 19). The COGIC is today both the fastest growing black denomination and the largest black denomination of Pentecostal origin (Lewy, 1996, p. 127), though several smaller Holiness and Pentecostal groups also exist among black Christians (e.g., the Church of Christ Holiness, U.S.A.; the Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God in the Americas) (Sanders, 1996, pp. 17-18; DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 59).

With the establishment of black denominations among the Methodists, Baptists, and Pentecostals, not to mention scores of predominantly black local churches within the predominantly white denominations, segregated worship became the norm among evangelicals (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 61). Niebuhr gives a good summary of the progressive steps that led to this reality:

Every degree of fellowship was represented in the mixed churches and every degree of separation is represented in the schisms of the racial

groups. The series of steps from fellowship to schism includes complete fellowship of white and Negro Christians in the local church, segregation within the local church, segregation into distinctly racial local churches with denominational fellowship, segregation into racially distinct dioceses or conferences with fellowship in the highest judicatories of the denomination, and, finally, separation of the races into distinct denominations (1967, p. 253).

Yet, the earliest Christian context never languished long without its defenders. Southern Seminary, a Southern Baptist school founded in Kentucky by James P. Boyce, was conducting a “race relations” class as early as 1918. Its first professor, Charles Spurgeon Gardner, was surely one of the most radical evangelicals of his day:

Gardner had taught the brotherhood of humanity in Jesus Christ as the basis of any adequate Christian moral thought. He once responded to a student’s question of whether blacks would go to heaven by saying, “In my judgment the Negroes have a much better chance than a preacher who would raise such a question” (Marsh, 1997, p. 95).

Gardner’s successor was Jesse Weatherspoon, a professor every bit as radical as Gardner and one who “would soon become a leader in race reform both at Southern Seminary and in the Southern Baptist Convention.” Weatherspoon went a step further than Gardner, urging his students to act politically to challenge Jim Crow laws (Marsh, 1997, p. 96).

Nevertheless, a major factor negatively impacting future evangelical involvement in racial reconciliation emerged during the 1920s. The more ecumenical and theologically liberal Christians began to represent the more progressive stances on race

issues. Evangelicals, more theologically conservative by definition, began to imbibe a widespread attitude of guilt by association: “Because the liberal agenda included race activities, conservative Protestants tended to shy away from addressing the race issue” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 43).

There were some marginally evangelical groups who stood in the 1940s as more racially mixed than the majority – notably: Primitive Baptists, Congregational churches, and Quaker assemblies (Pope, 1957, p. 108). Further, official, enforced segregation had largely ended in the mainline Protestant churches beginning in 1946, after the practice was condemned by the Federal Council of Churches (Pope, 1957, p. 158). Yet, evangelical reformers and exceptions aside, segregated worship was still the general reality among Christians, in practical terms if not officially. This situation intensified during the mid-20th century, as the lines were drawn in the battle for civil rights. Many do not realize that white churches were also challenged, as black college students during the Civil Rights era protested by showing up for Sunday worship at white churches in many cities (Marsh, 1997, p. 100).

While black Christians, especially in urban churches, mobilized and organized for the movement that would find its greatest expression in the 1960s under the leadership of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., white evangelicals in the South generally opposed the movement. In fact, much of the white Christian support for the movement came not from evangelicals, but from the more theologically liberal mainline churches (Berk, 1997, pp. 73, 214-215). *Christianity Today*, still the most popular evangelical periodical, actually refused to publish reports on the movement lest they give “the impression that civil rights should be part of the Christian agenda” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 46). This

stance of non-involvement hearkens back to the liberal/conservative rift beginning in the 1920s and is yet another historical factor that has probably helped to solidify the socio-cultural distance between the Black Church and white evangelicals.

In the South, evangelical denominations remained hotbeds of internal struggles between Christian universalism and Christianized racism. For instance, the 1954 Southern Baptist Convention voted, by an enormous majority, to officially support *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Supreme Court case that ended segregation in public schools. However, some prominent ministers like Douglas Hudgins opposed the ruling and, despite official support, “segregation continued to be widely accepted as God’s good design for humanity” (Peake, 1990, p. 284; Marsh, 1997, pp. 98-99, 102).

Many Baptist pastors, prominent fundamentalist Jerry Falwell among them, had what was called a “closed-door policy” – i.e., the church doors were closed to African Americans (Marsh, 1997, p. 102). Prominent Texas SBC pastor W.A. Criswell, in 1956, “stood before the South Carolina Legislature and viciously denounced racial integration, having on the day before delivered the same address before an evangelistic conference” (Barnhart, 1986, pp. 130-131). T.R. Peake, Professor of history at King College, summarizes the attitudes of evangelicals during the Civil Rights era:

During the decade following the 1954 Supreme Court decision that overturned the “separate but equal” approach of the earlier *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision (1896), American churches remained essentially passive toward civil rights. In predominantly white churches, traditional segregationist and racial attitudes prevailed, especially in the South. Although churches typically opposed racial violence and officially hailed

the *Brown vs. the Board of Education* decision, the idea of racial equality was alien to many accepted beliefs and practices. (1990, p. 283).

Marsh wrote concerning the perspective of many white Christians of this era who affirmed some changes, but nevertheless remained attached to ethnocentric ideas of segregation and white superiority:

You were to stick yourself in the world ... with the conviction that the racial universe you inhabited represented God's and nature's careful selection and civilization's finest work. Because the future belonged to you, you were to think – if you must think at all – that Jim Crow is fine, that this is the way things are in the South and the way they will always be. The ordering of things, you were taught, ought never engender unkindness or cruelty, but the noblest of affections. Black folk and their humble lot could even be romanticized. The patrician sentiments of William Alexander Percy's widely read *Lanterns on the Levee* continued to rule the hearts of many white Christians. "The black man is our brother," wrote Percy, "a younger brother, not adult, not disciplined, but tragic, pitiable, and lovable; act as his brother and be patient" (1997, p. 117).

In stark contrast, black Christians maintained an amazingly consistent inclusive attitude. Pope, writing in 1957, stated this clearly:

Almost without exception [the Black Church] would welcome non-Negro worshipers to its services and to membership.... There can be no doubt of its open-door policy; some years ago eight hundred Negro churches were

asked if they objected to attendance by white persons and *not one replied in the affirmative* (p. 116, emphasis mine).

Today the largest Pentecostal denomination, representatives of the overwhelmingly white Assemblies of God deliberated in 1956 over the issue of segregation vs. integration. Initially intent on issuing an official statement, they ended up expunging from the minutes the entire discussion in frustration. Realizing that that the social and ecclesiastical costs were enormous regardless of which side they came down on, it was decided that a "Commission" would be appointed to indefinitely "study the issue." Ralph Riggs, then an Assemblies superintendent, stated that "Our answer to those who challenged us would simply be that we have a commission appointed to study the problem" (Blumhofer, *Vol. 2*, 1989, pp. 174-175). Riggs further explained the safe stance of the denomination:

We did not feel free to create a Colored Branch for this would be condoning segregation and even creating segregation when this is not felt the right thing to do at the present time. On the other hand, the intense social conflict, particularly in the deep South, makes it unwise to introduce integration at the present time. For these reasons we felt that it would be best for us to mark time at the moment until the matter had developed further in the public consciousness and practice (Blumhofer, *Vol. 2*, 1989, p. 176).

While some churches cited such strategic reasons for their policies, it must be noted that many others boldly stated their policies on segregation as traditions that they considered

in no way inconsistent with Christianity. For instance, the Galloway Memorial Methodist Church in Jackson, Mississippi enacted the following policy in January of 1963:

It is not un-Christian that we prefer to remain an all-white congregation.

The practice of the separation of the races in Galloway Memorial

Methodist Church is a time-honored tradition. We earnestly hope that the

perpetuation of that tradition will never be impaired (Marsh, 1997, p. 128).

It was this policy at Galloway that, in 1964, resulted in the strangest arrest of the Civil Rights movement. John Garner, a white Christian activist and a member of Galloway, showed up to teach his Sunday School class with one of his black students as a guest. Police were called, and Garner was arrested in his own church for his complicity in daring to "integrate" the congregation (Marsh, 1997, pp. 138-139).

After some major victories for civil rights (including the passage of the 1964 *Civil Rights Act*) and the publication of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s scathing "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (emphasizing white Christian responsibility in the struggle), white involvement experienced a significant increase (Peake, 1990, p. 284). King, though often considered too theologically liberal for evangelical tastes, had a clear picture both of the earliest and the altered Christian perspectives:

Recalling the transformational role of a "God-intoxicated" early

Christianity, he warned the churchmen he was addressing that the

institution they represented was decaying into an "irrelevant social

club".... Reconciliation of the races and what he termed "the beloved

community" was always King's deepest intent (Berk, 1997, p. 116,

emphases mine).

It was in 1965 that the Assemblies of God finally went public with a clear statement affirming Christian universalism and denouncing discriminatory practices (Blumhofer, *Vol. 2*, 1989, p. 178). However, while the results of the Civil Rights movement were profound, abstract ideological shifts fell short of visible integration – particularly, segregated worship remained the accepted arrangement.

In some African American circles, higher academia gave rise to a new “black theology.” The biblical theology guarded so faithfully by the early Church was remolded into an Afro-centric philosophy of liberation that often reconceptualized Jesus as a black man (Genovese, 1976, p. 708; D’Souza, 1995, p. 372). Ironically, white Christians often denounced such Afro-centric expressions of Christianity, when such expressions actually only mirror Eurocentric Christianity with its innumerable representations of Jesus as a blue-eyed white man. White evangelical protestors sometimes miss the point of such representations:

To make such an affirmation [i.e., a black Jesus] is not as radical as it may seem; historically Christians have tended to depict Jesus as being like them, since they perceive that he gave his life for them. Just so, *black theologians tended to think in terms of God and Jesus as black in order that blacks may more easily understand that God is not solely in the possession of white people*. God and Christian theology are not the exclusive property of white western Europeans and Americans (Flowers, 1984, pp. 190-191, emphasis mine).

While ethnic conceptualizations of Jesus are commonplace, there are some problematic elements with such representations regardless of where they come from:

The fact that the Jesus of history was neither an Aryan, a German, a Frenchman, an Anglo-Saxon, an Afrikaner, or a black cannot be emphasized too strongly, not only for reasons of historical accuracy but also because Christians must never be allowed to forget that the Christ in whom they believe is always *against* as well as *for* their cultures. To acknowledge the Jewishness of Jesus ... is to employ a potent antidote to a culture-bound Christianity, an antidote that forces modern followers of Jesus to cleave to their Jewish roots "while the fruit from Christian branches falls on Gentile soil" (Davies, 1988, p. 118, *emphases his*).

In any case, black nationalist movements, albeit unwittingly, generally worked together with white evangelicals in promoting the altered Christian context so prevalent in the United States. This is evident, for instance, in their rejection of white activists like Jeanette and Ed King, and Bob and Dorothy Zellner (SNCC), all of whom emphasized "racial healing and reconciliation," an agenda that black nationalists considered "quaint and even annoying" (Marsh, 1997, p. 8).

Yet, from the beginning of its formulation, the influence of Afro-centric theology on the average black Christian has been negligible (Flowers, 1984, p. 187; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, pp. 179-180). This brand of theology has thus far been largely restricted to a minority segment of black academia, notably James Cone (Davies, 1988, p. 114), a fact "particularly true after the most overt and aggressive civil rights activity died down around 1970 and the churches became more quiescent" (Flowers, 1984, p. 194). Its promotion in actual churches has been limited to what have been labeled "Messianic-

nationalist sects," Afro-centric groups like the African Orthodox Church which later became the Shrine of the Black Madonna (Davies, 1988, p. 110; Baer, 1998).

A very telling event occurred in Detroit in 1969, an event that demonstrated how black attitudes toward the white churches, attitudes which white evangelicals seemed oblivious to, may have helped to perpetuate the reality of segregated worship. The National Committee of Black Churchmen drafted a "Black Manifesto" that, among other things, demanded 50 million dollars in reparations *from white churches and synagogues*. The reasoning behind such a demand was damning:

The manifesto was a very militant approach to the problem [of discrimination against and the poverty of blacks], delivered out of a black semichurch [*sic*] organization and aimed at the white religious establishment, *which blacks felt was guilty of complicity in the racist character of American society and that, with a few exceptions, had been mostly unhelpful in the recent civil rights struggle* (Flowers, 1984, p. 186, emphasis mine).

The fact is that black Christians understood, and probably still do understand, that a large measure of responsibility for racist policies fell on white Christians. Today, white evangelicals may have a problem grasping the reality of such responsibility, but that does not change the expectation of their black brothers and sisters. Further, it is not entirely unreasonable for black Christians to think in this way, since their historical memory includes the fact that "With few exceptions, at no time in American history did the white church or its major thinkers call into question the oppression of blacks" (Flowers, 1984, p. 188).

Further ecumenism occurred in the Black Church during the 1970s through organizations like the National Conference of Black Churchmen and the Congress of National Black Churches. Such organizations brought together black Christians under an eclectic banner to address a mix of issues that included “theological education, evangelism, communications among black churches, and unemployment” (Flowers, 1984, p. 195). The literature emanating from white evangelicalism during this time is unusually ambivalent toward such national organizations and/or their problems.

In more recent years, evangelical doctrine concerning separation of the races has continued among Pentecostals through the immense popularity of the *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible*. Dake basically repeated the old idea that God had separated people along ethnic lines and that they should remain that way, a notion that was expressed in his condemnation of interracial marriage and in the “Thirty Reasons for Segregation of Races” included among his notes on the Book of Acts (Goings, 1995, pp. 54-58). Until very recently, this doctrine was apparently accepted to varying degrees by both white and black Pentecostals though originating and most often expressed by the former.

Black Christians have been especially ignored in Pentecostal circles, despite their fundamental role in the genesis of the movement:

Although some continue to recognize [Charles] Parham as a co-founder and even as the principal founder [of Pentecostalism], Seymour was unquestionably the person responsible for the extraordinary spread of the Pentecostal movement in the twentieth century through his activities at the Azusa Street Revival.... In an ironic development black Pentecostals, who founded the movement, have historically been excluded from ecumenical

Pentecostal bodies such as the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America, as well as the National Association of Evangelicals (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 79).

Recent sociological research has revealed the propensity for Pentecostals to oppose racial justice, including taking a negative stance on interracial marriage (Yamane, 1998).

Likewise, ultra-fundamentalist institutions promoted the same doctrines of separation that their Pentecostal counterparts did until very recently. For instance, Jonathan Pait, Community Relations Coordinator at Bob Jones University, stated the reasons for their ban on interracial dating/marriage in a 1998 letter:

God has separated people for His own purpose. He has erected barriers between the nations, not only land and sea barriers, but also ethnic, cultural, and language barriers. God has made people different one from another and intends those differences to remain. Bob Jones University is opposed to intermarriage of the races because it breaks down the barriers God has established. It mixes that which God separated and intends to keep separate (1998).

Since Bob Jones University maintains an integrated school, this is an example of the old evangelical practice of allowing black Christians in *without fostering true equality*. Amid public controversy to a visit to the campus by President Bush, this ban was officially removed on March 3, 2000 by Bob Jones III (Pait, 1998).

While contemporary white churches no longer maintain the external trappings of segregation (e.g., separate seating), segregation is still subtly present simply in the fact that white evangelicals (with few exceptions) have done little to reconcile the situation.

The historical factors strongly suggest that the responsibility for taking the initiative falls not on black, but on white, evangelicals. So long as the predominantly white Church ignores this rift, the many claimed revivals remain “revivals without repentance” (Osborn, 1958, p. 219). In short, one social reason for segregated worship is simply that white Christians have *wanted* it that way.

Another factor that probably added substantially to a mindset that would permit such division was the fact that Protestantism has been characterized by a great deal of division since its earliest days. The original Protestant bodies – Lutheran, Presbyterian/Reformed, Anglican/Episcopal, and Baptist – have been divided and subdivided continually for the last five hundred years. This deeply ingrained reality makes ethnic division in the churches a very natural situation to accept, given the pre-prepared ideology formed by this massive division existing in Protestantism:

The denominational multiplicity in our land [the U.S.] has resulted in the loss of a sense of the “Great Church.” In contrast with the situation in Europe, *there is among us no corporate memory of a time when all the Christians of our nation were one.* We were divided from the start (Osborn, 1958, p. 119, emphasis mine).

Simply put, American Christians today have little regard for the divisions among themselves because such is, for them, the *status quo*. They have never known anything else. They have never seen a unified Church. Voices of concern for Christian unity, as well as numerous para-church, interdenominational, and ecumenical organizations, exist only because some Christians have looked beyond the altered context to the earliest Christian context – enshrined in both the New Testament and Christian tradition – and

seen there the unified picture that is so lacking in the culture-bound Christendom that surrounds them.

THE ROLE OF THE BLACK CHURCH

Underneath the external, historical incidents that served as catalysts for the creation of both a predominantly white evangelicalism and the Black Church are important contributing factors. For one, the lack of practical equality limited the relevance of communication between white and black Christians – especially the black conception of white preaching that so often charged them with the task of being “good slaves” (Stamp, 1956, pp. 158, 373). Related to this is the fact that the organization of black churches afforded a degree of autonomy that African Americans were otherwise denied (Genovese, 1976, p. 238).

While a type of slavery existed during the time of the early Christians, their comprehensive intrinsic worldview served to undermine such practices. This worldview was largely absent in the antebellum churches, most of which tended to practice a *status quo* religion. The figure that stepped into the experiential gap and remedied the situation was the black preacher who, “suffering with his flock ... understood their tribulations and was accepted as a counsellor and arbiter” (Blassingame, 1979, p. 131).

Even after slavery was abolished, white Christians in general never extended their hand toward reconciliation. The formation of a community of faith consistent with the earliest Christian context did not seem to be in the forefront of their minds. As has been amply demonstrated above, black Christians’ own testimony in history is that they saw separation as a *regrettable necessity*. Further, in contrast to the segregation doctrines of their white brothers and sisters, the black churches strictly maintained policies of

complete openness and equality. Their doors were open to their white brothers and sisters even if the white doors remained closed to them. The significance of this ongoing historical situation cannot be overestimated.

Perhaps one of the most important reasons for the endurance of the Black Church has to do with the fact that post-slavery black society was deprived of the social institutions so necessary for its survival:

The Negro church quickly came to occupy a unique and central place in its community. It was the first, and for decades almost the only, organization entirely under the control of Negroes. As such it came to be the major channel for expression of their views and emotions, for the achievement of status and the development of leadership (Pope, 1957, p. 115).

The Black Church became the “nation within a nation” of E. Franklin Frazier, preaching “a gospel that embraced the longings and desires of a disenfranchised people,” and providing black Christians “on Sunday mornings a rare though passionate affirmation of their humanity.” In the Black Church, “the last could become first; a field hand or a janitor could become a deacon, the maid or the cook a leader in the women’s union” (Marsh, 1997, p. 13). Of course, the Black Church found its ultimate power of expression in the 1960s, as one of three “indigenous organizations” crucial to the success of the Civil Rights movement (McAdam, 1999, p. 87).

Some researchers have even advanced the idea that African Americans have largely attended black churches out of a social necessity. This has been called the “semi-involuntary thesis” and emphasizes the idea that racial segregation has necessitated involvement in the Black Church by depriving the black community of the secular

institutions needed for social coherence. According to this theory, the existence of the Black Church is further strengthened by the fact that it has historically provided for both material and spiritual needs, actually creating *a sense of obligation* among those in the black community (Hunt & Hunt, 1999, pp. 779-780).

While the research along these lines normally focuses on church attendance patterns, it remains relevant here simply because it is the attendance of black Christians at black churches that is the substance of the Black Church as an institution. Reasons for such attendance, to that extent, must also be regarded as reasons for the perpetuation of the Black Church. Needless to say, the historical survey provided above, along with information provided by black scholarship concerning the Black Church as a vital social institution, tends to reinforce the “semi-involuntary” idea.

Through the analyses of researchers like W.E.B. Du Bois, the famous African American sociologist, the Black Church was codified as a key institution for social change in the black community (Lewy, 1996, p. 126). Writing in 1903, Du Bois paints a vivid picture of the social importance of the Black Church:

The Negro church of to-day is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character.... The [Black] Church often stands as a real conservator of morals, a strengthener of family life, and the final authority on what is Good and Right. *Thus one can see in the Negro church to-day, reproduced in microcosm, all the great world from which the Negro is cut off by color-prejudice and social condition* (1995, pp. 213-214, emphasis mine).

Lincoln and Mamiya further explain this crucial idea of the social necessity of the Black Church:

In his examination of the economic situation in African American communities, Du Bois concluded that any study of “economic cooperation among negroes must begin with the Church group.” He was referring to the founding and establishment of black churches during the period of slavery and in the aftermath of the Civil War. Black church members literally pooled their pennies and meager resources to buy land to erect church buildings in both the North and the South. During Reconstruction when many African Americans left the plantations or were driven off, they often settled in nearby black communities These communities were often led by their pastors, and their churches became the first communally built institutions. As the central and dominant institutions in their various communities, black churches performed other critical roles and functions in the economic sphere to ease somewhat the onerousness [sic] of abject deprivation (1992, p. 244).

Lincoln and Mamiya go on to point out that it was the black churches that became the basis for various fraternal organizations, aid societies, black-owned banks, and the black life insurance companies (1992, p. 245). In short, “the Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, pp. 8, 17). The reason for this, as Du Bois pointed out over a hundred years ago, was that “practically, a proscribed people must have a social centre, *and that centre for this people is the Negro church*” (1995, p. 215, emphasis mine).

As a central point in the black community from which so much emanates, the Black Church has been, in many ways, a success for the black community. For instance, the larger black denominations have recently moved from lower class origins to a largely middle class composition (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 9; Lewy, 1996, p. 127).

Empowered church-goers have become empowered citizens, workers, parents, and children. The Black Church is “a central part of the black cultural heritage and continues a dynamic interaction with the secular forms of black culture.... *A demise of the black religious tradition would have profound implications for the preservation of black culture*” (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 10, emphasis mine).

From the African-American perspective, this may well be a primary motivation to preserve the Black Church as its own institution. According to the Barna Research Group, using statistics based on a 1996 study, 63% of African Americans consider black pastors to be the most important leader in the black community (*African Americans*, 2003). One-fourth of all African Americans across class divisions “describe their church’s capacity to sustain them or to help them overcome despair as the most important thing it does” (Hochschild, 1995, p. 168). However, it must also be pointed out that the same upward mobility that has produced a measure of success may also be sparking some of the declines in the Black Church. For instance, E. Franklin Frazier argued that because of such increasing social mobility, the Black Church was losing its central place as “a refuge in a hostile white world” (Evans, Jr., 1992, p. 123).

Before looking at the contemporary scene among evangelicals, one final note is in order. Tragically, scholarly church history texts emanating from the evangelical tradition typically have, until very recently (21st century), omitted the Black Church altogether.

For example, Bruce L. Shelley's *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1995), a very popular history that is widely read among evangelicals, devotes only three scarce pages in the entire 519 page work to slavery, and *none* to the Black Church *per se*. In fact, the Black Church is "so overlooked by church historians that Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who taught Sunday school at a black church in Harlem in 1930) called black Pentecostals the 'stepchildren of modern church history'" (Daniels, 1998, p. 19). Whenever the Black Church is mentioned, it is often in cursory fashion. This fact alone points to a problem with the evangelical perception of black Christians. *Could it be that evangelicals, on some subconscious level, recognize the inconsistency of segregated worship and are pretending that it doesn't exist?* Or, worse yet, does white evangelicalism even take the Black Church seriously?

In 1964, Joseph Washington published a book entitled *Black Religion*. In this book, Washington argued that the Black Church really did not exist as a form of Christianity, but was more of a racially-based "religious society" with no coherent theology. As such, he claimed, black churches were not Christian at all. Although Washington urged black Christians to integrate into white churches, he did so on the basis that their churches were facades – that is, to be authentic they must be assimilated into the white establishment (Evans, Jr., 1992, pp. 19-20). Washington, with some modifications, was still promoting aspects of this viewpoint as recently as the 1980s (Evans, Jr., 1992, p. 156, fn. 10).

The glaring absence of the Black Church in evangelical Church histories and theology suggest that Washington's perspective may well represent a wider evangelical attitude, whether consciously held or not. If this is the case, this perspective will remain

a formidable barrier to reconciliation between black and white Christians as long as it continues to be held. White evangelicals must take the Black Church seriously if the reality of segregated worship is to change. The reconciled community of the earliest Christian context, according to the sources examined above, is about mutual submission guided by genuine love for one another, not the dominance of one by the other.

CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICALS & SEGREGATED WORSHIP

Throughout [American] history, churches have tended to follow and reinforce the dividing lines of class, status, and ethnicity. *Even today, the lines of class-bound religious affiliation remain visible* (Bellah et al., 1996, p. 65, emphasis mine).

What has become known as the Black Church was an established institution by the 20th century, although demographic factors altered the picture somewhat from that of the antebellum and emancipation periods:

African American religion underwent a process of further diversification in the early twentieth century as an increasing number of blacks began to migrate from the rural South to the cities of both the North and the South. By this time, two National Baptist associations and three black Methodist denominations had become the mainstream churches in black urban communities. Congregations affiliated with these denominations were mass churches in that they often crosscut class lines. Conversely, black congregations affiliated with white-controlled Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches catered primarily to elite African Americans (Baer, 1998).

Roof and McKinney have noted that the new diversity which entered into black religion in the 20th century has resulted “in even more racially separate structures and a more veriegated pattern of religious groups and traditions” (1989, p. 141).

Surveying the generalized landscape of evangelicalism, segregated worship remains the general reality among evangelicals:

Most mainstream congregations are affiliated with three National Baptist conventions, the AME, the AME Zion, and the Christian Methodist Episcopal churches. Approximately 90% of churchgoing African Americans belong to black-controlled religious organizations. The remaining 10% or so belong to white-controlled religious bodies ... (Baer, 1998).

According to Roof and McKinney, the six largest black denominations claim over 12.5 million black members, while the white denominations they examined claim only 1.5-2 million black members (1989, p. 141). It is important to realize that this statistic includes many white churches and/or denominations that are not within the evangelical category that is the focus of this thesis (e.g., theologically liberal churches). The numbers of black members of white *evangelical* (as defined at the beginning of this paper) denominations would be significantly lower than the statistics reported by Roof and McKinney.

Based on Roof and McKinney's estimates, “roughly 85 percent of all black Protestant memberships are in the black denominations” (1989, p. 141). Given that Niebuhr's estimate in 1926 was 88 percent, the reality of segregated worship had not changed in the sixty plus years between Niebuhr's and Roof and McKinney's studies. For all of the white churches and denominations falling under the working definition of

“evangelical,” approximately 2-3 percent represented the typical black membership (Roof & McKinney, 1989, pp. 140-141). Even “integrated” groups falling outside the evangelical parameter, like the more liberal American Baptists or the conservative Seventh Day Adventists, are largely the result of black local churches segregated *within* the larger white denomination (Roof & McKinney, 1989, pp. 141, 143).

Roof and McKinney concluded that white Protestant churches contain a level of integration that “is still small, hardly enough to refute the charge that the church remains among the most segregated major institutions in the [American] society” (Roof & McKinney, 1989, p. 143). As recently as 2000, Emerson and Smith estimated that “about 90 percent of African Americans attend predominantly black congregations” and that this of necessity implies that “at least 95 percent of white Americans – and probably higher – attend predominantly white churches” (pp. 16, 135-136). Such statistics serve to highlight the contemporary reality that stands in contrast to the belief system of the earliest Christians regarding ethnicity and Christian unity.

Other than the simple contrast between the earliest Christian context and the contemporary reality of segregated worship, it seems that the early Christians themselves pointed to the problematic nature of such inconsistencies. The words of the *Shepherd of Hermas* are particularly severe, stressing that those stones/people placed within the tower/Church that fall into disharmony are “cast out from the race of the righteous” (Buell, 2002, p. 457). Buell explains:

The narrative foregrounds the unstable consequences of aggregation when the member components of the tower/church do not remain unified....

When it comes to envisioning membership in the righteous *genos*, internal

differences are viewed as a problem. While aggregative universalism need not be defined in terms of homogeneity (recall Clement's symphony metaphor), in Hermas the image of the ideal is uniformity (Buell, 2002, p. 457).

With an analysis that seems tailor-made for the evangelical situation, Buell further notes that "Any internal differences can threaten the integrity of the whole" (2002, p. 459).

Underneath the inconsistency inherent in black and white Christians worshipping separately are some interesting statistical differences in their respective churches. Today, predominantly white churches boast greater numbers of people, while a growing number of black churches can claim greater proportionate commitments on the part of their members.

As of 1994, there were 75,000 black churches with the greater part of African American adults (70%) enrolled as members. While only 56% of white church members considered religion "very important" in their lives, 87% of black church members felt this way (Lewy, 1996, p. 125). According to Barna Research statistics for 2002, black Christians are more likely to pray weekly, read their Bibles weekly, and feel the necessity to share their faith with others than white Christians, though church attendance is proportionately approximate for both groups (*African Americans*, 2003). Statistical research conducted in 2006 by a team of psychologists further supported the idea that certain minority groups, among them African Americans, are more likely to be intrinsically religious based on Allport's Religious Orientation Scale (Ghorpade, Lackritz, & Singh, 2006).

A collective view of what has been established thus far suggests that, by and large, black Christians have discerned important emphases of the earliest Christian context from the very beginning, while white Christians have tended to have a worldview more in keeping with the surrounding culture. This contrariness with respect to the earliest Christian context is what has created and maintained the reality of segregated worship. Today, the situation is probably not far removed from what Liston Pope wrote in 1957: “Negroes generally assume that they would not be welcome in most white churches, and whites generally take it for granted that Negroes will stay away” (p. 113).

While most white evangelicals probably no longer entertain explicit racist notions, there is nevertheless a (perhaps subconscious) satisfaction with the way things are as demonstrated by the evident lack of concern for the reality of segregated worship as it stands. Marsh described the white evangelicals of the Civil Rights era:

White Christian conservatives...remained largely indifferent to black suffering, preoccupied instead with evangelism and church growth, and with personal vices like drinking, dancing, and “heavy petting” (1997, p. 8).

The influence of individualism on evangelicalism has been enormous throughout much of its history. Focusing on changing individuals through conversion experiences and personal discipleship leaves many of the cultural and systemic issues of concern to African American Christians neglected or ignored:

... despite having the subcultural tools to call for radical changes in race relations, [evangelicals] most consistently call for changes *in persons* that leave the dominant social structures, institutions, and culture intact....

[This] also means that evangelicals' views to a considerable extent conform to the socioeconomic conditions of their time.... They share the Protestant work ethic, support laissez-faire economics, and *sometimes fail to evaluate whether the social system is consistent with their Christianity* (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 21-22, emphases mine).

As examined further below, evangelical churches remain preoccupied with an individualistic agenda that is costing them dearly, even in those very areas they are often preoccupied with. Because sin is often conceived of in purely individualistic terms, evangelicals lack the "cultural tools" to address issues on an institutionalized level (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 77-79).

One general problem with white evangelicals, as with other white Americans, is that the contemporary face of racism remains unacknowledged in significant ways. A national survey conducted in 1999 by sociologists Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith revealed that 80% of white evangelicals considered racism a "very important" issue. Subsequent interviews, however, revealed that only 4% considered racism a "top issue," with 25% black evangelicals considering racism the most important issue facing Christians (2000, pp. 86-87). Emerson and Smith aptly describe such divergent viewpoints as "nonreconciliatory" (2000, p. 91).

Why do white evangelicals differ so radically from black evangelicals in their assessment of racism? While the social landscape differs significantly from that which surrounded parents and grandparents, this is often misinterpreted as indicating that equality has arrived and the battle is over. Emerson and Smith cut through such confusion with their concept of a "racialized society." That is, the contemporary U.S.

still represents “a society wherein race matters profoundly for differences in life experiences, life opportunities, and social relationships” (2000, p. 7).

Because contemporary racism appears different from the forms that racism has taken in the past, those in the majority tend not to recognize it for what it is. For white evangelicals, it is difficult to address a problem that they do not recognize in the first place. It is helpful, then, to point out that *conceiving of racism as a variable rather than a constant* makes more sense of the reality in contemporary society (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 8-9). Further, Emerson and Smith’s concept of a “racialized” society emphasizes that contemporary racism is most often systemic in nature, remains unrecognized by the majority (whites), and does not necessarily entail malicious motivation on the part of the perpetrators (2000, pp. 9-10).

Racialized systems are socially internalized and perpetuated accompanied by insistence that racial issues are a thing of the past. The contemporary reality of segregated worship in evangelicalism is just such a system. Such systems always require justification from the majority establishment, and it should not be surprising to find such argumentation among white evangelicals. All manner of reasoning has urged that segregation among evangelicals is a mutual, willing arrangement; contrary historical factors are often ignored or neglected. Yet, as Emerson and Smith point out, all segregation – enforced or not – “reproduces racialization” (2000, pp. 10-11). Black Christians, for their part, largely accepted the situation as normal given post-civil rights emphases reflecting an Afro-centric individualism (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 48).

Evangelicalism in general is only beginning to recognize segregated worship for what it actually is. There is still too little thought about the inherent contradiction

between the evangelical profession and the reality of segregated worship, a reality that, among others, “represents the accommodation of Christianity to the caste-system of human society” (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 6). Churches that perpetuate segregated worship are “emblems...of the victory of the world over the church, of the secularization of Christianity, of the church’s sanction of that divisiveness which the church’s gospel condemns” (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 25). It is because of its defeat at the hands of American society that the household of faith remains divided.

IV. QUESTIONING THE REALITY: POSSIBILITIES & BEGINNINGS

The challenges often seem overwhelming, but there are possibilities for an immense enhancement of our lives, individual and collective, an enhancement based on a significant moral advance. One of the greatest challenges, especially for individualistic Americans, is to understand what institutions are – how we form them and how they in turn form us – and to imagine that we can actually alter them for the better (Bellah, 1991, p. 5).

Recognizing the dissonance between the earliest Christian context and the present reality of segregated worship is fundamental if that reality is to change. Here, sociologist Robert Bellah's research regarding institutional and organizational change is helpful. As explained in the introduction (chapter I), the context/reality model used throughout the present thesis is meant to be a specific application of Bellah's more general distinction between "institutions" and "organizations" (1991, pp. 4-11).

However, the parallel is certainly not absolute. In the present thesis, the specific application of Bellah's ideas contains an important difference: in the case of segregated worship, the institution (context = the evangelical perspective) must be changed simply because it has *already* been previously altered from that of the earliest Christians. In other words, the context/institution must be changed *back* to what it originally was. While the earliest Christian context envisioned the church as a pan-ethnic community with the locus of its fundamental identity in a transcendent worldview, the current context has altered this vision in conformity with an individualistic society.

IS REAL CHANGE POSSIBLE?

Just as Bellah's institutions must change if the organizations are to truly change, even so it is this altered context that must change if the reality of segregated worship, being a problem *in local churches*, is to change. Using this parallel, two things become immediately apparent.

First, for the reality of segregated worship to exist as it does, the original Christian context must have changed from its original emphases, originally differing in significant ways from contemporary American Christianity. Harvey Cox, in a broader context, recognized this fact over three decades ago:

The sad truth is that the church *cannot* be the metainstitution our world needs to instruct us in festivity, to open us to fantasy, to call us to tomorrow, or to enlarge our petty definitions of reality. It cannot for only one reason: *the church is not the church*. That is, what we now call "churches" have departed so markedly from their vocation as agents and advocates of Christian faith that only a residue of that historic calling remains. Dim echoes of it are still heard in its preaching and pale shadows of it appear in its liturgy. But the substance has been thinned and the spirit dulled. (1969, pp. 95-96, emphasis mine).

If the situation that Cox described was true then, it is more so now: "the church is not the church." This is what Princeton theologian John A. Mackay referred to as the Church's "fateful tendency through the ages to move from the real to the unreal, from Christian reality to Christian appearance, *from what is authentically Christian to what looks like it but is not it*" (1969, p. 11, emphasis mine). This is a tragic reality because "the church is

required only to be truly the church, true to its own essential nature and purpose," embodied in the original Christian context which, "When this comes to pass, segregation in its life will be abolished" (Pope, 1957, p. 124). Again, "it is the *very nature* of the church to be *an inclusive and integrated community* of the faithful" (Pope, 1957, p. 157, *emphases mine*).

Niebuhr expressed how the earliest Christian context came to be altered by suggesting that the American churches "found that *it was easier to give to Caesar the things belonging to Caesar if the examination of what might belong to God were not too closely pressed*" (1967, p. 3, *emphasis mine*). For any number of reasons that should be researched further, Christians in general and evangelicals in particular have succumbed to a type of historical and theological amnesia with serious consequences both for the church and the society. Included in this inconsistent paradigm gripping the American Church is an unchallenging acceptance of the social construct of "race." Speaking from the emerging evangelical Left, Jim Wallis writes that such conceptions are "an idolatry that challenges our true and common identity as the children of God" (1997).

Evangelical theologian Ronald E. Osborn concurred:

... our peculiar danger in America is that instead of really creating a new and holy community that cuts across other lines we merely sanctify a congeniality that already exists outside the church. We have much yet to learn from the Christian community in India, which in heroic divergence from the mores of the surrounding pagan society refuses in its own life to recognize caste distinctions. *In so far as a Christian congregation is limited by lines circumscribing a group or class in the world it must miss*

the richness of that full fellowship in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but one man in Christ (1958, p. 128, emphasis mine).

Black Christians understand that the American Church has altered the earliest Christian context, one writer speaking of "... the problem of curing racist Christianity as a deformed cult: that is, healing Christianity itself of its deformation as a religion of sacralized violence that is *contrary to its own gospel origins*" (Smith, 1994, p. 184, emphasis mine).

More recently, Bellah has noted that the churches in America have become, for all practical purposes, compartmentalized places of refuge for people committed to individualism (1996, p. 224). This American obsession "with personal self-fulfillment," Bellah says, dangerously impairs the American "capacity for commitment" to basic institutions which include religion (Roth, 1989, p. 70). This is consistent with Niebuhr above, who saw the Christian Church in the United States as imbibing principles of society that it should have been challenging. Lewy mentions the influence of individualism on society in general and religion in particular when he writes that "the cultural ethos of radical individualism has become the bane of modern societies. It has undermined traditional values such as civic virtue, family solidarity, and concern for others" (1996, p. 62). Roth highlights the incompatibility between American individualism and community:

In sum, while American individualism honed ingenuity and industry that led to positions of economic and political world leadership, the same spirit drew Americans further apart even as they lived closer together in

conformity. Now giving self-fulfillment precedence over civic virtue and a publicly responsible loyalty, Americans care more for individual wealth than for their commonwealth (1989, p. 70).

Both the make-up and mission of evangelical churches have been impacted by the lack of genuine community. As anthropologist Marvin Harris has noted, evangelical Christians have tailored the message to meet the needs of the consumer, relying on impersonal methodologies like television (1981, p. 158). Unfortunately, in catering to such base values as materialism, the evangelical churches have lost the message of love for God and neighbor, a central part of the earliest Christian context. Given the paradigm of their spiritual ancestors, the contemporary reality of Christians worshipping separately on the basis of skin color does not seem to exhibit this central maxim of the faith.

For the reality of segregated worship to change, the earliest elements of the context in which it appears (i.e., pan-ethnic community; the maxims of love and equality) must be recovered. This is the argument of an increasing number of evangelical authors (e.g., Keillor, 1996; Rhodes, 1998; Peart, 2000; Bakke, 2000; DeYoung et al., 2003; Gilbreath, 2006), as cited throughout the present thesis. While I have been using the term "context" to designate Christianity, it is important to note that this term is always modified by either the word "earliest" or the word "altered." Thus, I have argued that though evangelicals identify their faith with the earliest Christian context, they are in fact perpetuating a significantly *altered* Christian context. It is this altered context embraced by contemporary American evangelicalism that must change. This is why Evans, Jr. writes that "the [universal] church is not charged with the task of hiding its historic sins [including racism], but with recovering in every age the truth that anchors its preaching

and praxis” (1992, p. 137). This, of course, is the very same point made by both Niebuhr and Cox (cited above), as there are several ways to conceptualize this same idea of recovering the values of early Christianity.

Writing in 1929, Niebuhr made the following observation:

Complete fellowship without any racial discriminations has been very rare in the history of American Christianity. It has existed only where the number of Negroes belonging to the church was exceptionally small in proportion to the total membership, where the cultural status of the racial groups in the church was essentially similar, or where, as among some Quakers, racial consciousness was consciously overcome (1967, p. 254).

Looking carefully at Niebuhr’s statement, it should be noticed that the first possibility for truly integrated churches is an accidental one, the number of African American members being “exceptionally small.” The second reason does not help either, since class/status distinctions within the church contradict the earliest Christian context just as surely as ethnic distinctions. Only the third possibility contains some hope: “*racial consciousness was consciously overcome.*” This is hopeful because it is precisely the argument of an increasing number of contemporary evangelicals, as analyzed in the present thesis.

Niebuhr even mentions an example, the Quakers, that can serve as a light on the path back to the earliest Christian context if evangelicals will pay attention to their historical witness. The bottom line here is the fact that *it has been done before*, thinking and acting like the early Christians, and, therefore, *it can be done again*. However, it will take a conscious commitment on the part of evangelicals.

Gordon Allport conducted research in 1967 on the relationship between religion and prejudice. In doing so, he found that religion *both* facilitates prejudicial attitudes *and* militates against such attitudes – a situation that he called a “grand paradox” (Lewy, 1996, p. 101). Continuing their research, Allport and his fellow researcher, J. Michael Ross, discovered that the depth of the individual’s religious commitment made all the difference in the world: the more involved and committed a person was, the less likely he/she was to hold prejudicial attitudes. In recent years, Gallup Poll data has tended to substantiate Allport’s findings (Lewy, 1996, p. 101). Not surprisingly, the New Testament itself presents the scenario of just such a distinction in passages like Luke 8.5-18 And John 2.24. In fact, it is not a stretch to see the three tests for Christian authenticity given in First John as being designed to, in Allport’s language, divide the “extrinsic” from the “intrinsic.”

Allport explained this distinction, itself the product of individualism, as due to individual differences. I would suggest, however, the distinct possibility that the “more committed” (intrinsic) individuals are less likely to harbor prejudicial attitudes simply because they have grasped to some degree the fundamental message that is part and parcel of the earliest Christian context. Allport and Ross actually end up suggesting something very similar, as summarized by Lewy:

Small wonder, they concluded, that the intrinsically motivated churchgoers were significantly less prejudiced than the extrinsically motivated. For both types, religion was knit into the fabric of their personalities. But while *human kindness was as essential to belief in God* for intrinsically religious persons, extrinsically religious persons easily

succumbed to inducements to bigotry. Nothing *in their religious outlook* required a surrender of pet prejudices (Lewy, 1996, p. 102, *emphases mine*).

Psychologist Rita Pullium elaborated on the significance of Allport's research in this same connection:

... the majority of churchgoers go to church for social support and/or for relief from personal problems. Such motivation, [Allport] suggested, would neither result in the most frequent church attendance nor an application of religion in all social dealings, that is, as a way of life.... They [i.e., the extrinsic] may be, in short, the ones who give religion a bad name (1989, p. 81).

I have suggested above that evangelical churches must recover the earliest elements of the altered context in which segregated worship is taking place if real change is going to occur. Using Allport's paradigm, recovering the earliest Christian context would center on fostering a greater commitment to a more authentic Christianity. Lewy summarizes the current situation, from this perspective, quite well:

A recent study that applied a twelve-item scale of religiousness concluded that the number of "everyday saints" who truly live what they profess amounts to no more than 13 percent of the U.S. adult population or about 17 percent of those who consider themselves Christians. Those who do internalize the key values of their faith are the ones whose personal conduct shows a distinctively different pattern (1996, p. 125).

Although it does not sound quite as dramatic as my conceptualization of “recovering the earliest Christian context,” the result is the same if it can be done *en masse*. However, I would point out that I prefer the “context” model for an important reason. Lewy, resting on Allport’s research, tends to locate the distinction primarily in the *individual* response. This can also be seen in the question posed by Pullium when faced with Allport’s research: “Why should religious people show less tolerance and compassion for outgroups when all religious denominations essentially preach love for all humankind?” (1989, p. 80). Yet Allport’s research, and hence the conclusions of both Lewy and Pullium, assumes that the central emphases of Christianity outlined above (among which is “love for all humankind”) are indeed being emphasized within the churches where those same individuals receive their religious instruction. Yet, by and large, this is not the case.

There is today a whole range of issues competing with the earliest Christian context for emphasis within evangelical churches: the quest for more “seeker-sensitive” methodologies, the materialistic prosperity gospel of many television ministries, the domination of political ideologies among both the Christian Right and the Christian Left, and the revivalistic stress on a conversion to prepare one for the hereafter and that demands little real change in the way in which the individual thinks and lives in the here and now (Berger, 1967, p. 158; Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 66-68). A kind of theological fatalism surrounds the evangelical quest for individual spiritual conversions that assumes an accompanying instantaneous change with regard to issues like racial reconciliation. This is an idea that Emerson and Smith have termed the “miracle motif” (2000, pp. 117, 131). These varying factors, rooted in different streams of Christian

history and arising from very different motivations, all have one thing in common: *they are all symptomatic of an Americanized Christendom that has largely embraced the surrounding culture.*

As a result, the present evangelical landscape, taken as a whole, can hardly be said to promote self-sacrifice, humility, or community. This is so simply because such characteristics, while part and parcel of the earliest Christian context, are contrary to the cultural values that evangelicals have imbibed from the very society they are called to change:

...by and large, the evangelical community has become comfortable with suburban mores and consumer culture. Having (for good reason) abandoned earlier definitions of worldliness that involve avoiding externals, evangelicals have been less successful in defining how the spirit of Christ might differ from that of success-oriented, upwardly mobile, American materialism (Hatch & Hamilton, 1995, p. 411).

Further, ignorance of the cultural leaven that has infected the churches does not change the result:

... compromises are doubly evil when they are unacknowledged, when *the emasculation of the Christian ideal* [read: the altered context] remains undiscovered and when, in consequence, men take pride, as in an achievement, in a defeat of the essential gospel. Such unconscious hypocrisy not only bars the way to continued efforts to penetrate the stubborn stuff of life with the ethics of Jesus but is the author of further compromises made all too early. *So it produces at last a spurious gospel*

unaware of its departure from the faith once delivered to the saints

(Niebuhr, 1967, pp. 5-6, emphases mine).

The contrary values of the surrounding culture even affect the message of reconciliation currently gaining ground among evangelicals: “As the message of reconciliation spread to a white audience, it was popularized. The racial reconciliation message given to the mass audience is *individual* reconciliation” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 67, emphasis mine).

Thus, the context model used in this thesis realistically incorporates the sociological/social-psychological complexity of the situation by treating the factors as widespread as they actually are. In Allport’s model, there is a minority of Christians within the larger group of those professing religion that stand out for their authenticity:

... Allport identified a subset of religious people who were the most frequent church attenders and who most seriously expended their energies on a truly religious life. *Religion pervaded all their social dealings, and they exhibited great tolerance for others* (Pullium, 1989, p. 81, emphasis mine).

Yet, while a minority of Christians (approximately 17 %) may be committed enough to discover authentic Christianity for themselves despite its neglect in the churches, the majority of professing Christians are hardly being challenged in this regard. So, while the solution is described as a need for greater individual commitment, this in turn necessitates the need for a recovery of the emphases that demand such commitment.

There are plenty of conversions but not nearly enough are authentic by biblical/historical definition (Berger, 1967, p. 158). Bellah, a sociologist and not a preacher, writes that

“the real problem in our society at all levels is the need for conversion, which, in biblical religion is always simultaneously spiritual and ethical, a turning to God and a turning away from sin” (1995).

Is it possible to replace a segregated evangelicalism with a multicultural evangelicalism? Absolutely, but only with a shift in the worldview of American Christians – white *and* black. While I am convinced that the responsibility to initiate change must be shouldered by white evangelicals, this in no way is meant to suggest that black Christians have no responsibility at all. As African American Pentecostal Robert Michael Franklin writes:

... it is important to note that whites cannot overcome their racism without some conversation and reality testing from people of color. As African American Christians who desire the ultimate reconciliation of Christ's church, we have a responsibility to be in partnership with honest, committed, white colleagues (2003).

Furthermore, since the change being spoken of involves not just integration, but reconciliation, there is a profound difference in where responsibility lies:

Twenty years ago, I would have said that it was whites who were most reluctant to build crosscultural relationships. Now I'm not so sure. As the light of racial reconciliation dawns on Christians around the country, white Christians are beginning to ask, “Where are the black Christians who understand the importance of this ideal?” That is a very good question.... *The old fight for racial equality did not require any give-and-take. It demanded change only from whites. But reconciliation is more*

costly; it demands change of us all.... I know many of you are weary, but this is not the same old fight to be accepted. It is not the same old fight to be included as an equal. This is a new struggle – another step on our journey to the kingdom of God. It is another step in living out the full meaning of the gospel. It's crucial that we black Christians continue to step forward and partner with white Christians who share our vision (Perkins & Rice, 1993, p. 237, emphases mine).

Alexis de Tocqueville (19th century) warned of two dangers looming on the horizon that threatened American religion and its influence in society: *schism* and *indifference* (Elshtain, 2001, p. 46). Contemporary evangelicals possess both of these negative qualities in abundance:

Surely if Tocqueville were in our midst today, he would point to both [schism and indifference] and suggest that we are in a clear and present danger of losing that generous concern for others that religion as institutionally robust faith communities, by contrast to spirituality of the vaporous individualist sort, promotes (Elshtain, 2001, p. 47).

The two factors that de Tocqueville observed are the very realities that continue to perpetuate racially-based churches among evangelicals. Worshipping in separate faith communities breeds indifference to the other group as their concerns remain unknown and unacknowledged. Likewise, this indifference in turn perpetuates the continuation of the schism in a vicious circle.

As I have argued thus far, the earliest Christian context has been *altered* and must be *recovered*. If evangelicals and their churches can begin to think once again as their

spiritual ancestors did they will possess the potential to rediscover “the capacity of Christian universalism, when uncorrupted by egotism and spiritual blindness, to transcend even religiously sanctified ethnocentrism” (Davies, 1988, p. 9).

MULTICULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS IN EVANGELICAL HISTORY

So far it has been demonstrated that the earliest Christian paradigm was pan-ethnic and contained within it the seeds of a multicultural community of faith, and that evangelicalism within the United States – increasingly a multicultural society not unlike Rome in the 1st century – has largely neglected the early emphases of their own Faith. In the previous section, it was further argued that the reality of segregated worship can change only within a renewed evangelicalism that has recovered those early emphases. It is now time to focus on the minority, those evangelical Christians who – at least since the mid-20th century – have struggled to live within the earliest Christians context.

Beginning in the early 1940s, several racially mixed congregations were started in various cities (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 62-68). These churches were purposely integrated with a view to being more faithful to the earliest Christian context and in the hope that they would serve as role models for other churches (Pope, 1957, pp. 112-113). Then, in the mid-1940s, over one hundred African American ministers drafted a statement addressed to white Christians in which they declared their solidarity with the earliest Christian context (“the Christian ideal”):

Freedom of worship, if it means anything, means freedom to worship God across racial lines and freedom for a man or woman to join the church of his or her choice, irrespective of race. *Segregated churches fall short of*

the requirements of the Christian ideal ... (Pope, 1957, p. 117, emphasis mine).

Such events represented some of the earliest attempts at racial reconciliation among evangelical Christians in the United States.

Over fifty years ago, in 1954, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America (discussed above) officially changed its name to the *Christian Methodist Episcopal Church*. Many denominations have changed names to reflect various new emphases or to dissociate from a negative emphasis (e.g., the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene dropped “Pentecostal” from its name after Azusa Street to avoid being identified with the Pentecostal movement). With this in mind, the reasons for the name-change in the CME are significant:

While the A.M.E. Church in 1876 rejected a proposal to change its name from African to American, the C.M.E.s, voting in an era when an ideology of integration was beginning to emerge, opted *to eliminate the racial designation to avoid any exclusionary suggestion*. “Christian” was selected both to retain the original initials and *to affirm the understanding of the church as being universal* (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 60, emphases mine).

It is decisions like this, made by both black and white evangelicals, that indicate some change or, at least a willingness to reach out to one another and recover the emphases of the earliest Christians.

As noted above, Pentecostalism began with an interracial ideal that reflected the earliest Christian context. Sadly, that emphasis was largely lost as segregated worship

became the norm within the movement. Yet, David Daniels writes some encouraging words:

Since the late 1960s, Pentecostal denominations have attempted to heal some of these [racial] divisions. More and more Pentecostals today hold tightly to the interracial dream which, as one church document put it, has more than ever “awakened greater hopefulness” in terms of solving race problems (1998, p. 19).

Much of this may be due to the neo-Pentecostal, or “Charismatic,” movement, which began in the 1960s. Basically, this movement represented an infusion of the Pentecostal experience into existing denominational structures. As a result, many mainline and evangelical denominations today have Charismatic congregations. The ousting of some pastors and congregations in the beginning of the Charismatic Movement, due to unwelcome experiences like “speaking in tongues” and physical healing, has resulted in a proliferation of independent Charismatic churches usually referring to themselves as “non-denominational.” Many of these churches (e.g., Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas) seem to attract both white and black members. For whatever reason, an inquiry that has yet to be pursued by social scientists, the Christian landscape seems to level out somewhat under Charismatic influences (cf. Rhodes, 1998, pp. 75-76; DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 71-72).

Billy Graham, perhaps the most well-known Baptist preacher in history, has had a “long-standing position on race relations” (Wacker, 1995, p. 391). Graham went on record as early as 1956 stating that racial prejudice was a sin. In 1957, he was interviewed by *Ebony* magazine, during which he stated that there would be “a lot of

segregationists who are going to be sadly disillusioned when they get to heaven – if they get there” (Martin, 1991, p. 234). Further, Graham went on to point out “that the absence of a color line in heaven, which he believed the Bible taught, seemed to require that Christians observe no color line on earth” (Martin, 1991, p. 234). That same year, Martin Luther King, Jr. himself accepted an invitation from Graham to deliver the invocation at the July 18 crusade in Madison Square Garden, during which he set forth the concept of “a brotherhood that transcends color” (Martin, 1991, pp. 234-235).

However, it should be noted that Graham was also a promoter of gradual change and disavowed civil disobedience, a stance that sometimes manifested itself in “a series of wavering actions on the race issue” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 47). It is telling that the factors which prevented Graham from taking the next steps in his support for civil rights were theological. An individualist product of evangelical revivalism and an increasingly popular eschatology with pessimistic views of the future (premillennialism), he simply did not see the point in working for structural changes when the problem resided in the hearts of individuals (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 47). While Graham’s positions on race matters took shape over time, the fact that he took such definite positions during those early years stands out. Today, Graham remains the most well-known evangelical in the world and continues to promote racial reconciliation through his ministry (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 64-65).

Jim Wallis is a white Christian who is acknowledged as one of the pioneers of the “Christian Left” in United States. In 1967, Wallis discovered the reality of segregated worship among his own evangelical group (usually called “Plymouth Brethren” by outsiders) as he began to meet black Plymouth Brethren in his own city of Detroit,

Michigan. Against the backdrop of the increasing unrest over civil rights at that time, this new information changed Wallis' life dramatically. Attempting to raise consciousness within the altered context, Wallis was stunned that very few of his white Christian participants were willing to get involved. Once again, as the research has demonstrated throughout the present thesis, it was the white, and not the black Christians who proved to be the strongest barrier to an integrated community. Wallis saw the contradiction between the earliest Christian context and the reality of segregated worship, and concluded "that something was terribly wrong – with ... [his] church" (Wallis, 1983, pp. 34-50):

... people whom I knew to be otherwise kind and loving would be transformed, uttering vicious words of intolerance and fearful hatred.... I wanted to know why. My growing alienation and questioning began to focus on one overriding issue: the status of black people in America.... Hoping that the church might provide some answers, I asked: "What about our Christian faith? Doesn't God love all people?".... Of course...God loves everybody, I was told, but there were differences. And of course we love everybody too, but that doesn't mean we have to live together.... I asked the church people why we sent missionaries to Africa but didn't have any contact with black people in our own city. Weren't there a lot of black Christians, and why didn't our churches ever have anything to do with one another?.... I was told that we were better off separated.... Others said that blacks were happy with the way things were. They had their ways and places to live, and we had ours.... Some people told me

that asking these questions would only get me into trouble. That proved to be the only honest answer I ever got (1983, p. 36).

As a young man haunted by the emphases of the earliest Christians, but faced with the altered context, Wallis actually lost his faith for several years (1983, pp. 50-51). Eventually, he came to understand that it was not Christianity that was the problem, but the American alteration of the earliest Christian context:

I discovered that the power of biblical faith known so well by revivalists and reformers down through the years has the capacity to radically critique and challenge the root assumptions of American wealth and power. *I sensed the possibility of the redirection of the evangelical tradition back to its most authentic stream, away from the culture-conforming detours it has taken in our country.... I realized that my evangelical faith, so long captive to American privilege and power, need not be abandoned after all, but rather recovered, rekindled, and restored to its truest meaning* (1983, p. 18, emphasis mine).

Today, Wallis serves as pastor of the Sojourner's Community in Washington, D.C. (founded in the late 1970s), and is fully committed to a radical, cross-cultural, and thoroughly Christian agenda that demands change:

As Christians become identified with the marginal people, we too will become marginalized, pushed to the edges of society. We too will inhabit the desert, in opposition to things as they are, in solidarity with the poor, in solitude and prayer, in community, in prison, in risk-taking and sacrifice. Key to the church's recovery of its identity is its relinquishment

of privilege and control – being willing to risk its position and even social legitimacy for the sake of the gospel (1983, p. 181).

No African American has done more for racial reconciliation among conservative evangelicals than John Perkins. Protesting over the inequalities in his small Mississippi town, Perkins was arrested and beaten, along with others, on February 8, 1970 (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 52-53). Amazingly, he came to a revolutionary conclusion during this ordeal: “racial and economic justice, though a battle that must be continually waged, was not a high enough goal for Christians. For those who claim to be new creatures in Christ, reconciliation must be the goal” (Berk, 1997, pp. 9-10). Perkins forgave those who had beaten him and committed himself to do missions work in Mississippi.

Referred to as “something of an anomaly,” Perkins drew his inspiration from diverse sources: Reformed Calvinism, fundamentalist views of the Bible, and the Social Gospel movement (Berk, 1997, pp. 95-99). Perkins made inroads into the evangelical community, promoting his vision of reconciliation: “‘The purpose of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,’ John emphasized, ‘is to burn through racial and cultural barriers’” (Berk, 1997, p. 215). Working with such prominent evangelicals as John MacArthur, today the pastor of Grace Community Church in California, and Billy Graham, Perkins eventually founded an integrated community of Christians he called the Voice of Calvary, after the popular radio show of John MacArthur’s famous father (Berk, 1997, pp. 78, 198, 399). Perkins also participated in the signing of a 1973 document entitled “A Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern,” and has assisted Jim Wallis with the Sojourners Community (Berk, 1997, pp. 206-207).

For many years, Perkins was in a minority – a black Christian confronting white evangelicalism with the responsibility of racial reconciliation. His trademark viewpoint is a strong dose for white and black evangelicals: “... a gospel that reconciles people only to God and not to each other *cannot* be the true Gospel of Jesus Christ” (Perkins & Rice, 1993, p. 44, emphasis mine). Today, although advanced in years, Perkins continues – now with a growing number of allies – to speak and write on behalf of his vision of black and white Christians existing in a reconciled community (Berk, 1997, p. 399).

Overlapping Perkins were other black evangelicals working for racial reconciliation. Tom Skinner experienced a conversion to Christianity while an active member of a street gang in Harlem (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 53). Skinner quickly became an influential evangelist and eventually found himself in a position to hold the ear of white evangelicals. Skinner reached thousands of African Americans with the evangelical message, wrote provocative books on racial issues. In 1970, he preached a message concerning race and Christianity at the massive, and predominantly white, Urbana conference; the sermon, “The U.S. Racial Crisis and World Evangelism,” is still considered by many to have been prophetic in both tone and content (Gilbreath, 2006, p. 59-69). In 1996, Skinner and evangelical author Patrick Morley started a ministry emphasizing racial reconciliation in Mississippi (Gilbreath, 2006, pp. 70-71).

Another significant sign of change is that prominent leaders and denominations have publicly acknowledged and apologized for past sins of racism and segregation. For instance, Jerry Falwell, after relating specific failures to stand for black friends during the Civil Rights era, writes in his autobiography:

I am sorry that I did not take a stand on behalf of the civil rights of David Brown, Lump Jones, and my other black friends and acquaintances during those early years [as a pastor].... But I must admit that in all those years it didn't cross my mind that segregation and its consequences for the human family were evil. I was blind to that reality. I didn't realize it then, but if the church had done its job from the beginning of this nation's history, there would have been no need for the civil rights movement (1997, p. 308).

Even more significant is the "Resolution on Racism" issued by the Southern Baptist Convention in June of 1989:

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists have not always clearly stood for racial justice and equality; and

WHEREAS, The growth in the racial and ethnic population of Southern Baptist life is a strong indicator of our growing diversity; and

WHEREAS, The Bible affirms that all people are created in the image of God and are therefore equal; and

WHEREAS, All people need a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ;

Therefore, be it RESOLVED, That we, the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada, June 13-15, 1989, affirm our intention of standing publicly and privately for racial justice and equality.

Be it further RESOLVED, That we repent of any past bigotry and pray for those who are still caught in its clutches; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we bear witness to the devastating impact of racism; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we call upon individual Southern Baptists, as well as our churches, to reach across racial boundaries, establishing fraternal rather than paternal friendships; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we encourage Southern Baptist churches to observe Race Relations Sunday; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That our agencies and institutions seek diligently to bring about greater racial and ethnic representation at every level of Southern Baptist institutional life; and

And be it finally RESOLVED, That we as Southern Baptists renew our commitment to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with every individual in obedience to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) (Southern Baptist, 1989).

In 1995, a similar public declaration was issued "by white and black pentecostals [*sic*] at a historic gathering that was dubbed the 'Memphis Miracle'" (Wallis, 1997).

Another significant event occurred in 1995, as Don Argue, then president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE),

... called together black and white evangelical leaders and, in a dramatic moment, confessed the sin of racism by white evangelicals, asked

for forgiveness, and committed the NAE to forge new multiracial

relationships to change evangelical institutions. Even initially skeptical black evangelical leaders became convinced that the new direction was for real (Wallis, 1997).

Since this declaration, the NAE has appointed more African American leaders in its organization, worked closely with the National Association of Black Evangelicals, and assisted in the reconstruction of black churches destroyed in hate crimes (Early, 1996).

Christian sociologist and coveted speaker Anthony Campolo had an unusual childhood. When the Baptist church he attended as a child closed down due to white flight, his father simply chose the next nearest Baptist church, Mt. Carmel Baptist – a predominantly black church. Growing up in this biracial environment impacted Campolo, and his discovery of John Wesley and the social activism of the early Methodists solidified his worldview early on (Olsen, 2003, p. 32).

After earning a degree in theology, Campolo pursued graduate work in sociology because, he says, “I wanted to understand the social forces that were at work in my community. What were the sociological forces that nurture racism?” His career goal was based on his acceptance of Max Weber’s idea of “charismatic” leaders who arise in times of social crisis – simply put, Campolo set out to *be* one of them. While controversial, Campolo has managed to retain an evangelical hearing in many sectors and his books continue to sell well. Addressing numerous social issues, racial reconciliation among evangelicals is a topic that surfaces again and again in his ministry (Olsen, 2003, p. 32).

Promise Keepers is an organization that was founded in 1990 by former football coach Bill McCartney, with headquarters in Denver, Colorado. Since its inception, it has been an important organization committed to ending segregation among evangelicals.

Promise Keepers is a para-church organization that has held rallies and events all over the United States, focusing on training and accountability among men. Over 2 million men of varying ethnicity have attended the rallies, usually so large they are held in major sports arenas.

Racial reconciliation is one of the "seven promises" that the thousands of evangelical men must make, and Promise Keepers rallies are characterized as being an interracial gathering of Christians. In addition, the Promise Keepers organization has put many African Americans on staff (over 25%), and feature many prominent African American speakers at their gatherings (Berk, 1997, pp. 397-398). Racial reconciliation was the main emphasis of the group in 1996, which included a gathering of over 39,000 clergy in Atlanta specifically for that purpose (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 65-66).

There are prominent African American evangelical pastors in contemporary churches whose avid listeners/readers include both black and white Christians. The recently deceased E.V. Hill, a minister with the National Baptist Convention, ministered to an interracial audience of millions via both his writings and television ministry. Anthony (Tony) Evans not only ministers interracially through his church and the connected Urban Alternative radio ministry, but is well respected among prominent white evangelicals like Charles (Chuck) Swindoll and John MacArthur, Jr. Charismatic pastor Fred Price currently pastors an interracial mega-church in Los Angeles, in addition to his conference and television ministry (McKissic, Sr., 1990, pp. 38-39).

Popular white evangelical author and pastor John Piper devoted his 2002 Pastor's Conference to "The Sovereignty of God and the 'Soul Dynamic,'" a conference featuring both black and white speakers that took a "a head-on, no-holds-barred approach to the

historical and theological connections between historic Reformed theology and the African-American experience” (Piper, Desiring God, 2003). In addition, Piper regularly addresses racial issues from the pulpit, promoting what I have termed the earliest Christian context. Some of his sermon titles include: “Every Race to Reign and Worship,” “Class, Culture and Ethnic Identity in Christ,” “Race and Cross,” “God’s Pursuit of Racial Diversity At Infinite Cost,” and “Jesus Is the End of Ethnocentrism” (Piper, Desiring God, 2003).

There are many other evangelical individuals working today for racial reconciliation, certainly far too many to explore fully here (cf. Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 59) – and that fact alone is significant. In addition, there are specific churches that have actually integrated their congregations purposely to facilitate racial reconciliation. For instance, the late Spencer Perkins (John Perkin’s son) and Chris Rice, a white evangelical, began the integrated Antioch Christian community in Mississippi in 1995, a community consisting of black and white Christians living together in a commitment to racial reconciliation (Berk, 1997, pp. 376-378).

Much of the work of racial reconciliation has been conducted among evangelicals by para-church organizations such as Promise Keepers and Sojourners (examined above). Even ministries based in local churches (e.g., that of pastor John Piper) have often formed organizations structured to reach the broader evangelical community (e.g., Desiring God Ministries). Wuthnow’s research into para-church groups suggests that such organizations have become the more public representatives of American Christianity, both because of how they do things and also what they are able to do in terms of raising funds and influencing public discourse and policy (1988, pp. 100-132).

Of course, the question to be asked is this: *Just how much does all of the above matter?* The para-church organizations promoting racial reconciliation may well prove to be a vital force in evangelicalism's ongoing project to change society, but such groups would seem limited in what they could accomplish on the local church level. That is, how many evangelical men have experienced an interracial worship service at a Promise Keepers meeting only to return home to their churches and proceed with business as usual? The very fact that segregated worship still represents the general reality among evangelicals suggests that this has happened more often than not. Likewise, resolutions and affirmations on the denominational level have their place but do not necessarily represent the individual churches underneath their organizational umbrella.

As for individual evangelicals and their churches, there remains the possibility that many of them have taken up "racial reconciliation" out of genuine concern only to move on to something else before the essential work is even begun (Gilbreath, 2006, pp. 78, 81-83). Wallis comments on this very issue:

Will "racial reconciliation" just be "another fad," others ask, or will white evangelicals let that commitment take them to places they have never been before? Will they allow racial reconciliation to transform the evangelical world, or will they stop short of any real changes? "The crowd still looks pretty much the same," observes one closely involved in the process (1997).

Given the current picture in the evangelical world, and the many years the above described actions and declarations embrace, it seems that what has happened so far does indeed fall short of what is needed. Yet, these represent significant movements toward

recovery of the earliest Christian context among evangelicals. As Wallis hints, such developments could be the beginnings of change.

There may also be some social indicators that black and white Christians can begin to find common ground in their mission to society. For instance, both white and black churches are facing the common problem of reaching newer generations as interest in and respect for religion declines (Pope, 1957, pp. 118-119; Lewy, 1996, p. 129).

Cornell West commented concerning this problem in the Black Church:

I think, in fact, one way of reading rap music is as an attempt by certain highly talented cultural artists to socialize a generation in the light of the shattered institutions of black civil society; the families no longer do it, the schools can't do it. "How do I relate to other people? Tell me." And so they listen to Salt-N-Pepa who provide some moral guidelines as to how to relate to other people. *They used to get it in Sunday School thirty years ago* (1992, p. 691, emphasis mine).

This is a trend apparently in process since the 1960s (Flowers, 1984, p. 185). Citing Hart Nelson's reevaluation of the 1978 Gallup study on "Unchurched America," Lincoln and Mamiya asserted over fifteen years ago that "Recent studies have begun to show a significant growth among young, unchurched blacks, especially males in northern urban areas" (1992, p. 160). They go on to quote one of their many survey participants, a CME pastor:

For the first time in black history, we are seeing an unchurched generation of young black people growing up in urban areas. In previous generations, you could always assume some knowledge of Black Church culture....

Today, there are teenagers out there [in the streets] who have no knowledge of and no respect for the Black Church and its traditions.

(Lincoln & Mamiya, 1992, p. 310)

Within the context of predominantly white evangelicalism, Bruce and Marshall Shelley identify this same trend – separation of sectors of society from religious influence (1992, pp. 18-19). Such distancing is a manifestation of what has been termed *secularization* (Wuthnow, 1989, p. 15). Peter Berger defines this process as that “in which religion diminishes in importance both in society and in the consciousness of individuals” (2001, p. 443). This process is one that *both* black and white churches face, and common problems tend to produce allies in opposition to those problems. The need to respond to secularization, as well as other common social trends affecting the mission of the Church (e.g., postmodernism), may increasingly provide a social opportunity for new convergences and alliances between white evangelicalism and the Black Church.

There are, no doubt, some who would question whether such a convergence is desirable. Above, it was noted that the social importance of the Black Church has been a prime reason, from the African American perspective, for its perpetuation throughout history. This may cause some to wonder whether it would be detrimental if black and white Christians were to begin to worship together in reconciled churches. At least three things should be mentioned in this connection.

First, for many years now the Black Church has not been “the only significant institution in the Negro community” as it once was, “such agencies as the Negro press and the NAACP” having “largely taken over the leadership once exercised ... by the church” (Pope, 1957, p. 118; cf. Salley & Behm, 1995, pp. 32-33). Just as para-church

groups have, in some ways, displaced white evangelical churches, even so African American organizations have arisen that do what only black churches once did. In fact, the very problem just mentioned – a younger unchurched black generation – suggests that the Black Church is no longer functioning as the training ground it once did (Evans, 1995, p. 79). This goes back to the secularization that plagues both black and white churches. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, the Black Church faced a host of challenges, including declining influence and participation, as it entered the 21st century (1992, pp. 383–404).

Secondly, it can be argued that integrated, reconciled churches will be able to accomplish more for all of society. This could happen as both understanding and empathy increases between black and white Christians, and a new multicultural community is created. While both groups have some issues, genuinely addressing those issues *together* will be an essential aspect of truly multicultural churches. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the Black Church as an institution has much to offer a predominantly white evangelicalism. As noted above, black Christianity has managed to preserve many elements of the earliest Christian context. Multicultural churches do not necessarily mean an end to the Black Church so much as they would a sharing of its cultural and communal wealth.

While both white evangelicalism and the Black Church maintain certain cultural distinctives (e.g., worship style, preaching styles), it must be remembered that such things are distinct because they developed in distinction from one another (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 158). DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, and Kim point out that “culture” is a fluid (as opposed to static) reality and use the Hispanic concept of *mestizaje* (“the mixture of

human groups” – considered a *good* thing) to argue that “new and rich ways of living and viewing the world wait to be created by the intertwining of a diversity of cultures” (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 138-139). Just as distinct forms have developed in isolation, even so new forms will emerge as multicultural churches decrease the social distance between black and white.

While it is too soon to be overly optimistic, evangelical history in the United States bears ample witness that there has always been evangelicals willing to work to change the reality of segregated worship. The 21st century has seen an increase in racial cooperation and multicultural churches among evangelicals (cf. DeYoung et al., 2003). However, many prominent evangelicals working for reconciliation point out that the necessary work has barely begun (Gilbreath, 2006, pp. 178-186).

V. RESTORING THE CONTEXT: MULTICULTURAL CHRISTIANITY

The Wall Street Journal referred to evangelicalism in 1997 as “the most energetic element of society addressing racial divisions” (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 63). A national survey (1999) revealed that 60% of the participating white evangelicals understood that multicultural churches look more like those described in the New Testament (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 122). It is no doubt encouraging for reconciliation-minded evangelicals to see the many efforts among Christians in general, and evangelicals in particular, to promote racial harmony and multicultural churches.

However, it would be unrealistic to see sweeping change where there is none. Promise Keeper’s 1996 year of racial reconciliation, noted above as a positive emphasis, received negative feedback from over 40% of the participants and is cited as the likely cause of lower attendance at conferences from 1997 onward (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 68). As of 2003, only about 2.25% of American Christian churches were racially mixed (defined as having no one racial group making up 80% or more of the church) on a regular basis (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 2).

Over fifty years ago, Liston Pope cautioned Christians concerning the difference between integration and mere desegregation:

The presence of a few members of a minority group in a church circle does not mean that integration, in the sense of full inclusion in the life and work of the church, has taken place. It may mean only that desegregation has begun (1957, p. 112).

Segregated worship is a *widespread* reality in our society, and the positive changes in evidence here and there are not yet widespread. As previously demonstrated, American evangelicalism remains, by and large, racially stratified in significant ways (Evans, 1995, pp. 1-20; Poling, 1996, pp. 63-100; Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 153-168; Perry, 2002, pp. 33-110; DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 181-186; Gilbreath, 2006, pp. 73-99, 130-156, 168-186).

Before real change can occur on a widespread basis, American evangelicals must come to understand the seriousness of the situation:

The history of schism has been a history of Christianity's defeat. The church which began its career with the promise of peace and brotherhood for a distracted world has accepted the divisions of the society it had hoped to transform and has championed the conflicts it had thought to transcend.... having accepted the cynical distinctions of the old humanity, it has maintained and reinforced these by its denominational structure, often giving the sanction of the spirit to the warfare of the flesh. From its position of leadership in the task of integrating humanity it has fallen to the position of a follower in a social process guided by economic and political forces (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 264).

Niebuhr's diagnosis includes nearly every element essential to the present thesis.

Unfortunately, American evangelicalism has yet to embrace this perspective in its fullness.

As noted above, the situation of segregated worship in evangelical churches can change only with recourse to the earliest Christian context. Simply put, this means

recovering early Christianity for a contemporary evangelicalism that has allowed competing ideologies to obscure what their spiritual ancestors considered central to their faith. A crucial question, then, is this: *How, in practical terms, can this be done?*

While there are no doubt many American evangelicals yet to realize the inconsistency between the roots of their faith and the reality of segregated worship, there are also many others that simply do not know *how* to build and maintain multicultural congregations.

Drawing on various sources, the following observations can be made.

RESOCIALIZATION & A PARTICIPATING CLERGY

First and foremost, recovering the pan-ethnic emphasis of early Christianity requires *a participating clergy*. The Christian lay person, especially the intrinsic type, listens to his/her pastor because they genuinely seek instruction in how they should think and live. This is evident, for example, in the historical fact that the white congregations who stood for civil rights in the 1960s were largely following the lead of their white pastors, who addressed the problem in their sermons and teaching. Likewise, those white churches that stood against civil rights consisted of congregations following their pastors' anti-civil rights messages (Kivisto, 1998). Pastoral leadership occupy an influential position for a percentage of their congregations, and history has proven again and again that those willing to listen – regardless of how small that percentage of people may be within a larger congregation – can function as catalysts for significant change.

Pastoral leadership must pay careful attention to what sociologist Samuel W. Blizzard termed the “integrative role,” the process of moving the congregation from profession to practice (1958, pp. 374-380). Among other things, American clergy have generally traded in “the prophetic voice” for messages geared toward religious consumers

with “felt needs,” messages that demand little real change or character development (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 162-168). Yet, in sociological terms, Christian discipleship has always been about a *resocialization* process. The pastor and his message, for good or bad, is a crucial force in this process:

I have a growing conviction about the need for preaching that would make the gospel known in our historical context, taking a biblical and evangelistic approach with a strong emphasis on conversion.... It is time to make preaching the gospel publicly controversial again. *We need the kind of preaching that will call people away from the ruling American myths, illusions, and life-style* (Wallis, 1983, p. 192, emphasis mine).

Pastors faithful to the earliest Christian context have a responsibility to do exactly this. In the acceptance of new minority members during the 1940s-1950s, Pope found that it was both the stated policy and the leadership of the local church that were the crucial factors in the integration process (1957, p. 111). Evangelical ministers must bring this responsibility to bear on their people with regards to the inconsistency inherent in the reality of segregated worship:

... if we were to assume for a moment that there are black and white Christians who are ready, willing, and able to move beyond initial expressions of repentance towards renunciation and beyond, what practical steps might that process include? In addition to challenging the churches to do the right thing, we [i.e., ministers] can perform ministries of grace and empowerment by providing moral action plans for motivated people (Franklin, 2003).

Theologian and author Reinhold Niebuhr understood the position occupied by clergy in the re-socialization of their congregations. For this reason, the 1950s saw Niebuhr urging ministers to denounce racial prejudice as a sin from the pulpit right along with the typical list of sins that sermons often focus on (Osborn, 1958, p. 69).

Clergy also function as leaders in the church in other ways. For instance, it is the pastoral leadership of a local church that sets the pace in the area of outreach. Pope (1957) noted that the white clergy “seldom called on non-white families or invited them to church” and that “recruitment of members has followed racial lines” (pp. 114-115). It seems that things have hardly changed along these lines. In fact, some leaders in the Church Growth movement have actually urged churches to remain homogenous. This particular strategy, called the homogenous unit principle (HUP), reasons that churches should specifically tailor their ministries to reach a particular group of people – one of the identifiers of such a group being ethnicity (McGavran & Wagner, 1990, pp. 163-178; Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 150-151, 161).

Principles like the HUP, as David Wells puts it, prevent churches from preserving that aspect of the Gospel that emphasizes that “in Christ all barriers have fallen – those of race, education, class, etc ... if they are carefully and deliberately preserving these barriers as part of their mission strategy” (1990, p. 70). Increasing numbers of evangelical clergy have been influenced by church growth methodologies that, at least in this regard, prioritize a pragmatically-driven quest for numerical growth over the biblical/historical definition of what the Church – by very definition – is supposed to be. To challenge the reality of segregated worship, evangelical ministers will have to “choose between apparent acquiescence in segregation for the sake of numerical church growth

and the struggle for reconciliation at the expense of numerical church growth” (Stott, 1996, p. 65).

RESPONSIBILITY & A PARTICIPATING LAITY

Recovering the pan-ethnic emphasis of early Christianity also requires a *participating laity*. This may seem to be a rather obvious suggestion, but is more complicated than it may at first appear. It is probably true that most white evangelicals today would have little problem with black members in their churches. It is equally true that most black churches would welcome white members. Yet, as Pope argued over fifty years ago, this is hardly enough:

... willingness to “accept” non-whites in white churches is not likely alone to produce much change, just as the traditional open-door attitude of Negro churches has failed to bring in many white members (1957, p. 117).

There is a *responsibility* toward building multicultural churches that comes with being a Christian (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 129). For both sides, efforts at racial reconciliation must be *intentional*. Given the historical situation that has given rise to segregated worship, it is probably safe to say that white Christians will have to take the *initiative*, and that black Christians, for their part, must be *responsive* to that initiative. Otherwise, what cognitive psychologists term the “status-quo bias” will dictate that the reality of segregated worship continues unchanged (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 146). That is, there is a marked tendency for individuals to perpetuate whatever arrangement they already know. Without both white and black evangelicals who are willing to commit to the idea of multicultural faith communities, the perseverance so essential to the task will be lacking.

Black evangelicals may well have the most difficult responsibility in that the earliest Christian context demands something of them that may at times seem contrary to their sense of history. As African American activist Fannie Lou Hamer often reminded black Christians during the Civil Rights era, their “problems will not be solved by hating whites,” and “If we’re trying to break down this barrier of segregation, we [African Americans] can’t segregate ourselves” (Marsh, 1997, pp. 8-9). It seems that the only way to have a laity, black *and* white, that will participate in an agenda for reconciliation is the factor highlighted in the previous section – the clergy must use their oratory power and influence responsibly to both educate and motivate (Blizzard, 1958, pp. 374-380). The motivation, and sometimes reeducation, must flow from pulpit to pew. Many evangelical laity, as their history has repeatedly demonstrated, will follow passionately committed clergy.

One popular strategy that is used by evangelical churches is to simply relocate when the surrounding community begins to change. In the past, it was standard procedure for a white congregation in an area that African Americans were moving into to sell their church to a black congregation and relocate their own church elsewhere (Pope, 1957, p. 120). Yet, is such a strategy faithful to the emphases of the earliest Christians, as examined above? Rather than viewing changing demographics as an opportunity for evangelical white flight, consistency with the earliest Christian context would regard such changes as a positive challenge:

Churches located in so-called “transitional zones,” where a new group (often Negro) is moving in and the old settlers are moving out, have

special opportunities to transcend race in their composition (Pope, 1957, p. 120).

Situations like this bring estranged ethnic communities to the doorsteps of white churches. Instead of preserving the *status quo* by picking up and moving, local churches can meet such situations head-on by practicing the kind of sacrificial reconciliatory ministry that characterized the earliest Christian context. This will most often involve a willingness to change and adapt on the part of white evangelicals (Pope, 1957, p. 121). Wedded to the *status quo*, evangelicalism loses its power to transform both individuals and communities.

Powerfully persuasive teaching on racial reconciliation, even if internalized by whole congregations, is not enough to bring about multicultural churches. While such an ideology is indispensable to the task of racial reconciliation, there are equally powerful social forces that militate against such a perspective being worked out in observable ways:

... given U.S. history, merely eliminating racial prejudice would not end racially divided churches. The need for symbolic boundaries and social solidarity, the similarity and homophily principles, the status quo bias, and the niche edge and niche overlap effects all push congregations, and volunteer organizations in general, continually toward internal similarity (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 151).

If “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2.14-26), then those elements of Christian faith that demand racial reconciliation are also dead unless they are wedded to intentional effort to

bring them to bear on congregational and social life. Any viable movement to build multicultural churches will necessarily be counter-cultural.

Finally, evangelical history (surveyed above) reveals a recurring problem: the tendency for the majority (white evangelicals) to stop short of working for the changes suggested by the earliest Christian context. That is, white evangelicals have often been satisfied with cursory solutions (e.g., attracting black members) and have failed to adequately assess the depth of the racial divide in the United States. In practical terms, white evangelicals have not actively pursued social relationships with minority Christians (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 80-81). Such external arrangements fall short of the intrinsic spirituality that pervades early Christianity.

RECOVERY & A PARTICIPATORY LITURGY

Yet another element that will prove helpful in recovering the pan-ethnic emphasis of early Christianity is *a participatory liturgy*. Buell notes that it was the “religious practices” of the early Christians that served as “a means of aggregation,” that united “people from many cities and nations into a new Christian people.” And again, “*new practices create a new people* – brought into relation to one another via their new relation to God” (2002, p. 444, emphasis mine). The practices referred to by Buell include those generally conceived of as forming the conversion-initiation experience, chiefly water baptism.

Evangelicals, generally speaking, suffer a serious weakness along these lines. Allowing an individualistic culture to remake the faith in its image, evangelicals have long held to a revivalist mentality that focuses on personal decisions for Christ and individual faith to the exclusion of communal elements. Marsh pinpoints this very

mentality as an indirect factor in the racist attitudes of certain evangelicals during the Civil Rights era (1997, pp. 106-112).

In other words, while other Christian traditions have perhaps weakened the vertical dimension of Christianity (i.e., the individual's relationship to God), evangelicals are often found weakening the horizontal dimension (i.e., one's relationship to other human beings). Concrete expressions of Christian *community* are often missing among evangelicals. Therefore, a ritual like baptism becomes anything but what it originally was: *an induction into the community of the redeemed*. Lest some think that the connection I draw between the rite of baptism and an integrated community is tenuous, note the connection drawn in the New Testament by Paul himself:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For *by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free* – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many (1 Cor. 12.12-14, emphasis mine).

Evangelicals generally concede that water baptism is an outward, symbolic demonstration of the Spirit-baptism described by Paul, though explanations of its precise nature vary (cf., e.g., Grudem, 1994, pp. 80-81; Bloesch, 2001, pp. 11-15). It is seen, therefore, that the Apostle directly links baptism with the pan-ethnicity of the earliest Christian context. Baptism is a ritual designed to bring people into a unified body with a common history and identity. As Durkheim noted, all religious ritual involves similar purposes (1965, p. 47).

Recovery of a participatory liturgy will be founded on a renewed emphasis on evangelical Christianity as *a community to be entered into*, one in which all who complete the conversion-initiation process are *participants*. It will begin with a recovery of baptism as an induction *event*, an event attended by *celebration* and invested with transcendent *meaning*. It will continue with the recovery of the love feast of the early Christians, the celebration of the Lord's Table at which all come together in unity, a communion celebrated often in remembrance of the One whose body they constitute:

In offerings and in the Lord's Day, *these rituals specifically reached across barriers of nationality, race, and culture to unify the early Christian movement*. In all these manifestations they provided patterned behavior by which the worship and community life of the church could be recognized ... (Dudley & Hilgert, 1987, p. 145, emphasis mine).

Pope notes that Roman-Catholic churches have had more success in creating community in their churches between those of varying ethnicity, writing that it is "the centrality and objectivity of the Mass" that "elevate[s] worshipers to a common plane" (1957, p. 123). Likewise, when the Episcopal Church wanted to build community between white and black members of their churches during the antebellum period, its priests turned to the communion table:

...bringing into action the highest and holiest feelings of our common natures. There should be much less danger of inhumanity on the one side, or of insubordination on the other, between parties who knelt upon the Lord's Day around the same table, and were partakers of the same communion (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 242).

Despite the Episcopal mistake in thinking that it could preserve the master/slave relationship (see above), liturgical churches have nevertheless recognized that their liturgies have the potential to offer powerful symbols that facilitate life in community. Whether viewed from the perspective of the theologian or of the social scientist, the power of symbols like baptism and the Eucharist cannot be overestimated – the earliest Christian context cannot survive without them.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Pointing out inconsistencies between the earliest Christian context and the reality of segregated worship, and subsequently prescribing multicultural churches as a more faithful representation of the emphases of the early Christians, requires evangelicals to contemplate their history and theology as revealed by the very sources they regularly appeal to. However, mere recognition and acknowledgement will never change the reality of segregated worship. Real change will accompany only a concerted effort among both black and white evangelicals. Multicultural churches cannot come into existence overnight simply because the reality of segregated worship did not come into existence overnight. The path to truly multicultural fellowships will often include frustration and will require patience.

Practical steps like interracial gatherings rooted in the commonality of the faith, the appointing of minorities to church staff positions, the clear declaration and enforcing of an inclusive policy, the promotion of outreach to other racial groups, and even church mergers where the opportunity presents itself are all steps in the right direction (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 162-180). Nevertheless, it would be naïve and simplistic to misperceive such actions as quick solutions to the abiding problem:

Once members of minority groups have been brought in, it is very important that they have more than an official or token relationship to the church. They need to be incorporated fully into the program and fellowship of the body if the reception of them is to be more than a gesture. And the new type of relationship in the church will need to be carried over into relationships in other areas of life. It may be easier to worship together than to go to a church supper together, and easier to do the latter than to demonstrate that the bonds of faith still hold outside the church where the world is watching (Pope, 1957, p. 125).

If a truly multicultural faith community is the goal, the earliest Christian context should serve as the guiding paradigm in whatever practical efforts various groups of evangelicals choose to pursue. Without this perspective, the efforts become mere gestures that will always fall short of true reconciliation and community.

To facilitate multicultural churches in a racialized society, it will be necessary for evangelical Christians to change the way they think, both about their faith and about one another. In fact, evangelicalism *as a whole* will only accomplish a pan-ethnic community with a renewed perspective. Samuel S. Hill gives a concise, yet thorough, summary of the mission of the Christian Church, a summary that is remarkably consistent with the earliest Christian context:

The Christian church has four major responsibilities.... the measure for evaluating its faithfulness consists in the degree to which the church devotes itself to the achievement of *all four* objectives. The first responsibility is to perpetuate Christianity by casting it in forms and

structures, and equipping it with authority, so that it can abide the corroding and eroding forces of time and circumstance. The second is to bring the gospel's meaning and power to bear upon all individuals in every society across the entire range of human needs and problems. The third is to review Christianity's truth-claims constantly in the interest of theological statement at once rooted in transcendent revelation and practical relevance. The fourth is to bring about the transforming and healing relation of all persons to the God of Jesus Christ (1999, p. 191, emphasis his).

All four of the responsibilities noted by Hill, directly or indirectly, come to bear on the reality of segregated worship. On the practical level, as professor and minister Curtiss DeYoung emphasizes, evangelicals must become "artisans of reconciliation" in their day-to-day lives and activities (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 60).

Leadership in a local church will be a stumbling block to a multicultural agenda unless it is diversified. The position and privilege associated with the majority (white evangelicals) must be shared in a truly multicultural church (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 95, 197). Wayne Gordon, a pastor at the multicultural Lawndale Community Church in Chicago, resigned as Senior Pastor in 1992; he did so intentionally, saying in an interview that he decided to take an assistant pastor position simply because he wanted the black members of his church to "see a white man give up power." This kind of willing rearrangement of leadership is what Raymond Bakke refers to as "downward mobility," challenging pastoral staff to embrace the concept when it facilitates truly multicultural churches (2000, p. 41). A practical journey back to the earliest Christian context will

require “the authentic incorporation of minorities into the life and leadership of the churches” (Pope, 1957, pp. 117-118), a fact that continues to be emphasized by contemporary reconciliation-minded evangelicals (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 177).

While the above suggestions certainly are not exhaustive and fall short of a total solution, what is *insufficient* for change in this area can be noted with some degree of certainty. Mere willingness without action, and even official statements of inclusive policies, will leave the situation where it is (though perhaps causing some individuals to feel better about it). Changes on the denominational level should not be equated with life in community, which takes place at the local church level. While the practical side of day-to-day relations in a multicultural setting will be difficult: “Becoming a multiracial congregation is not an afterthought that we ‘tack on’ to our normal way of doing church; it is a *fundamental shift* in understanding and practice” (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 140, emphasis mine). Yet there is hope to be found in the historic, pan-ethnic example of the earliest Christians.

WHY RECONCILIATION MATTERS TO SOCIETY

... we have got to attempt to understand what goes on in a complex phenomenon in this country: Namely, all of the various religious sects and groups and cults and denominations and temples and synagogues and all the other forms of association through which folk come together. How do we understand them, especially as potential for broad progressive and oppositional praxis? These are fundamental questions (West, 1992, p. 695).

In 1958, as the Civil Rights movement was gaining momentum, church historian Ronald E. Osborn imagined that society would eventually change the Christian Church:

It may be expected that as members of different races become acquainted with one another in the “secular” walks of life they will find themselves entering into increasing religious fellowship with one another. (p. 127)

Yet, nearly forty-nine years of subsequent history in the American churches have proven Osborn wrong. Perhaps the reason for Osborn’s failed prediction can be found in the words of Jesus and in the work of some sociologists, both of which are surprisingly similar on this point. In short, Osborn had it backwards. *It is the Christian Church that contains the potential to transform society.* Niebuhr believed that only the earliest Christian context contains the “synthesis of culture ... built upon a common world-view and a common ethics” that can answer the problems of society (1967, p. 266).

As African American Pentecostal Michael Goings writes, “When the American church actually practiced and promoted segregation within itself, *it set a trend and example for the whole world to follow*” (1995, p. 35, emphasis mine). With this contention, sociologists Emerson and Smith have agreed (2000, pp. 40, 154). Even so, a *reconciled church* would offer a powerful counter-example for contemporary society to emulate. This is especially true given that religious participation remains the most vitally important voluntary membership association in American civic life (Putnam, 1995; Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 155).

Further, even the racial healing in American secular society, with the benefit of hindsight, has halted far short of what was apparently envisioned by Osborn. This can possibly be traced to differing motivations, and hence agendas, in society and the Church.

Society in the United States is driven by political and economic concerns, and a cursory level of racial integration has come to be regarded as consistent with those concerns. Such, however, should not be mistaken for *racial reconciliation*. As Perkins and Rice have pointed out, there is a difference between integration and reconciliation, with the latter being both far more costly and far more beneficial for everyone concerned (1993, pp. 9, 17, 23-26). Mere integration may work for the functioning of secular society, but this alone does not constitute faithfulness to the earliest Christian context among evangelical Christians.

Practical consequences flowing from a perspective consistent with the Christian emphases outlined in the present thesis tend to stand out when observed. In April of 1992, it was a black Christian named Bobby Green who ran to help white truck driver Reginald Denny during the L.A. riots, having a perspective that went beyond race and politics and feeling that God told him to "get up and go there." Likewise, it was a white Christian named Kenneth Bennett who started the Memphis program "Streets" to invest his life in helping inner-city black teenagers. Like Green, Bennett acts out of his faith to alleviate human plight without regard to race and politics (Lewy, 1996, p. 89). These are simply contemporary echoes of "the Parable of the Good Samaritan" told by Jesus (Luke 10.25-37). The coverage routinely given to such accounts by secular media testify that the reverberations of these echoes cause people to sit up and take notice.

Such anecdotal accounts are specific examples of what faith communities like Antioch, mentioned above, are achieving *en masse*. It seems that when Christians, black and white, think in the same terms as the earliest Christians, they both intersect with one another on the common planes of humanity and faith. If whole communities of truly

multicultural churches dotted the United States, all of them functioning according to this same paradigm, what would happen to a surrounding society riddled with racial disharmony? One result would be the exposure, in very visible terms, of what Buell calls “the elusive elasticity of race” (2002, p. 434). Consistent with the earliest Christian context, American evangelicals would be shining “as lights in the world” (Phil’p. 2.15).

In contrast, American evangelicals sabotage their stated mission to society by perpetuating a weakened perspective that results in a kind of hypocrisy:

... a skeptic world notes with amusement where it is irreverent and with despair where it longs for a saving word, that the organization which is loudest in its praise of brotherhood and most critical of race and class discriminations in other spheres is the most disunited group of all, *nurturing in its own structure that same spirit of division which it condemns in other relations* (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 9, emphasis mine).

To put it in Jesus’ terms, society will be convinced of the claims of His followers only when the members of society see them living out His ethic of love in community (Jn. 13.35). Since Jesus’ ideal has only rarely been seen among evangelicals with respect to racial relations, “The domination of class and self-preservative church ethics over the ethics of the gospel must be held responsible for much of the moral ineffectiveness of Christianity in the West” (Niebuhr, 1967, p. 21). Because of this, American evangelicals have unwittingly sacrificed much of their effectiveness:

... far too many evangelicals have thrown in the cultural towel, acquiescing to expediency rather than rolling up their spiritual and theological sleeves to accomplish the hard work of reconciliation. *The net*

result of this benign neglect is that the gospel is either hindered or rejected, as people view as untenable a message that seems to have little effect on how people relate to their neighbors. This leaves the Christian community with a theologically accurate message but an empirically deficient model (Perkins & Rice, 1993, p. 8, emphasis mine).

It is this same perspective that Jean Bethke Elshtain, of the University of Chicago Divinity School, describes under the rubric of the “Civic and Hopeful” stance:

Within the Christian tradition...believers are called not to conform to the world but to be formed in such a way that they can transform the world. The world is wounded in so many ways: by nationalism, racism, violence. Beginning with the dignity of each and every human person, the civic and hopeful model lifts up human dignity by recognizing the religious dimension of every person: that we are made in God’s image.... The critical-hopeful model promotes a dialogue between faith and culture and civic struggles, striving to prevent the final triumph of the highly individualistic, isolating, and excessively consumer-commercial spirit of the age as citizens are enjoined to think, to speak, and to act toward a common good (2001, p. 59).

Jesus Himself described the Christian community (i.e., the local church) as the “salt” and “light” of society, warning that losing its savor or dimming its brightness would render it useless to the outside world (Matt. 5.13-16). Again, according to the fourth Gospel, Jesus promised His early disciples that the committed love that Christians have for one another would be an identifying mark and an example to society as a whole

(John 13.35). Similarly, Jesus prayed that future believers in Him would be unified “*so that the world might believe*” (Jn. 17.20-21, emphasis mine). Bock, an evangelical theologian, affirms the application of such passages to contemporary human relationships:

A major responsibility [evangelicals] have in witnessing to the world is that the quality of our own relationships, especially to one another, should show itself to be decidedly different from the world. Jesus’ “new commandment” to love one another “as I have loved you” is really a kingdom command. Sacrifice and service stand at the heart of relational dynamics. If the world is to understand community in a context of loving God and relating to others, the place it should be most visible in this cosmos is in how those in his community relate to God, each other, and the world (2001, p. 59).

It is true that many social scientists have introduced ways of thinking about religion without giving any credence to empirical claims for transcendent truth. Nevertheless, several social scientists have concurred with Jesus insofar as their insistence that religion is a positive, and even essential, aspect of society. Gerhard Lenski wrote concerning the ripple-effect that religion produces in society:

... through its impact on individuals, religion makes an impact on all the other institutional systems of the community these individuals staff. Hence *the influence of religion operates at the social level as well as the personal level* ... (Wood, 1989, p. 29, emphasis mine).

Likewise, Alexis de Tocqueville “saw religion as reinforcing self-control and maintaining moral standards,” elements affecting the maintenance of a society, though he also recognized in religion “an expression of the benevolence and self-sacrifice that are antithetical to competitive individualism” (Bellah et al., 1996, p. 223).

Durkheim’s research on suicide, as well as later research conducted in other areas, convinced him that religion was the “moral glue” that held society together. Religion, in the social cosmology of Durkheim, is the fount from which all springs:

Since it has been made to embrace all of reality, the physical world as well as the moral one, the forces that move bodies as well as those that move minds have been conceived in a religious form. That is how the most diverse methods and practices, both those that make possible the continuation of the moral life (law, morals, beaux-arts) and those serving the material life (the natural, technical and practical sciences), are either directly or indirectly derived from religion (1965, p. 255).

Religion and society, Durkheim argues, are inseparable realities:

... it may be said that nearly all the great social institutions have been born in religion. Now in order that these principal aspects of the collective life may have commenced by being only varied aspects of the religious life, it is obviously necessary that the religious life be the eminent form and, as it were, the concentrated expression of the whole collective life. If religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the soul of religion (1965, p. 466).

While actual explanations of religion elude Durkheim's "ideal society," the society nevertheless continues to be built on religious assumptions (1965, p. 468). Lincoln and Mamiya write that Durkheim clearly expressed the view that "religion is ... a social phenomenon, a shared group experience that has shaped and influenced the cultural screens of human communication and interpretation" (1992, p. 2).

Lewy expressed the Durkheimian perspective in practical terms:

Society needs a morality that will curb the antisocial tendencies of human beings, and this morality cannot be taught simply on the rational grounds that it is socially necessary. No society has yet been successful in teaching morality without religion, for morality cannot be created. It requires the support of tradition, and this tradition is generally linked to religious precepts. Certainly in the eyes of the great majority of the American people, morality is inseparably connected to religion – the moral rules are seen as God-given and derived from religion – and this connection yields concrete results (Lewy, 1996, p. 133).

It is not difficult to apply this perspective. It is significant that the 96th American Assembly on Religion in Public Life, held in New York in 2000, identified "ethnic and racial reconciliation" as one of its five "crucial concerns" (al-Hibri et al., 2001, pp. 159-162). Writing of segregated churches, Emerson and Smith point out that "any social structure or process that both increases the saliency of group boundaries and reduces interracial ties *necessarily reproduces racial inequality*" (2000, p. 161, *emphasis mine*). Thus, if evangelical churches *en masse* began to promote the earliest emphases of their faith once again, living that ethic out in ways that included integrated worship and

community, it could potentially impact the moral structure of society as a whole (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 181-186).

While this process alone would not solve all of America's racial issues, it would lay an important foundation for such change to occur. Instead of simply prioritizing self-interest, as much of American society does, evangelicals would be true peacemakers, reaffirming their faith by doing what is best both for themselves and for all (1 Thes. 5.13-15). Contrary to Osborn's prediction, it would be black and white Christians, re-socialized within churches promoting and living the earliest Christian context, that would greatly improve racial relations in the other institutions of society.

Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam has written about the decline in mutual trust and community in American culture, pointing out the detrimental affects of this trend for society as a whole. Borrowing from economics, he refers to elements like trust and community as "social capital" – that is, "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (1995, p. 67). Putnam is talking about the traits of true community interaction, and gives several reasons why "life is easier" when lived out in this way (1995, p. 67). Not surprisingly, Putnam finds that, despite the external religiosity displayed in America, religion has become "somewhat less tied to institutions and more self-defined" (1995, pp. 68-69). The many social organizations that have grown are, by and large, organizations that allow participation *with little or no social connections* (1995, pp. 70-71).

Evangelical churches have too often followed this same path, given the lack of real community discussed at length above. Yet, again, the earliest Christian context has been altered.

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament reveals that the earliest Christian communities were rich in what Putnam terms “social capital.” Literally investing their lives in each other, they found their own fulfillment through the paradoxical philosophy of Jesus that the person who “loses his life will find it” (Lu. 9.24). Luke’s narrative in Acts reports that these early Christians were even living in a voluntary, mutual form of socialism, where everything was held in common and shared with whoever had need (Acts 2.44-45). Likewise, as noted previously, the same principle continued among the early churches of the post-biblical period.

Putnam’s thesis is important because he argues that true community increases “social trust” (1995, p. 71). If anything is needed in answer to racial barriers in the United States, it is social trust. What this means in practical terms is that truly integrated, reconciled bodies of black and white Christians could do much to improve racial relations in the wider American society. Not only this, but reconciled churches could then reach out to society by providing what one author calls “safe zones” for honest racial discussions between those of different ethnicities (al-Hibri, 2001, p. 87). In purely Christian terms, this would be one way to “confess your sins *to one another* ... that you may be healed” (Jas. 5.16, emphasis mine).

Yet, citing Wuthnow, Putnam also points to some potential problems for local churches that, as is increasingly the case, utilize the “small group” model. Before such a model can bring its intended benefits, evangelicals must understand what community actually is. Otherwise, “small groups” run the risk of becoming groups that “merely provide occasions for individuals to focus on themselves in the presence of others” (Putnam, 1995, p. 72). Wuthnow further criticizes the “weak” commitment level of small

group participants: "Come if you have time. Talk if you feel like it. Respect everyone's opinion. Never criticize. Leave quietly if you become dissatisfied" (Putnam, 1995, p. 72). This is a "group" catering to *individualism*. There is some evidence that commitment to groups structured in this way, conceived of as "religious subcommunities" within the larger local church, can actually *decrease* support among members for racial integration (Wood, 1989, p. 33).

Putnam found a strong correlation between "social trust" and community: "the greater the density of associational membership in a society, the more trusting its citizens." Further, Putnam suggests that the "social decapitalization" going on now will, in time, worsen the situation (1995, p. 73). If black and white Americans are ever going to share social trust, they must begin to *associate with one another in meaningful ways* – this is precisely where the recovery of the earliest Christian context among evangelicals becomes a catalyst for racial reconciliation in the wider society.

Wallis commented on the recovery of the earliest Christian context in this same connection:

The evangelical tradition, contrary to our experience of its cultural captivity, has the capacity to fundamentally challenge the American status quo and offer a desperately needed vision of justice and peace firmly rooted in the Bible. While the state will continue to try to keep evangelical faith a civil religion, a growing number of us find that our biblical faith makes us increasingly uncivil in regard to the present political and economic order.... There has always been a very basic contradiction at the heart of America's use and abuse of Christian faith to

serve its national purposes. I believe the day is upon us in which that contradiction is being exposed. Indeed, *a revival of genuine biblical faith in this country might in fact be the one thing that could most undermine the injustice and violence that have become endemic to the American system* (1983, pp. 189-190, emphasis mine).

One of the by-products of Putnam's "social capital" (understood as mutual trust in community) existing within a multicultural evangelical church would no doubt be sorely needed honest discussion of the racial issues facing the larger society. Cornell West bemoans the fact that the academy is seemingly the only institution left where such interaction takes place, including "the church" as one of the institutions that has *succumbed to cultural forces militating against such interaction* (1992, p. 692). Likewise, Bellah used the words of Puritan John Winthrop (1588-1649) to point to Christian community as an answer to America's moral dilemma:

As the century closes we see that it is we Americans who, at every level, are lost in sin. If we can hear the words of John Paul II or John Winthrop, or the Bible, in which so many Americans profess to believe, then we can turn away from the course we have been following, the pursuit, as Winthrop put it, of "our pleasures and our profits." What we are to do instead, as Winthrop, paraphrasing the Apostle Paul, put it, is to "entertain each other in brotherly Affection, wee must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others necessities. . . wee must delight in each other, make others Conditions our owne, rejoyce together, mourne together, labour and suffer together, allwayes haveing

before our eyes. . . our Community as members of the same Body"

(Bellah, 1995).

With reference to Winthrop's words, Bellah commented that "Beyond kinship, religious commitment could provide another basis of social solidarity" (1996, p. 114).

As Lewy observes, Bellah recognized social problems stemming from the cultural shift that has affected the Christian Church as much as any other area:

A tendency to rank personal gratification above obligation to others, Robert Bellah noted, was accompanied by "a deepening cynicism about the established social, economic, and political institutions of society" (1996, p. 121).

Yet Bellah also recognized the potential of religion to change society:

The church idea reminds us that in our independence we count on others and helps us see that a healthy, grown-up independence is one that admits to healthy grown-up dependence on others. Absolute independence is a false ideal. It delivers not the autonomy it promises but loneliness and vulnerability instead.... *A church that can be counted on and that can count on its members can be a great source of strength in reconstituting the social basis of our society. Such a church may also, through its social witness, have the influence to help move our society in a healthier direction* (1996, p. 247, emphasis mine).

The Black Church itself is a historical demonstration of what Bellah and a host of social scientists, as well as Jesus Himself, say about the power of the Church to transform society. In the 1960s, some black churches were actually able to redefine church

membership “to include [Civil Rights] movement participation as a primary requisite of the role” (McAdam, 1999, p. 129). One observer is quoted as saying, “To the Negro of Montgomery, Christianity and boycott went hand in hand” (McAdam, 1999, p. 129). What would occur if a commitment to racial reconciliation was included in the membership requirements of contemporary evangelical churches?

Wuthnow is another sociologist whose work becomes relevant here. He points out that the American religious landscape is increasingly coming to be dominated by special interest groups (e.g., “Christian skateboarders”; “Christian nurses”) both within and without the Church (1988, pp. 102-104). This is a problem, because it tends to further stratify black and white Christians since they often hold differing political views, have differing cultural interests, and tend to occupy different economic strata in society. Special purpose groups are not designed for long term commitment and are simply too specific to foster any type of integration built on transcendent themes. Wuthnow notes that it is the increasing specialization of such groups that destroys the capacity for unity within a church:

In combining people who share only a rather focused objective, they run the danger of appealing to quite homogenous groups. And *these groups, instead of simply being aggregations of people who come together to worship, are likely to reflect other divisions in the wider society* (1988, p. 130, emphasis mine).

Special purpose groups are likely to reflect different interests from black to white, and so “could begin to divide along broader social lines, aggravating these [social] fractures [that already exist], rather than helping to heal them” (Wuthnow, 1988, p. 130).

Repeating the argument of Harvey Cox, I would suggest that we are witnessing more and more the church *ceasing to be the church*. I would further suggest that the domination of special interest groups that hampers community within churches and changes the focus of their activity is intimately related to the reality of segregated worship among evangelicals. Another study conducted by Wuthnow demonstrates that people familiar with Christ's Parable of the Good Samaritan, analyzed above, are more likely to exhibit charitable behavior (Lewy, p. 133). This at least suggests the possibility that if the parable was properly interpreted and understood, its message would have an affect on the reality of segregated worship among Christians.

There are also the more obvious ramifications of the life of the Church for society. Christian churches and organizations provide all sorts of service-oriented ministry to those outside their walls. James R. Wood, Professor of Sociology at Indiana University, researched 58 Indiana churches in this regard, his sample being representative of the denominational spectrum in Indianapolis. Only 1 of the 58 churches was entirely uninvolved in *community service ministry* (1989, pp. 36-38). Faith-based Christian charities are found throughout much of the United States and do much to challenge the social problems that often concern sociologists.

Given that many of these social problems stem from and specifically affect the issue of race, it would seem that multicultural churches would be enabled to pursue such ministries with a depth of understanding and purpose previously unrealized: "If white evangelicals were less racially isolated, they might assess racial problems differently and, working in unison with others, apply their evangelical vigor to broader-based solutions" (Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 132). Only in a reconciled Christian community will there

be a real understanding of both social problems affecting specific segments of the community and those problems common to everyone. Some social scientists have even suggested that simply reducing racial isolation serves to refashion conceptualizations and create new understanding between groups, both socially and theologically (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 83-86, 106-109). In fact, well-meaning efforts at “reconciliation,” when performed within the context of racial isolation and individualism, may actually *perpetuate* inequality simply because those efforts ignore problems at the structural level (Emerson & Smith, 2000, pp. 113, 130-132).

Social sciences generally, and sociology in particular, were developed not to merely analyze, but also to repair, society. Grand visions promoted in the writings of sociological founding fathers (e.g., Marx’s post-revolution utopia) often depended on an unrestrained social Darwinism that divided human beings into classes, absolute faith in social progress, and/or a dispensing with the “mythological” concepts of religion.

S.D. Gaede, Professor of Sociology at Gordon College, comments on the breadth of social analysis employed by early sociologists and the contemporary consequences of their methodologies:

[Early sociologist’s] breadth of analysis, however, had one significant defect: it consistently led to failure. The futures charted by men such as Comte, Spencer, and Marx simply did not come to pass. Needless to say, such predictive failures threw into question the adequacy of the theorist’s vision. As a result, students of the early theorists (and their students’ students) increasingly restricted the scope of their analyses, hoping to find safety in the minutiae of human events. Today, therefore, except for a few

rather brave souls, we find the social-science landscape littered with millions of highly specialized studies on everything from flossing behavior to postmortems on the personalities of dead presidents (1985, p. 87).

Hopefully, the impetus for change being expressed in the present thesis will not be perceived as arrogant, but rather as a return to an important purpose of the social sciences. If I read Gaede correctly, sociologists largely steer clear of predictive scenarios that may propose or inspire change because the failures of the early theorists have produced in them a feeling of inadequacy to tackle such issues. While rejecting their rejection of religion, I hope that the presentation in this thesis will be perceived as a sincere, albeit cautious, attempt to point to some ideas that may hold great potential for the transformation of society and as a probing analysis of others who are pursuing such ideas.

American society, more than any other contemporary nation, has embraced the social construct of race and perpetuated division on that basis. The racial issues facing the United States have evolved in certain ways, but they have not disappeared. Black and white Americans continue to stand divided in nearly every social arena. If what the New Testament claims the Church to be, and some sociologists have found the Church to be, is correct, it is no wonder that this remains the case. Can religion change society? As Niebuhr wrote nearly a century ago, "It is evident that it cannot do so in its present ecclesiastical forms, *subject as these are to the very same influences which have brought civilization to its plight*" (1967, p. 269, *emphasis mine*).

Hill writes of the southern church, but with words applicable to the entire evangelical Church:

By Christian norms, the southern church is right in meaning to submit to the biblical message as its authority, in taking the Christian mission seriously, in stressing the importance of personal decision and personal faith, in insisting that conduct must be commensurate with profession, and in its sedulous vigilance against compromising Christian truth. *The tragic waste results from its severe partialization of the Christian message, which is no light matter but, rather, the very essence of heresy. In the southern church's hands, the Christian affirmation and claim are reduced to a mere shadow of their massive, dynamic reality* (1999, p. 195, emphasis mine).

Until black and white Christians find their common humanity in the City of God, to borrow the terminology of St. Augustine, what hope is there for the racial crisis in the City of Man? Religion has great potential to heal social divisions, but not if it remains "a mere shadow" of the "dynamic reality" it could be.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the Fall of 1960, a young African American girl named Ruby Bridges was going through her own daily hell as the sole agent of integration for a public school in New Orleans, Louisiana. She would walk through a crowd of screaming, vulgar white racists every day. A white psychiatrist named Robert Coles took an interest in her due to previous studies he had done on stress. One day, Coles noticed that Ruby would stop at the top of the school stairs outside, turn around, and then her mouth would move. When he found out, through interview sessions, that Ruby was praying for her tormentors, he was stunned. He had no explanation for it, and the behavior of that little girl changed his entire life.

Today, Robert Coles is a Christian largely because he could not deny the faith of Ruby Bridges (Coles, 1996, pp. 34-40). What exactly does this have to do with the issue of segregated Christianity? Simply this: Ruby's unconditional forgiveness of her white tormentors spilled outside of the sharply defined world of black and white. It is significant that Ruby's Christ-like behavior influences most of all the spiritual life of a white man observing from a distance.

Is it not entirely consistent with the teachings of biblical and historic Christianity to see in the unspoken spiritual interaction between Ruby and her therapist a *microcosm* of what the Christian Church should be? That is, within the biblical construct of the household of God, the meeting of two very different cultural experiences is anything but harsh and abrasive, and certainly not harmful. To the contrary, Ruby was living out of an

identity that reached far beyond ethnicity and notions of race. Further, it was this transcendent identity that in turn transformed her therapist. The positive results on both ends of the interaction happened within the context of a historical event that had everything to do with black and white, and yet the interaction itself was predicated on nothing of the sort. What happened, albeit by a sort of accident, was nothing less than the mutual edification of human beings that is the substance of the earliest Christian context.

Liston Pope wrote about “a tension [that] often arises,” focusing on segregated worship, “regarding the actual situation and the contrasting testimony of the Scriptures and of Christian history on such matters” (1957, p. 142). The present thesis represents, among other things, an attempt to bring this tension into sharp focus. Communities, as some of the social scientists cited above have noted, are built on *collective memory*. Unfortunately, an amnesiac American evangelicalism has been in possession of a memory that is both faulty and selective.

When evangelicals have forgotten what the story is about, they can always go back to the beginning. In this case, Christianity began with the revolutionary concept that the doing and dying of Jesus Christ was the historical expression of God’s love for *the world*. Exiled on the island of Patmos, the author of Revelation/The Apocalypse saw in his vision of the multitude of saints before God, a group gathered “from all peoples, languages, and nations” (Rev. 7.9). Taking such scriptural concepts at face value, the earliest Christians conceived of themselves as something akin to a “race,” a community of people unified in their identity as God’s people and open to all comers. This idea seems to be gaining some ground once again, but its explosive potential has not yet been

fully realized. When it is – according to the traditional words of Jesus and the theories of many sociologists – it will be apparent to all.

Christianity was never intended to be molded by the hatred of racists nor by the pain of those hated by them. Rather, it was intended to change the former and heal the latter, and Christians short sell their own religion when they work for anything less:

Whatever the manner of its coming, the kingdom of God is *a kingdom beyond caste*. The churches in certain instances are not above caste; their own lives are divided by it. *To the extent that this is true, they do not belong to nor foreshadow the coming kingdom*. They, too, will need to be redeemed and purified. For where God truly reigns and his kingdom prevails, men know no difference of color or race. Forgiveness and oneness in him are the way of life in the kingdom beyond caste (Pope, 1957, pp. 159-160, emphases mine).

Christianity, undiluted by centuries of human agenda, is meant to transform *both* parties into something else, “new creations” like Ruby Bridges; human beings sharing a restored Image like Christ, “Christians.” For evangelicals, individually or corporately, to be *anything less* represents a betrayal of both their own Scriptures and the history of their spiritual ancestors. If black and white Christians in the United States continue to view one another as they always have, they will always remain segregated to one degree or another. In fact, this will remain the case even if they are standing side by side within the same building on Sunday morning singing the same songs and listening to the same sermon. It is the *worldview* that must be altered, and it must be the worldviews of *both*

black *and* white evangelicals that must be altered to embrace and live out the grand maxims that are inherent in the Christian tradition.

And what exactly would that look like? Clement of Alexandria, there at the beginning of the faith, testified to the beauty of the earliest Christian context:

The Word was not hidden from any; he is a universal light; he shines on all peopleLet us hasten to salvation, to the new birth. Let us, who are many, hasten to be gathered together into one love corresponding to the union of the one Being. Similarly, let us follow after unity by the practice of good works, seeking the good Monad. *And the union of many into one, bringing a divine harmony out of many scattered sounds, becomes one symphony*, following one leader and teacher, the Logos, and never ceasing until it reaches the truth itself, with the cry "Abba, Father." (Buell, 2002, p. 448, emphasis mine).

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APPENDIX: THE NEW TESTAMENT & RACE

While a brief summary of the teaching of the New Testament with regards to ethnic division and pan-ethnic unity is presented above, I have included more detail below for those readers who are interested. In addition, some of the implications of the New Testament ethic concerning interpersonal relationships are examined, as well as what some evangelical scholars have written concerning these passages.

Matthew, traditionally regarded as the author of the gospel narrative bearing his name, records the genealogy of Jesus in a way that many commentators consider to be theologically motivated. This is seen to be the case when it is realized that Matthew acted counter-culturally in including four Old Testament women in his version of the genealogy that do not appear in those of Exodus or 1 Chronicles (Bakke, 2000, p. 52). The four women in question, as has been recognized as significant at least since Martin Luther highlighted their presence in the 15th century, all are foreigners: Canaanites (Tamar and Rahab), Moabite (Ruth), and Hittite (Bathsheba).

Jesus, a *Jewish* man, approached the hated minorities of his day, the Samaritans, with an attitude that ran counter to that of his Jewish contemporaries. For instance, in John chapter four Jesus takes the initiative in approaching a Samaritan woman and offering her the same change of life he was offering the Jews. The passage portrays the perplexed demeanor of the woman as she asks Jesus, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" The author then adds an explanatory note:

“For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4.9; all biblical quotes are from the New King James Version).

The most startling evidence of Jesus’ universal perspective comes in the “Parable of the Good Samaritan,” a story with a meaning often lost on 21st century American readers (Luke 10.25-37). After instructing his disciples to love their neighbor, someone asks “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answers this inquiry with the story of a Jewish traveler who is robbed and beaten. Left for dead by the roadside, the man is passed by two of his own people, one of which is even a priest. It is one of the hated Samaritans who stops and helps the man (Luke 10.25-37). The radical nature of the illustration could hardly be less than intentional, occurring shortly after Jesus’ harsh rebuke of His disciples James and John for wanting to call down fire to destroy a group of Samaritans (Luke 9.51-55). It is most significant that, after establishing that it was the Samaritan who acted as a “neighbor,” Jesus tells his questioner “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10.37).

Both the third Gospel and Acts have traditionally been attributed to the half-Gentile disciple, Luke. It is Luke who records the angelic announcement, implicitly universal in scope, at Christ’s birth: “Peace on earth, goodwill toward men” (2.14). Simeon’s announcement, also recorded by Luke, speaks of “salvation ... prepared before the face of *all peoples*” and calls the infant Jesus “A light to bring revelation *to the Gentiles*” (2.30-32, emphasis mine). Later, John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus, announcing that “*all flesh* shall see the salvation of God” (3.6, emphasis mine). While Matthew records a genealogy of Christ designed to stress His connection to Israel and the line of David, Luke gives us a genealogy with a universal emphasis in that it traces Jesus all the way back to Adam (3.23-38).

From the very beginning, Jesus invites Jewish anger by making the point that prophets of old were blessing Gentiles, citing the Old Testament examples of Zarephath of Sidon and Naaman the Syrian (4.23-28). Jesus heals a Roman Centurion's servant (7.1-10), making the startling comment that "I have not found such great faith, *not even in Israel!*" (7.9, emphasis mine). When James and John offer to call down fire to destroy a group of unbelieving Samaritans, Luke records Jesus' rebuke: "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (9.55-56). Jesus tells the Jewish unbelievers that "it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon [both Gentile cities of the Old Testament] at the judgment than for you" (10.14). Luke includes the Parable of the Good Samaritan (10.25-37), as well as a litany of parables concerning the impending exclusion of Israel and the inclusion of all peoples in God's kingdom (13.24-30; 14.16-24; 15.11-32; 16.16-17; 16.19-31; 19.11-27; 20.9-16). Luke closes his Gospel repeating Jesus' commission to go to "all nations" (24.47) (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 14).

The writers of the synoptic gospels emphasized the inclusiveness of Jesus' message and practice, his vision of a multicultural community of followers, the influence of Gentiles on his life and ministry, and the "all nations" mandate adopted from the Old Testament. All of these emphases served to highlight, and were probably written out of, a pan-ethnic community of disciples (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 20).

Luke begins the book of Acts with words attributed to Jesus: "... you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, *and to the end of the earth*" (1.8, emphasis mine). In the very next chapter, the audience for Peter's sermon is comprised of "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea

and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs ...” (2.9-11).

In chapters 3-8, the narrative emphasizes the spread of the gospel message among the Jews. In chapter 6, an ethnic conflict arose when the Grecian widows felt discriminated against and was averted by the immediate attention given to the issue in the appointment of a group of Greeks to solve the problem (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 23-24). Chapter 8 records Philip’s witness both among the Samaritans and to a traveling Ethiopian. In chapter 9, Saul is converted on the road to Damascus and called to take the gospel message to the Gentiles. Chapters 10 and 11 record the conversion of the Gentile Cornelius and his family, including a vision experienced by Peter that confirms their inclusion in no uncertain terms (10.9-16, 28) (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 24).

Chapter 11 records the beginnings of the church at Antioch, the first church comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, mentioning the new name given to this multicultural community: “Christian” (Bakke, 2000, pp. 58-79; DeYoung, 2003, pp. 27-29). This early church was characterized by an ethnically diverse leadership team and quickly became the model for New Testament churches (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 28-33). Beginning with chapter 12, the book of Acts focuses on Paul’s mission to the Gentiles, recording the expansion of Christianity in Asia Minor and Europe. It is noteworthy that “the first congregation established by Paul on the continent of Europe was multicultural” (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 30). The Jerusalem Church, made up exclusively of Hebrew converts, is never again mentioned after chapter 21.

Luke's emphasis on a multicultural Church is further demonstrated by intentional universal proclamations included in his history. In Acts 2, Peter quotes the prophecy of Joel 2.28-32 which includes the details that God's Spirit will be poured out on "all flesh" and that "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (2.17, 21). Peter concludes his Pentecost sermon by assuring his Jewish hearers that the promise (of salvation) was for them, but equally for "all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call" (2.39). Later, Peter tells Cornelius, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. *But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean*" (10.28, emphasis mine). That Luke records the reaction of the Jewish Christian leaders upon hearing of Cornelius' conversion is equally significant: "When they heard these things, they became silent; and they glorified God, saying 'Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life'" (11.18).

Also recorded are the universal arguments of Paul. For instance, Paul identifies with his Gentile audience in Lystra:

We also are men *with the same nature as you*, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (14.15-17, emphasis mine).

Likewise, in his dispute with the philosophers of Athens, Paul stresses that God “gives to *all* life, breath, and all things,” that He “has made *from one blood every nation of men*,” that their own poets have spoken certain truths about God including the fact that “we are the offspring of God,” and that God “now commands *all men everywhere* to repent” (17.25-30, emphases mine). After referencing these verses, author Alan Davies (University of Toronto) writes, “As a Christian, I regard racism as *fundamentally incompatible with Christianity*” (1988, p. x, emphasis mine).

John’s Gospel is also replete with an emphasis of universal inclusion. Jesus is described as “the true Light which gives light to *every man coming into the world*” (1.9, emphasis mine), “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of *the world*” (1.29, emphasis mine), and “the Savior of *the world*” (4.42, emphasis mine). In what is perhaps the most well known Bible verse of all, we are told that “God so loved *the world* that He sent His only Son so that whoever will believe in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (3.16, emphasis mine). It is interesting that in the very next chapter John relates Jesus’ meeting with the Samaritan woman that is commented on above. Later, Jesus calls Himself “the bread of God,” defining this as “He who comes down from heaven and gives life to *the world*” and “My flesh, which I shall give for the life of *the world*” (6.33, 51, emphases mine). John records Jesus calling Himself “the light of *the world*” and saying that He speaks “to *the world*” the message He heard from God (8.12, 26; 9.5, emphases mine).

Further demonstrating the equality and unity that He has in mind for His followers, Jesus tells His Jewish listeners “*other sheep* I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be *one flock* and one

shepherd” (10.16, emphasis mine). Speaking of his inevitable crucifixion, Jesus states “... I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all peoples* to myself” (12.32, emphasis mine). Jesus did what He did “that *the world* may know ...” (14.31, emphasis mine). When Jesus gives the promise of the Holy Spirit, He says that His purpose will be to “convict *the world* of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (16.8, emphasis mine).

This universal theme shows up again in John’s First Epistle. Jesus is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but *also for the whole world*” (2.2, emphasis mine). The Father “sent the Son as Savior of *the world*” (4.14, emphasis mine). John’s theme finds its eschatological conclusion among the visions of Revelation. The “new song” the saints sing before God includes the words: “You were slain/And have redeemed us to God by Your blood/*Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation*” (5.9, emphasis mine; cf. 7.9-10). In a later vision, John sees an angel proclaiming “the everlasting gospel” which is intended for “those who dwell on the earth – *to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people* ...” (14.6, emphasis mine). It is written of the “New Jerusalem” that “the kings of the earth” will “bring the glory and honor of *the nations* into it” (21.24-26, emphasis mine). Using imagery lifted directly from the book of Genesis, the “tree of life” is pictured in a restored paradise; it is consistent with the Johannine universal theme that the tree’s leaves are “for the healing of *the nations*” (22.2, emphasis mine).

It is true that many evangelicals interpret John’s “world” declarations in individualistic terms (Boyd, 2002, p. 140). But this can hardly be John’s intention, given the universalistic theme that runs throughout his writings. What John is conveying is the Christian teaching that Jesus is not simply the Jewish Christ, but is also “the Desire of All

Nations” spoken of in the Old Testament (Hag. 2.7). John’s “world” speaks of all *ethnos*, all people groups (Piper, 2001, pp. 161-163, 196-200). The concern of such a consistent thread is to declare that the Jewish Messiah is a *universal* Messiah.

As with the synoptic Gospels and the Johannine writings, the writings of Paul (much of the New Testament) continue the same type of universalistic emphasis. Paul opens his letter to the Romans with a systematic presentation that logically places Jews and Gentiles on the same footing, as sinners in need of a Savior (1-3). Paul concludes this particular argument with the following:

Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of *the Gentiles also*, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith (3.28-30, emphasis mine).

The crucial distinction between men, according to Paul, is fundamentally theological in nature: that of being “in Adam” over against that of being “in Christ.” Human beings at birth are in the former condition, alienated from God through sin – a condition that Paul applies to “all” without exception. Those who embrace the gospel message through faith are in the latter position, “in Christ,” a position open to all without distinction (5.12-21). The pan-ethnic universalism given expression by Paul, then, runs unaltered from his anthropology to his soteriology.

In Romans chapter eleven, Paul symbolizes God’s community as an “olive tree.” While conceding that the Jews are to be represented as the “natural branches,” he argues that God is nevertheless “grafting in” the believing Gentiles in such a way that God’s

community remains unified in a single “olive tree.” In fact, Paul concludes that Israel’s rejection of Christ is divinely orchestrated “that He might have mercy on *all*” (11.32, emphasis mine). In chapter 16, Paul extends greetings to fellow Christians with Greek, Latin, and Jewish names (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 32-33). Andrew D. Clarke (University of Aberdeen) has argued that embedded in this concluding list of names is “a theology of ethnic, social and gender inclusiveness” (2002, pp. 103-125). Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians ends with a reference to the Old Testament as “the prophetic scriptures made known to *all nations*, according to the commandment of the everlasting God” (16.26, emphasis mine).

There is a crucial Pauline passage in his first letter to the church at Corinth that demonstrates not only the pan-ethnic nature of New Testament Christianity, but also the essential interdependence that Christians are to recognize among themselves despite ethnicity:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – *whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free* – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body,” is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the

body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that *there should be no schism in the body*, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually (1 Cor. 12.12-27, emphasis mine).

This passage receives much attention from contemporary evangelicals, but normally in the exclusive context of the various spiritual gifts discussed in the chapter (e.g., Carson, 1987, pp. 15-50; Grudem (ed.), 1996, pp. 59-62, 156-160, 176-179; Turner, 1996, pp. 179-277; Berding, 2006, pp. 102-121). However, given Paul's specification of ethnicity and class (verse 13), it would seem that he intends the principle inherent in his analogy of "the body" to extend to those potential divisions as well (cf. Broek, 2002, p. 132).

Paul spends much of his ministry repairing ethnic divisions in the local churches, basing this on the theological point that Christ has already done so in principle (Gal.

4.26-29) (DeYoung et al., 2003, p. 33). Consider Paul's words to the Gentile Christians in Ephesus:

... now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one [i.e., Jews and Gentiles], and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity ... so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near [i.e., Gentiles and Jews]. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2.13-22).

Evangelical theologian Darrell L. Bock characterizes this passage as specifying "the call of the indwelt community [of faith] ... to display the presence of such transformed relationships before a needy world" (2001, p. 59). Emphasizing his role as a preacher to the Gentiles, Paul writes to Timothy that God "*desires all kinds* of men to be saved" and that Christ "*gave Himself a ransom for all*" (1 Tim. 2:4-7, emphases mine).

Even what is perhaps Paul's most neglected letter, Philemon, is important to this analysis. Paul is sending Onesimus, a runaway slave who has converted to Christianity, back to his master, Philemon. Paul writes a brief letter and sends it with Onesimus, admonishing Philemon in Christian terms but not explicitly revoking their existing master-slave relationship. This fact alone has caused much avoidance of, and even some disdain for, the letter to Philemon. Add to this Paul's occasional exhortations to slaves and their masters (e.g., Eph. 6; Phil'p. 3; 1 Tim. 6), and the problematic elements become apparent.

However, African-American exegete Lloyd A. Lewis has presented a different perspective on this issue in "An African American Appraisal of the Philemon-Paul-Onesimus Triangle." While some of Paul's exhortations appear to obscure his otherwise consistent universal emphasis, Lewis notes that not all of this apparent contradiction "is due to what Paul himself has written," and that it has more to do with "the issue of the conflict between a text and the methodology of its interpretation" (1991, p. 233). The insistence is made that Philemon must be viewed not simply in terms of historical chronology, but also within the scope of Paul's clear theology and ecclesiology (Lewis, 1991, p. 246). Lewis looks beyond what those with extrinsic agendas have said about Philemon to the letter itself, finding something far different:

... the relationship between Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus – a relationship that is fraught with the social barriers that stand between a master and his slave – is mitigated by Paul's careful use of language that reinforces the image of the church as a particular type of family (1991, p. 246).

Lewis goes on to show that Paul's language in the letter – drawn from Galatians – points to a profound change in the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus.

Paul employs specific kinship terminology within the context of the often-used analogy of the Christian community as a family or household. Consistent with those passages analyzed above and below (in particular Gal. 3.1-4.7), inclusion within the Christian community (for Paul) should effectively erase social distinctions which specifically include the distinction between "slave" and "free." Popular evangelical scholar Dallas Willard explains:

The complete obliteration of social and cultural distinctions as a *basis* for life under God was clearly understood by Paul as essential to the presence of Jesus in his people. It means nothing less than *a new type of humanity*, "Abraham's seed." Those who, in Paul's language, have "put on Christ" make nothing of the distinctions between Jew and Greek, between slave and free, between male and female. If they "are Christ's," they inherit life in the kingdom, just as Abraham did through his faith (Gal. 3) (1997, pp. 125-126, emphasizes his).

In this often-misunderstood letter, Paul "views Onesimus as his peer in the family of God," undermining, albeit indirectly, the institution of slavery (Lewis, 1991, pp. 233-246). Bakke reaches similar conclusions: "Read between the lines: Onesimus is a spiritual son of Paul and Philemon is a spiritual son of Paul, so what does that make the two of them? Brothers" (Bakke, 2000, p. 93). Bakke, pointing out that runaway slaves were typically branded horrifically or executed, argues that Paul quite obviously expects Philemon to set the slave free (Bakke, 2000, pp. 96-97). It is significant that post-biblical

Church history indicates not only the emancipation of Onesimus, but his ordination and productive ministry as the Bishop of Ephesus (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2003; Gonzalez, 1984, p. 42; Bakke, 2000, pp. 98-99). As early as the writing of Colossians, Onesimus is described as “a faithful and beloved brother” who is working as a minister with Paul (4.9).

More generally, it is important also to recognize that Paul deals with slavery as an existing institution and does not command or endorse it. Further, the institution with which Paul is dealing was one bound up in economics rather than ethnicity. Rome was a pluralistic and multicultural society where all races could be found among both slave and free; bankruptcy laws did not exist and slaves were often those who were working off substantial debt. Thus, slavery at that time included the prospect of eventual freedom and the possibility of social mobility. Dudley and Hilgert warn biblical interpreters:

Another temptation is the facile imposition of modern social and economic categories on a past that was not necessarily structured in the same way as ours and in which the flow of social dynamics often did not follow patterns we may take for granted (1987, p. 6).

Therefore, it would be less than accurate to impose feelings originating with United States history on Pauline passages dealing with slavery. The “stealing of men,” what today would be called kidnapping, was strictly forbidden as a damning sin, and it is this undeniable feature of American slavery that makes it so very different from what was going on in 1st century Rome (cf. 1 Tim. 1.9-10) (Keener & Usry, 1997, pp. 36-38; Carroll & Shiflet, 2002, pp. 28-30). Finally, Paul’s exhortations to masters of slaves actually undercut the institution itself through the language of Christian kinship that

levels all class/status distinctions in Christ, such exhortations demonstrating that the Christian concept of self-identity potentially transcended social inequalities (Willard, 1997, pp. 125-126).

Being members of a multicultural society, citizens of the United States tend to locate their identity in their nationality (most whites conceive of themselves as “Americans”), their ethnicity (most minorities), and/or their particular culture (nearly everyone). While it may seem politically incorrect in some contemporary circles, the early Christians would have denied all of these factors as indicators of personal identity. This does not mean that early Christians ignored or denied these elements altogether. But it does mean that they based their fundamental identity on the universalism so evident throughout the New Testament (cf. Buell, 2002; DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 28-29).

What makes this observation so significant is the fact that this early Christian paradigm existed within a society, the multicultural Roman Empire, paralleling our own in many important ways (Dudley & Hilgert, 1987, pp. 9-10). Understanding this concept of where Christians located their identity is crucial to understanding the earliest Christian context so inconsistent with the contemporary reality of segregated worship (DeYoung, et al., 2003, p. 182).

In his second letter to the Corinthian church, Paul sets forth the universal sacrifice of Christ as the defining factor in how Christians should view both themselves and one another: “from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.” He specifies that every Christian, being “in Christ,” is a “new creation” (5.14-17). In his letter to the Galatian church, this same theme is reiterated:

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For *in Christ Jesus* neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, *but a new creation* (Gal. 6.14-15, emphases mine).

Likewise, Paul refers to “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” as the One “from whom *the whole family in heaven and earth* is named” (Eph. 3.14, emphasis mine). It is “the Jerusalem above” that is “the mother of us all” (Gal. 4.26). There is even some evidence that the Greek word *ekklesia*, most often translated “church,” was carefully chosen to invoke deep meanings for both Jews and Gentiles, bringing them “together into a new sense of *common identity*” (Dudley & Hilgert, 1987, p. 14, emphasis mine).

Stressing the same continuity between Israel and the Church expressed by Paul in Romans 11 (considered above), the first epistle attributed to the Apostle Peter refers to Christians as “a *chosen generation* [lit., “race”], a royal priesthood, *a holy nation*, His own special people” (2.9, emphases mine). The consistent New Testament idea is that from many *peoples* are constituted *a people* of God.

Returning to Paul, there are two passages in particular that touch on this issue of Christian identity. In Galatians, Paul makes the following statement:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; *for you are all one* in Christ Jesus (3.26-28, emphasis mine).

This concept appears again in Colossians as part of an extended discourse regarding Christian identity. Christians are to focus on spiritual matters as their priority, their lives

being “hidden with Christ in God.” Christians are those who have “died” and been “resurrected,” having put away “the old man” and embraced the “new man” (Walsh & Keesmaat, 2004, pp. 154-159). This “new man” is described as:

... renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, *but Christ is all and in all* (3.1-11, emphasis mine).

Another feature of this issue of Christian identity is that it was thoroughly *corporate* in expression. That is, living in community was an essential feature of biblical Christianity. From the very beginning, Christians existed together in a type of willful communism, living lives of simplicity and unity (cf. Acts 2.44-47; 2 Cor. 8.8-15). The central idea that governed the Christian community was that of love for one another in very real and tangible ways (cf., e.g., John 13.34-35; Rom. 13.8-10; 1 Cor. 13). In fact, one’s vertical relationship to God was seen as inseparable from one’s horizontal relationship with others (e.g., James 2; 1 Jn. 2.9-11; 3.10-19; 4.7-12). The necessary corollary to this was the idea that relational conflicts (Eph. 3-6), including those defined as cultural/ethnic (Eph. 3-4), were actually mere symptoms of an unseen spiritual war (Eph. 6.10-20) (Powlison, 1995, p. 112).

In practical terms, this unity in community is clearly seen in the many New Testament instructions involving the phrase “one another.” Christians are to love one another (Jn 13.34-35; 15.12,17; Rom. 13.8; 1 Thes. 4.9), be joined to one another (Rom. 12.5), be devoted to one another (Rom. 12.10), honor one another above self (Rom. 12.10), rejoice with one another (Rom. 12.15), cry with one another (Rom. 12.15), accept

one another (Rom. 15.7), counsel one another (Rom. 15.14), care for one another (1 Cor. 12.25), serve one another (Gal. 5.13), carry one another's burdens (Gal. 6.2), be patient ... with one another in love (Eph. 4.2), be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph. 4.32), submit to one another (Eph. 5.21), bear with one another (Col. 3.13), forgive one another (Col. 3.13), admonish one another (Col. 3.16), encourage one another (1 Thes. 4.18; 5.11; Heb. 3.13), edify one another (1 Thes. 5.11), spur one another on (Heb. 10.24), be hospitable to one another (1 Pe. 4.9), be humble toward one another (1 Pe. 5.5), confess their sins to one another (Jas. 5.16), pray for one another (Jas. 5.16), and fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1.7). All such regular interaction was to take place in local churches that we would define as *multicultural* in composition (Bakke, 2000, pp. 69-72).

Essential to the Christian concept of community was the example of Jesus in humbling Himself and serving the interests of others (Rom. 15.1-7; Phil'p. 2.1-4). Further, in some mystical sense, the Christian Church was identified *with Christ* in its functioning aspects – the community of Christians is “the body of Christ,” characterized by a composite unity of its diverse members (cf. 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4.1-16; Phil'p. 1.27). These immutable realities were presented by the New Testament writers as transcending all other social obligations and engendered a unique loyalty among the early Christians: “... as we have opportunity, let us to good to all, *especially to those who are of the household of faith*” (Gal. 6.10, emphasis mine).

New Testament writers, of course, recognized that realistic situations often fall short of this ideal of a pan-ethnic community living “in Christ.” Conflicts arose almost immediately that had to be dealt with. In Acts 6, Luke records that the widows of

Grecian heritage felt discriminated against by the Jewish Christians – so seven men were chosen to see that all of the widows were treated equally (6.1-5) (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 23-24). The most glaring example of such a conflict was the early rift between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul's third missionary journey had as its central goal the express purpose of taking up a collection from the Gentile churches to help the church in Jerusalem, a calculated attempt at reconciliation (cf. Acts 18.23-23.16; Rom. 15.25-27; 1 Cor. 16. 1-4; 2 Cor. 8.1-4).

Paul's letter to the Galatians is written to reiterate the universality inherent in the requirements of the gospel message, over against some who wanted Gentiles to become Jews before becoming Christians (2.14-21). Even Peter is rebuked publicly for his double-standard with regard to his treatment of Gentiles (Gal. 2.11-14) (DeYoung et al., 2003, pp. 33-36). DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, and Kim offer the following analysis that emphasizes the importance of this conflict:

Paul told Peter that such an action compromised "the truth of the Gospel" (2:14).... Paul chose *not* to take what seemed the pragmatic course of action, that of 'founding a separate and exclusively Gentile church'.... He believed that it was not enough just to maintain a spiritual unity in the universal church. Unity needed to be seen and experienced in the local congregation as well.... The Apostle Paul could not stand by and allow the Christian church to lose its power to reconcile and therefore make void the truth of the gospel" (2003, p. 35, emphasis theirs).

However, it must be recognized that this was a very early problem that had more to do with the inevitable separation of Christianity from Judaism than ethnic boundaries.

It is the theological content of the gospel message at issue rather than skin color, nationality, or culture *per se* (Dudley & Hilgert, 1987, p. 11). Furthermore, the New Testament writers take great pains to portray such incidents as falling short of Christianity, emphasizing the corrective measures taken. As Dudley and Hilgert have written, there is a sharp distinction here between the early Church and the contemporary Church:

... the early Church faced up to conflict and used it constructively. In the contemporary church, by comparison, withdrawal and denial of conflict often immobilizes the congregation and frustrates even its positive impulses (1987, p. 2).

In this same way, the contrast between the New Testament Church's handling of ethnic division and the way in which American evangelicals have dealt with it is being increasingly highlighted by both those within and without evangelicalism (e.g., Emerson & Smith, 2000; Gilbreath, 2006). The rule of faith has regarded discrimination among Christians as unacceptable (Jas. 2.1-4), given the universal scope of God's impartiality (Acts 10.34-35). H. Richard Niebuhr boldly placed the New Testament schism in its historical context:

After the close association of Jews and Gentiles in early Christianity had ceased, the question of race relations within the church of Christ did not emerge again as a challenging problem until modern times (1967, p. 238).