

Responding to Social Justice and Critical Race Theory

Part II: A Pastoral Guide for Soul Care in Troubled Times

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TO BEGIN WITH

The care of souls in an age wrestling with social injustice is layered and complex. If pastors are to offer quality soul care, they need to be alert to normal spiritual maladies and simultaneously informed of the cultural conditions so they can provide specific care tailored to any presenting malady in a troubled soul. Like a doctor assessing symptoms of a disease pervasive in society—much like those of COVID-19—so a physician of souls needs to be mindful of the various societal maladies that impact and afflict the sheep in his flock and community.

Part one of this study provided a historical overview and ideological exploration of social justice and Critical Race Theory, contrasting it with biblical justice. It also outlined a clear Christian ethic for Christians to love and care for their neighbor in the face of injustice, balancing the truth of God’s Word with the pressures and misbeliefs of a critical social justice culture. Having previously examined our contemporary cultural landscape and the factors giving rise to our present social justice context, we turn now to the cure of souls.

In this part we move from theory to practice. Here pastors will discover specific tools to use as they care for souls in these troubled times. There is a clear need to address people hurt by the effects of racial injustice and racism—as well as those who may have either wittingly or unwittingly perpetuated such injustice.

That won’t be an easy task. Soul care never is, especially when there are any number of variables that can afflict someone all at the same time. On the whole, being a *Seelsorger*—a curate of souls—in a social justice context is a multilayered, complicated and nuanced task in itself. And when combined with the proclivities of fallen humanity, plus countless other spiritual, physical, mental and emotional ailments that afflict humankind, it’s enough to make a man run and hide. This is why the church father John Chrysostom says a shepherd needs “great wisdom and 1,000 eyes, so that he can examine a soul’s condition from every angle” in order to give proper care.¹ In other words, a pastor needs to be intentionally habituated to the disposition of humanity and the afflictions that confront us. While our societal unrest and demands for social justice may be complex, the core and content of soul care remain constant. Jesus Christ the crucified stands at the center of this care. His life-giving blood shed at the cross of Calvary is to be pastorally and skillfully applied upon the frail and fragile lives of sinners in spiritual distress through the careful enactment of word and sacrament.

You will need to develop a pastoral disposition sensitive to the complex layers of this emotionally charged environment, while also developing the pastoral skills to render a Christ

¹ St. John Chrysostom, *On the Priesthood*. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1964), 56.

centered curative treatment for wounded hearts and minds as well as those who have wounded others.

CHAPTER 7

Jesus as Light and Life to Soul Care

It's always helpful to begin with a remedy in view for any malady you're treating. That remedy, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ. In him is life and light—a light to lead the way in the midst of any dark night of the soul. And with Christ as the light of the world, seasoned curates know the importance of applying his light to the many and varied ailments plaguing the souls of our time. Like light shone through a prism reveals its many and various colors, the one and same gospel light of Christ is applied by physicians of the soul to the various maladies appearing among people in our age of “social justice.” In other words, there will be various aspects of guilt, shame, heartache, and hurt from sins committed and sins endured, because of various racial injustices and forms of discrimination. They each need the same light of Christ as a remedy to be applied uniquely and specifically according to the prevailing malady of each soul and in accordance with its nuanced needs. Such soul care is done through the enactment of God's Word by way of pastoral exhortation, admonishment, confession and absolution, consolation, prayer, ritual enactment and blessing, in accord with Christ's command to his undershepherds to tend his precious sheep and lambs (John 21).

The focus of Part Two is thus on that complex task—the pastoral care of souls. It is undertaken amid our current cultural upheaval—full of rioting, unrest, divisions, and political turmoil—with the aim to render specific care in relation to those specific maladies that are peculiar to a specific individual. To do so successfully, pastors will need to be intentionally habituated to the care of souls in such a way that prepares

them for ready engagement with the multiple symptoms and maladies that plague people, regardless of the social movement or unrest.

One pastor offering profound insight into soul care is seasoned curate Harold Senkbeil. His award winning and must-read book, *The Care of Souls*, calls this pastoral disposition a *habitus*.² It's a pastoral posture that engages individuals with attentive eyes and ears focused intently upon the presenting ailments of a soul that are seen through the lens of the unchanging word of God and coupled with contemporary diagnostic tools gleaned from modern psychology, employed through pastoral care as a first article gift of creation. (i.e., The First Article of the Apostles' Creed). This disposition frames quality pastoral care and informs the second part of our study. With this *habitus* in place, one is all the more prepared to enact the grace of God—the forgiving and cleansing power of Christ.

Forgiveness and Remission: The Double Cure

The forgiveness of sins and the remission of sins (the putting away of sins) are two aspects of that same grace given through Jesus. Forgiveness speaks more about the removal of guilt, while remission includes the removal of shame. Experiencing racial prejudice and/or injustice results in aspects of both guilt and shame. Therefore, pastors need to be mindful of how forgiveness and remission are both essential to soul care, and how to intentionally enact each

² “A pastor's habituation, or character, is what counts most in ministry. This *habitus* can't be instilled merely through pedagogy or acquisition of intellectual knowledge, though instruction and knowledge remain vital and indispensable components in pastoral education. The great nineteenth-century American Lutheran Theologian Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther put it this way in his *Pastorale*: ‘Pastoral theology is the God-given practical disposition of the soul, acquired by certain means, by which a servant of the church is equipped to perform all the tasks that come to him in that capacity.’ ...Habit is not something you were born with; it's obtained over long experience.” Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastors Heart*. (Lexham Press, 2019), 18.

upon any troubled soul.

Both are applied through the shed blood of Christ, along with his identity bestowing grace. They stand at the core of all pastoral care and curative remedies. This is especially important in a culture bent on establishing “social justice.” In a time replete with demands for communal and

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governmental change regarding “systemic racial injustice,” a Christ centered curative remedy is the bold declaration that public policy and civil engagement—though important and helpful—are not what actually delivers the forgiveness of sins, the remission of sins, consolation, healing, or the transformation of heart and mind. Rather, these flow from the gospel of the shed blood of Christ and his unconditional love. That is the remedy for hard hearts and hurting hearts alike. Christ is the remedy for both a bad conscience and a wounded soul. This chapter shows pastors how to offer care using these precious gifts and to enact care using these grace saturated gifts. This becomes especially important given the numerous questions that arise in our current context.

CHAPTER 8

Addressing Difficult Questions

Our age of social justice brings with it a complexity of societal history and ideologies that pastors should understand, at least at a cursory level, in order to better engage in quality soul care. This means a pastor must be mindful of the various pressures pushing down on him as a member of society even as he himself has multiple vocations—husband, father, friend, citizen, etc. Important questions to address therefore include: How does a pastor balance the impulses of his personal political ideology

with the convictions of his biblical theology in providing soul care for those in his flock? How does he allow his pastoral disposition to be shaped by scripture while remaining silent about any preferred political party or philosophy of government? Likewise, how will a pastor offer care to those who do not understand or are frightened by social movements seeking to halt systemic injustice, especially when some of those movements and counter movements are violent (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Antifa, white supremacists, the Alt Right)? These are difficult but important questions that need to be tackled.

Additionally, pastors need to consider if caring for souls in an age of social justice includes marching in peaceful protests in solidarity with social reform movements. Likewise, does the care of souls include advocating for change in public policies related to racial injustice and/or spurring a congregation and community into overt political activism toward those ends?

These are just a few of the many difficult questions confronting pastors at the beginning of this third decade of the 21st century. They are questions that need to be addressed, especially in light of dealing with what some are publicly calling a “dual pandemic,”—the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and systemic (institutional) racism.³ The simple fact is that the issue of racial injustice is so pervasive and provocative that it’s difficult to ignore since the May 25, 2020 death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officers. That incident, and the explosive social response to it, continues to have world-wide repercussions.

Congregation members face calls for social and racial justice in their daily vocations as employees, citizens, and community

³ For example, in her 2020 school year kickoff address, Dr. Rhoda Mhiripiri-Reed, the superintendent of Hopkins, Minnesota public school system, virtually addressed the faculty and staff noting this dual pandemic and stated, “we need to examine the role that whiteness plays in light of our macro system of white supremacy.” minute 16:15 to 17:56: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=174&v=jEXY3yMho1M&feature=emb_logo.

members—especially if they access news on TV or online or use any type of social media. The tragic event in Minneapolis triggered riots, looting and massive protests and unrest that swept across the nation for four intense months. Social media exploded with one perspective after another. Black Lives Matter yard signs were planted all around urban and suburban environments, all under the scrutinizing eye of a never-ending news cycle amid a vitriolic national political process.

Pastors need a calm demeanor and the leading of the Holy Spirit through the word of God in order to discern how best to care for and lead their flocks during such difficult days. They need the guidance of God’s Word to keep them focused on their task at hand, which, as Jesus says, is to “tend my sheep” (John 21:16). Therefore, pastors will need to consider whether becoming involved in political speech and activity moves them beyond their primary calling to care for souls, preach, teach, and administer the sacraments.⁴ True, political action belongs to the vocation of Christian citizen, but pastors need to decide which actions are appropriate in light of their primary calling to the office of the public ministry. To be sure, pastors certainly are called to prophetically speak the truth of God’s Word to an unbelieving world and are tasked with publicly leading a flock in doing so. But pastors must balance what the Lord has given them to do as servants of his word, with what he has given them to do as a Christian citizen, so as not to confuse the two vocations or subvert the primary role of the pastoral office in dealing with political chaos in a culture and country.

⁴ Augsburg Confession, Article V, The Ministry: “So that we may obtain this faith the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ’s sake.” *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions, A Reader’s Edition*. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 36.

This is not always an easy balancing act, I realize. Yet history is filled with pastors who have risen up in their dual vocations as pastor and citizen to confront evil and oppression. Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his dual role in caring for his underground flock and opposing the government in Nazi Germany,⁵ as well as the pastors involved with the abolitionist movements in 18th Century England like Dr. Beilby Porteus, Bishop of London. In 19th Century America, we had clergymen like Henry Ward Beecher and Edward Beecher, the well-known brothers of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the classic abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

As noted in the first part of this study, there are varying perspectives on what degree of political involvement a pastor and the corporate church should engage in within any given country or culture. This second part certainly honors those perspectives, but urges the reader to remember that the primary commission of a pastor flows from the Lord and his word to tend the sheep and lambs of Christ with his gifts of love and grace. Opposing government oppression, cultural evil and injustice, or even leading a revolution may indeed be appropriate for pastors in various times and places. But that is the exception rather than the normative role of the pastor. Therefore, Part Two focuses on the care of souls that simply flows from Christ’s command to feed his sheep with his word and sacraments (John 21:17).

Racism and Soul Care Through the Word of God

To offer quality soul care in a social justice age, pastors will first need to be informed about cultural nomenclature, particularly the competing definitions of racism as noted in Part 1. They will need to utilize God’s clear word

⁵ See Theodore J. Kleinhaus, *Till the Night Be Past: The Life and Times of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 2002). and Eric Metaxas, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010).

as a means to navigate the issues stemming from these competing definitions and extend compassionate biblical care while advocating for biblical justice. When dealing with sin, the definitions a pastor relies on are those clearly identified by the word of God. Therefore, the word of God, particularly the ten commandments and their meanings, must be the sole standard in a pastor's diagnosis of any presenting malady. (See Luther's Small Catechism). The dictates of political correctness or a critical race ideology are not the normative means of care. Likewise, the passions of a soul will need to be examined in light of those commandments. Even more, they shape the careful assessment of any corresponding wounds received by a troubled soul. Because of the pain endured, these wounds may have also tainted the conscience as well.

Regardless of how an individual may wish to define racism, a faithful pastor's first allegiance is always to the Lord and his objective word if any true spiritual care is going to be offered. Oftentimes this means a laying bare of the soul as one unburdens the intensity of their emotional distress. Faithful shepherds will need compassionate patience and tact to listen while someone rids their soul of all its hurts and passions.

Part of this process includes skillfully uncovering what idolatries a soul might be holding onto that do not allow them to acknowledge a sin as sin.⁶ Likewise, a true *Seelsorger* will tactfully explore what wounds may have been inflicted which cause a soul to refuse to give up vengeful indignation. Justified as a person may feel, insisting on vindictive reparation for one's injuries has the potential for tremendous spiritual contamination.

Soul care, therefore, usually involves patient listening and being attuned to what the heart

⁶ A great formal resource to use to help individuals uncover their idols is *Ambassadors of Reconciliation* and their Lifestyles of Reconciliation Series, specifically chapter two of "Go and Be Reconciled: What does this mean?" (Billing, MO: Ambassadors of Reconciliation, 2016).

is revealing before a pastor dares to speak a word one way or the other. This is especially challenging when pastors have to deal with what some are calling "the new cult of anti-racism."⁷ As Gerald McDermitt notes in *First Things*, this cult of anti-racism is also anti-Christian:

This new religion claims to offer a better diversity than God's. While St. Paul says that in the new creation he "now know[s] no man after the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16), the new anti-racism focuses on the old creation and knows men only after the flesh. Its diversity is about skin color alone, rather than God's infinitely more interesting diversity of Jew and gentile, man and woman from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and the Lamb (Rev 7:9).⁸

Undershepherds of Christ will need all the virtues of the Good Shepherd to navigate the challenges of soul care amid this ideological onslaught, especially courage and wisdom. They need courage to stand on the truth of Scripture in a compassionately clear manner, and wisdom to discern the dangerous and festering Critical Race ideology undergirding this social movement.

CHAPTER 9

Soul Care and Critical Race Theory: A Lesson from the Good Samaritan

As noted in Part One, debates about racism and social justice remain a bone of contention for many. It is a debate that invariably affects and afflicts the members of our congregations and pastors. The effects of racial inequality and the obvious economic disparity resulting from it

⁷ Gerald McDermott, "Wanted: Pastors with Courage," *First Things*, 9-17-20. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/09/wanted-pastors-with-courage>.

⁸ McDermott, "Wanted: Pastors with Courage."

are elements that impact the souls that pastors shepherd.

What a particular soul believes about their condition, whether they are in fact a victim of injustice or if they merely perceive they are a victim of injustice, invariably shapes how an undershepherd will apply God's law and gospel to that soul. Likewise, it also shapes how a pastor will care for those with uninformed bias towards people of unfortunate circumstances.

Here the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) offers direction for both love of God and love of neighbor. Though the parable is often preached as all law, “Do this and you will live,” (v. 28) and “You, go and do likewise,” (v. 37), the subject in the parable is the Samaritan—a figure for Christ Jesus himself. A brief meditation on the text will help clarify.

The lawyer asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, and so Jesus tells him. Keep all the commandments totally, completely, and perfectly. No small task. Realizing he is unable to do what Jesus says, the lawyer tries to lessen his culpability by asking, “and who is my neighbor?” (v. 29). In response, Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan.

We should note that Jesus does not tell this parable to show how one can earn eternal life. That was already made clear. Keep the law perfectly: love the Lord God with all your heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself—an impossibility for fallen sinners to do perfectly. Rather, Jesus tells a story that is rich in love and compassion in order to show how he is himself the Good Samaritan and how he alone fulfills the law perfectly in our place. Jesus is the one who does not pass by the oppressed, or the abused, or the beaten, or the one left for dead. He comes from heaven to earth as the sinless Son of God to rescue all from sin and bring healing to those wounded and dying from sin.

Yet along the way, Jesus does provide a picture

of what rescued people do. Since he secured eternal life for us, freeing us from the impossible burden of earning it for ourselves, he shows what a life of love looks like in the parable and then declares, “Go and do likewise!” Of course, such an ethic of love is only possible to do because Jesus declares from the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). There he bled and died for the sins of the world.

In the end, Jesus wants the hearers and readers of this parable to identify with every person in the parable except the Samaritan. That role he reserves for himself, to show what he had come to do for all humankind—rescue the afflicted,

*He portrays himself as
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bring healing to the abused, pay our debts, offer forgiveness, and provide hope to the oppressed. Yet, as he does so, Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him—to love and serve as he loves and serves (Matt 16:24).

Reflection on this parable is especially helpful in a racially tense time. Note how Jesus makes a Samaritan, the hated half-breed, the hero of his story. He portrays himself as the despised outcast. Divisions of racial and ethnic superiority are nothing new, in other words. Jesus took care to note those cultural realities and use them to tell a story of divine rescue that points to him as the way, the truth, and the life, while also calling his listeners to a more compassionate way of life. It is an apt Word of truth rich with law and gospel.

Unfortunately, many Christians today remain blind to the complex layers wrapped in our contemporary cultural upheaval. Rather than embracing the truths of this parable, they instead opt for the simpler and more sinister route of siding with what essentially become political parties and the divisions of “us” versus “them.” Here too quality soul care is needed to tend the

precious lambs and sheep of Christ in order to keep them from turning away from the Lord and his word and turning against one another.

Thus, pastors do need to do the hard work of cultural diagnosis as well as diagnosing any one individual soul. That means staying abreast of the various ideologies in play in a social justice context and digging into the mistreatment or injustice perpetrated against any one individual or group. It means understanding the plight and struggles of any given people group in their community and the challenges they may be facing.

Understanding the Black Community: Answering Meaninglessness with Hope

It is vital that pastors honestly consider the challenges facing the black community as a whole and how that translates into the conscience of that community. As noted in Part One, black classic liberal intellectual, Cornel West, provides significant insight into the plight of the black conscience in light of all the oppression they have faced since slavery, Jim Crow, and contemporary forms of racism (redlining, profiling, and prejudice). Whether or not one completely agrees with contemporary allegations of systemic or institutional racism, West's observations are nonetheless deeply diagnostic and helpful for curates to use in the care of individual souls who have experienced profiling, prejudice, and racism and its cumulative effects.

West notes that a toxic combination of hopelessness and lovelessness are plaguing the black community, leading to a sense of pervasive meaninglessness. This nihilism, he says, is not some philosophical doctrine to explore intellectually, but rather a lived experience of insignificance that burdens the conscience of black persons, particularly among lower and lower middleclass black communities as a whole. In sum, West describes the prevalent

black experience as one of nihilism:

[It is] the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others.⁹

This mentality accounts for much of the cyclical despair, as well as the reckless and offensive behaviors that often plague the black community, particularly in low income and high crime communities.

Faithful curates of the soul will take the time to hear these burdens and consider how to intentionally love people who, despite the chip they may have on their shoulder, are really being swallowed up by the emptiness of life and desperately looking for hope and love. Curates of the soul will need to not merely speak words of hope, but also enact those words of hope in a ministry of presence. They need to foster meaningful expressions of Christian love and community, and where possible, offer material care to demonstrate their sincerity. But such Christian compassion and love is accompanied by the pastoral enactment of the word of God upon the troubled soul's burdened conscience.

To that end, renowned black pastor and civil rights advocate, John Perkins, founder of the John & Vera Mae Perkins Foundation, has pastored this way for nearly half a century. Profoundly mindful of the role of local congregations as places of hope and reconciliation, Perkins has endeavored to foster among congregations and pastors a theology that embraces both the redemptive justice of the cross of Jesus Christ as well as social and

⁹ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 14.

economic justice (biblically understood) in the local communities. He has a heart for all people regardless of their race, while also carefully recognizing the various perspectives of both black and white communities:

The damage that resulted from the old system of segregation has left African Americans in a hard state. The breakup of the family, laws and systems that have kept us from flourishing, redlining in housing developments, and so many other lasting effects of segregation make it so much easier for a black man to rob or hurt an innocent white person without much thought because of the damage that has been done. On the other side, the damage done to white people from centuries of racism makes it easier for them to avoid living in black neighborhoods, fear black people walking in the streets, or even commit vicious hate crimes against blacks. The lasting guilt and lingering fears of racism cause people to view those who are different as being almost subhuman, rather than seeing them as children of God created in His image. This is why we talk past one another when racial incidents flare. This is why we ignore other people's stories or perspectives. This is why we always react defensively first, instead of humbly listening to and trying to understand the other side of the story.

But there is a better way. There is the way of Jesus Christ, shown up on the cross—the most humble and grace-filled act there ever was. Due to our redemption, we have an obligation to forgive and accept the forgiveness of others. In forgiving and being forgiven, the healing process begins for both parties involved.¹⁰

¹⁰ John Perkins, *Dream With Me: Race, Love, and the*

In these racially charged times, Perkins is a seasoned and model pastor who champions Jesus Christ as the true source of hope and healing. He strives to cultivate communities of love who prize the traditional virtue of justice and biblical compassion and are willing to stick it out together as they forgive and are forgiven.

Breaking Down the Dividing Wall of Hostility

Recognizing the above, pastors need to consider how they would care for an angry Christian black man or woman wounded by racism. They also need to consider how they would care for someone who, in their woundedness, has embraced a secular critical social justice ideology. This is particularly so if this ideology has so consumed them that the desire for vengeance and retribution dominates their thinking.

Conversely, pastors need to consider how to care for white people who refuse to acknowledge or engage with the hurt of the black community. They need to contemplate which words of scripture should be offered in the face of such indifference, as well as in the face of perceived or real systemic injustice. Likewise, they need to consider which words of Scripture should be offered to those who refuse to take accountability for their own behavior.

Pastors need to walk softly through personal suffering and any exhortations to endure it. Jesus does indeed say to “turn the other cheek” (Matt 5:39), but pastors must consider how that would be received should a pastor speak those words to a troubled soul. A pastor must balance a soul's intense hurt with the call to take up our cross and follow Christ—to know which aspect is to be addressed and when patience should be utilized. Likewise, a *Seelsorger* needs to navigate the intense hurt of injustice, whether merely perceived or real. In short, the care of

Struggle We Must Win (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 170.

souls is indeed a complex “art of arts;” it means faithfully applying law and gospel appropriately without compromising either or confusing the two.

Ultimately, soul care takes its lead from Jesus and includes an equal love and care for people regardless of their language, race, or nationality. “Confessing that God created humanity in his image and redeemed us by the blood of His Son, any Christian ethic worthy of the name must contend for the dignity of every person

The gospel predominates.

created in God’s image—man or woman, born or unborn, black or white, rich or poor, useful or inconvenient.”¹¹ The goal, then, is to treat the malady of hate and division with the power of Christ and his cross to bring about peace and reconciliation. As Paul says, Christ is “himself our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (Eph 2:14).

Curates of the soul are equipped for this task through the Spirit’s own tools of God’s word and holy sacraments. These must lead the way in healing injustice and in changing hearts and minds by the revolutionary power of God’s word. In particular, the gospel alone has the sole power to change human hearts and minds and to amend sinful lives. This is the joy of Lutheran theology. The gospel predominates. Yet it is tempting to use the law to create our desired outcome—force and coercion are always appealing in the heat of the moment. But pastors must be mindful of such temptations, especially amid various strident appeals for change and action. The law is powerless to bring about the changes it demands from us. Only the gospel, full of love, grace, and truth, has the power to

¹¹ Walter Strickland II and Dayton Harmon, *For God so Loves the World: A Blueprint for Kingdom Diversity* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020), 67.

heal, forgive, cleanse, and transform hearts and minds (Rom 12:2). That’s why the chief role of pastors is to preach the gospel and administer the sacramental gifts of Christ.

CHAPTER 10

Social Justice Activism and the Church

Sadly, many clergy do not see the proclamation of the gospel as their primary responsibility. Many American Christians face abusive pressures directly in their vocations as members of a church, often at the hands of a “woke” pastor. The fact is congregations around the country are saturated with the issue of racial justice one way or the other. Consider the example of the Rev. Kenneth Boller, pastor of the Church of St. Francis Xavier, of New York City, a Jesuit-led Roman Catholic parish. He asked his parishioners to recite a “pledge for racial justice” during Mass, which affirms that “white privilege and the culture of white supremacy must be dismantled.”¹² The pledge, first created by a Unitarian church and adapted by Boller for his parish asks parishioners to affirm the following:

The Church of St. Francis Xavier joins with people throughout the world, in committing itself to racial justice. And so we pledge together: Please respond YES.

—DO YOU SUPPORT justice, equity, and compassion in human relations?

—DO YOU AFFIRM that white privilege is unfair and harmful to those who have it and to those who do not?

—DO YOU AFFIRM that white privilege and the culture of white supremacy must be dismantled

¹² Susan Berry, “Jesuit-Led Parish Asks Parishioners to Take Pledge Affirming ‘White Privilege’ Must End” *Breitbart News*, Sept. 5, 2020. <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2020/09/05/jesuit-led-parish-asks-parishioners-to-take-pledge-affirming-white-privilege-must-end/>.

wherever it is present?

—DO YOU SUPPORT racial equity, justice, and liberation for every person?

—DO YOU AFFIRM the inherent worth and dignity of every person?

Therefore, from this day forward:

—WILL YOU strive to understand more deeply the injustice and suffering white privilege and white supremacy cause?

—WILL YOU COMMIT to help transform our church culture to one that is actively engaged in seeking racial justice and equity for everyone?

—WILL YOU make a greater effort to treat all people with the same respect you expect to receive?

—WILL YOU COMMIT to developing the courage to live your beliefs and values of racial justice and equality?

—WILL YOU strive daily to eliminate racial prejudice from your thoughts and actions so that you can better promote the racial justice efforts of our church?

—WILL YOU renew and honor this pledge daily, knowing that our church, our community, our nation, and our world will be better places because of my efforts?¹³

This demonstrates the extent to which the social justice climate is impacting the church. Faithful pastors who keep soul care in the name of Jesus at the center of their ministry will sensitively navigate such pressures for pledges. They will seek to highlight the love of Christ and his transforming power instead of a preferred

¹³ The Church of Francis Xavier website: <https://sfxavier.org/news/a-pledge-for-racial-justice>

political or social justice agenda.

The example shows that pastors need to evaluate with their members and congregation whether such pledges are ever proper and fitting in a public worship service. They need to honestly assess whether such pledges only serve to confuse, anger, and alienate members, while ultimately subverting the gospel as the power that brings lasting change.

The emotions evoked by this pledge (pro or con) demonstrate the utter importance for the patient and compassionate care of souls during these fractured and difficult times. Yet as one does so, it's important for pastors to remain mindful of the whole counsel of God. When dealing with any one particular pressing social issue or sin issue, the whole counsel of God reminds us that life is always bigger than any one issue. This is by no means to be dismissive toward that issue. But when pastors allow one concern to preoccupy the life and ministry of the church, other maladies present in the body of Christ are often overlooked. The raw emotion of a sin issue can make it easy to become focused on one singular question to the exclusion of the whole counsel of God and the other important matters facing humankind, as well as the sins afflicting humankind.

Social Justice in the LCMS

Our own church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), which is 95% white, is no exception. The president of the Black Clergy Caucus of the LCMS, Rev. Warren Lattimore, Jr., issued a letter after the death of George Floyd, asking some very hard questions of the LCMS leaders:

The year is 2020. A few years prior, the last remaining Historically Black College and University dedicated to training Black Lutheran teachers was closed by the Synod. The nation is in unrest. Racial injustice is being

protested in a nation that has long denied its existence. Black men and women are being killed by those who have sworn to protect them. Breonna Taylor. George Floyd. Ahmaud Arbery. David McAtee. Racial tensions flared into riots in Minneapolis. Black Lutheran pastors knew Minneapolis would not be an isolated case, so an isolated response would not suffice. “If such a crisis should arise in Chicago, Los Angeles, Milwaukee or some other city, where could our black congregations turn for help?” Can we turn to District or Synod? Do they “understand the nature and scope of the crisis [and have a] commitment to try to resolve it?” That is our genuine hope. Yet there are no Black Lutherans on the Synod Board of Directors. The Seminary Boards of Regents lack Black clergy. To date, there still has been no Synod President or District President who is Black. To paraphrase Dr. Dickinson, when our cities are burning down, does Black ministry have anywhere to turn for some official who is able to understand and bring hope or comfort?...

Since closing Concordia Selma, the last Lutheran HBCU, Synod reduced Black Ministry’s budget and divested from the Black Ministry Family Convocation—a triennial gathering to study God’s Word and celebrate the perseverance of Black Lutherans. With no HBCU to support Black Lutherans, no Black Lutherans are entering seminary this year. We do not need Synod to offer us thoughts and prayers. Prayer is an essential spiritual discipline; platitudes are not....

When we do not seek to end the institution of racism, this nation’s original sin, or worse deny it, we not only fail to recognize the humanity of

our black and brown brothers and sisters in Christ, we also fail to recognize the God in them, the Spirit of God Who has given them life and breath.¹⁴

The letter aims to draw out the sin that has afflicted many in this country, while also expressing the discontent among many in our own Synod. In short, whether or not one agrees with it, there is much mutual conversation and consolation that needs to take place as we together wrestle through difficult questions in the name of the Lord. However, the ultimate point must be to direct us together to Christ for the remedy of injustice and heartache, rather than to one particular Christian leader of a preferred skin color as the definitive answer to injustice. This is not to minimize the lament of the letter or the maladies it addresses, but rather to focus on the true remedy that we jointly seek as essential to our life together.

Nonetheless, how should his questions be remedied? They are pointed and deserve a frank conversation. Part of it would include a conversation about how to best effectively and fairly remedy the representation of black individuals in the positions of leadership as he notes. Again, our Synod is 95% white Anglo. We must wrestle with this fact. The remaining 5% is divided up among black as well as Hmong, Hispanic, Native American, and African immigrants among other ethnic minorities. For perspective, demographic analysis shows that the U.S. population is 13% black. Questions, then, for us to consider are: Is there a reason why our own denomination does not reflect that percentage? Why might that be? What are we doing well in outreach to black communities? What can we do better? How can we recruit more black pastors and equip them as teachers and leaders in our church? How can we collaborate with voices like Pastor Lattimore’s

¹⁴ “Black Clergy Caucus Statement on George Floyd” <https://www.theunbrokencord.com/writings/black-clergy-caucus-statement-on-george-floyd>.

to find faithful ways to address these issues?

More provocatively, the group Lutherans for Racial Justice has created an online petition and movement to remove what the group's leader, Pastor Matthew Gonzalez, says is injurious and harmful systemic racism that is overtly present within our denomination. In a fierce and fiery plea, he notes that the leaders and members of the Synod are the problem, and that they have for far too long failed to acknowledge our own racism and contribution to the racist system of our Synod.¹⁵ However, he does not offer any specific examples large or small to this accusation.

Unfortunately, the appeal is more emotionally driven than reasonably or constructively presented. Apart from noting that "It's time!" for us to take action, not much is offered to guide that action. What that action should tangibly and truly consist of, as well as how it should reasonably be accomplished, remains vague and buried in raw emotion. The specific indictment regarding systemic racism is only offered in a generalized accusatory manner.

This demonstrates the danger of letting unbridled passions, political or otherwise, lead any call for action or repentance. If systemic racism is indeed present, then by all means we need to address it! But be specific. How is it occurring? Where is it occurring? Who is committing this evil? Speaking in generalities is not helpful when dealing with such an emotionally intense issue. When addressing fellow Christians and Christian leaders, pastors do well to speak the truth specifically, lovingly, and directly to the situation at hand, in the context of God's Word and with the power of Christ's love. Without such thoughtfulness and courtesy, such appeals become more alarmist and inflammatory than biblically encouraging or exhorting.

¹⁵ YouTube video, minute 4:25 and following. https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=10&v=kqrUd-8QKyVI&feature=emb_logo, See also <https://lutherans-forracialjustice.com/lrj>.

In short, the vitriolic and dysfunctional age we inhabit makes it all the more urgent for quality and gracious soul care to be of the utmost concern for pastors today. Our church body is just one example. Fingers are being pointed and accusations leveled over racist sins of omission and commission that have occurred within our ranks since the founding of our church body. Even more, given how emotionally provocative these issues are, we can be assured Satan will seek to pit pastor against pastor and congregation against congregation. But as Paul reminds us, we do not battle against flesh and blood, but against the forces of evil and darkness (Eph 6). The devil and his demons delight when we circle up into camps of "us" vs. "them". Therefore, as pastors charged with soul care, we need to know the pressures and emotions bearing down upon us and our people as we seek to apply God's gracious word of law and gospel into the lives of our people.

The danger of indicting others with great fervor and passion is that the passion of Christ gets lost or simply traded for emotional zealotry.

Pastors need pastors too.

Blanket accusations and wholesale indictments are standard fare in the secular world. But true *Seelsorgers* are called to better wisdom and the use of a thousand eyes, so that we might examine the broken hearts and minds of troubled souls from every angle and aptly apply the light and life of Christ to these troubled times and critical needs.

Yet pastors are only human, after all. That's why we pastors should give only what which we ourselves regularly receive. This, too, is the disposition of physician of souls. As much as we give Christ to others, we ourselves must receive him often and regularly. Pastors need pastors too. That is the truth that lies at the heart of our reformation theology and corresponding

pastoral theology. Lutherans have a tremendous robust theological contribution that is ripe for the times in which we live.

History of Black Ministry in the LCMS

In fact, although we are a predominantly Anglo-Saxon population in our denomination and have our shortcomings, we are blessed with a history of intentional black ministry that continues to this day. The story of Rosa Young (1890–1971) offers a compelling narrative of not only her life of faith, but of how the fullness of the gospel came clear to her through the passion and compassion of Lutheran pastors who had a heart for black ministry in the American south. In an astounding personal account of her teaching ministry, she notes that Lutherans had garnered a positive reputation even with prominent black leaders of the day like Booker T. Washington. In fact, he was the one who directed her to appeal to the Lutherans for help:

At last one day a letter came from Tuskegee Institute signed by Booker T. Washington himself. In this letter he told me he was unable to help me in the least; but would advise me to write to the board of Colored Missions for the Lutheran Church. He said they were doing more for the colored race than any other denomination he knew of. He liked them because of the religious training which they were giving colored people. He gave me the address of Rev. Christopher F. Drews, who was then the chairman of the board for Colored Missions.¹⁶

It was at one of the Alabama schools Rosa started that black former first vice president of the LCMS, Rev. Dr. Robert King (1922–2016), was first educated in a Lutheran parochial

¹⁶ *Light in the Dark Belt: The Story of Rosa Young as told by herself.* (St Louis: Concordia, 1950), p.102–103

school.¹⁷ King was elected by seven national Synod conventions as a vice-president. He served as LCMS third vice-president for three terms: 1986–1989, 2001–2004 and 2004–2007; as second vice-president for four terms: from 1989–2001; and as first vice-president for five months in 2001 after the death of then-President Rev. Dr. A.L. Barry.

This by no means exonerates the LCMS from any potential shortcomings in past or present ministry to black people, or any deficiencies in how our national church body is organized. But it does document a sincere desire for intentional and faithful ministry among the black community, which Rev. Dr. Roosevelt Grey faithfully carries on for our Synod today.¹⁸ Imperfect as the LCMS may be, by the grace of God we endeavor to serve and care for the souls of people of every tribe, race, and language, with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Where we fall short, we beg for mercy, strive to do better, and seek to work together for the care of our neighbor, the growth of God’s Kingdom, and the glory of God.

CHAPTER 11 Human Identity with Christ at the Center

There is much to be offered by Christians to address racism within the church. But it ought always begin and end with Christ and his shed

¹⁷ “On Christmas Eve I had my first encounter with a Lutheran parochial School when I attended the Christmas program at Good Shepherd. Sitting in a church, hearing Christmas carols for the first time, I am listening to the children sing ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem,’ ‘Silent Night, Holy Night,’ ‘Hark the Herald Angels Sing,’ and more. I’m hearing all about Christmas. My sister Deet, and brother, Flemp, are singing with the Children, too, because this is where they go to school now. The school wasn’t here when Jim and I went to Birmingham. My sister said that this is school started because of Rosa Young in Rosebud, Alabama.... It is January 1932. Jim and I are not returning to Birmingham. We are enrolled in Good Shepherd Lutheran School.” Robert King, *Pastor Jenkins said “Hang on to Matthew 6:33”*: *An Autobiography* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999), 33–34.

¹⁸ <https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/national/black-ministry>

blood. That is what the Lutheran contribution to soul care offers—what it means to be a theologian of the cross and not a theologian of glory.

Pastoral care deals with souls as they are situated in the sin of this world, dealing with the sins they have committed as well as sins committed against them. The goal is to give them a good conscience, a cleansed soul, and life transformed by the hope and promise of the Gospel. This is done through the application of Christ to both victim and perpetrator alike, but each according to the requirements of their circumstances.

For example, the identity of Christ is applied to someone who has been sinned against. When one has been the victim of racist mentalities, hatred, or discriminatory policies, the baptismal identity of Christ is wrapped around this wounded soul as a healing balm. The goal is to restore in them the precious and beloved identity they have as a redeemed child of God. This also lets the life of Christ go to work in their life (Gal. 2:20). Here shame and hurt are most often the malady being treated.

To be sure, social intervention on behalf of an oppressed people demonstrates advocacy for them. But the first duty of an undershepherd of Christ is to bring wounded souls into the presence of the advocate, Jesus Christ, who fights for them, with them, and alongside them against the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh.

In the case of those who have suffered racism, a skilled pastor will be needed to treat the great heartache and hurt a soul may have endured. He does not excuse or explain away racist treatment in any way, but rather simply enters into the angst of the soul in the confidence of the Gospel to bring cleansing for the shame suffered and release for the anger raging within.

Pastors do well to know when and how to enact God's Word upon wounded and troubled souls.

This goes for offenders against God's Word as well. Perpetrators of sin certainly need to come to repentance. However, they will then also need to receive the balm of the Gospel. The love and holiness of Christ is the remedy for all sin, but the art of soul care includes confronting and exposing the evils of racial discrimination as well as applying the holiness and light of Christ, especially when treating the sins and wounds of racism.

Applying the Light of Christ

The joy of using Christ's holiness is that it is the light no darkness can overcome. It shines on the darkness of a troubled soul, be that guilt, shame, brokenness, heartache, headache, rejection, defiance, or depression. For pastors this becomes especially significant as we care for burdened consciences and hurting souls. However, the art of pastoral care is more than a generic application of Christ's holiness to a troubled soul.

Rather, like light that splits into a rainbow of colors, the art of pastoral care is to know how to direct the light of Christ's holiness in the color specific to the malady of a particular soul. As they do, pastors will need to be mindful of a soul's felt need, and yet address their actual need in Christ. This means being able to attend to the soul's affliction in a way that identifies the best starting point. Namely, does it begin with "sin in relation to me" or "sin in relation to God?" Here "sin" includes the offenses they commit, those committed against them, and those pressing upon them from the fallen and disordered world. The art of this soul care aims to retain close proximity to God's holiness so that spiritual cleansing, purging, and healing can ritually and regularly take place. As Chrysostom said, "The shepherd needs great wisdom and a thousand eyes, to examine the soul's condition from every angle."

Thankfully, the word of God confesses the depth of God's holiness and delivers God's holiness.

Consider Psalm 103:

¹Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
²Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, ³who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, ⁴who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, ⁵who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. ⁶The LORD works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. ⁷He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. ⁸The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Ps 103:1–8).

This Psalm not only clarifies the content of God's holiness, but also delivers that holiness through God's audible and written word. It is the living voice of the gospel. From God's "holy name" come all his benefits. As the Psalm progresses, his benefits include forgiveness, healing, redemption, love, mercy, satisfaction, righteousness, and justice—a colorful rainbow indeed!

What ails the soul, be it from racist experiences or others, will by faith certainly find remedy in one or more dimensions of God's healing holiness. The pastoral art of extraordinary care is to bring aspects of God's holiness to people in such a way that it engages the soul with an array of their senses—cognitive, emotional, verbal, spiritual, and ritual (i.e., frequently, routinely and regularly). The goal is for them to formally and intimately experience that holiness amid their extraordinary circumstances.

Of course, it's important for this extraordinary pastoral care to dovetail with the ordinary care being received through the word and sacrament of the Divine Service (public worship). Extraordinary circumstances require intensified and deliberate proximity to God's holiness;

it flows from and leads to the holy things God himself provides in the Divine Service. Whenever contact with God's holiness is lost, the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh fill the void, wasting little time to defile God's people.

Caring for Those Who Have Been Sinned Against

When someone has been defiled or sinned against in some manner, there are always intense emotions that result from the offense. If someone has experienced racism, the emotional result often includes anger, shame, sorrow, and indignation. Quality care will include listening intently to the rawness, hurt, and/or anger of a wounded soul, while keeping the word of God as curative treatment on hand, ready to meet the spiritual diagnosis gained from such attentive listening.

Treating the malady of a soul is important. The danger lies in that if left untreated, such suffering can lead to other temptations that deceive and mislead into despair and other great shame and vice. For example, consider the largescale rioting and wanton destruction of property and disregard for law and order following the George Floyd tragedy. Though these outbreaks stemmed from collective indignation at apparent systematic police brutality against black people, sadly there was significant destruction of black and minority owned businesses as well—"other great shame and vice" indeed.¹⁹ This of course

¹⁹ Brad Polumbo, "Here Are Just 10 of the Many Minority-Owned Businesses Destroyed in the Riots" (June 5, 2020) *Foundation for Economic Education*.https://fee.org/articles/here-are-just-10-of-the-many-minority-owned-businesses-destroyed-in-the-riots/?_cf_chl_jschl_tk__=ec6bf82ec1245341e08c9be2dfa3a6c0a15eba e7-1615040615-0-AUTZyG41Oc7Me81tlucFaTHB6ebAryCmGdCAJUSxF5j1Qe44v99FA254odqI8LGc8_Zk-fPswGdF3n9lyE0uN5DuWlcPx7zXR7NjgsgS7Hf8IicAAA79T-UOYQHVVZP17MZVhnQkvOq52fRo3luV-Vn-tetWACcKUDfMW8W4VFLU2yZ6J_nTz90Pact-FzeNz0QJbhRw9U25QpJ8owh4QormE59MAsV0rEC-QhttBhIgbZop8Kgu9x8aELMcY65FYoAdr_qivm-490vED2R0wKtaF7vDZT2bG_JNiGKIOtvrSE-JOrD3EIDWWMqTe2Arabhu7qquuP1toEAAc9X-nIzDkzvkvPY34IzNN491KKgpiCd_Xxnv8NzX8eNzxx-

not only violates the seventh commandment, but brings no ultimate peace to the hurting soul.

Worse still, those caught up in this type of violent and destructive protest can go from being victims of racism to becoming perpetrators of the same hatred. When we are injured, our fallen condition is such that we deceive ourselves into thinking we're entitled to lash out in retaliation to get revenge, either to exact vengeance for the injury suffered or to receive reparations for the wrong that was endured. This is to the devil's delight. And he is busy at work, to be sure. But good pastoral care will lovingly address this with both law and gospel.

Caring for Those Who Have Sinned Against Others

Conversely, those who are perpetrators of racism and have committed sinful acts certainly need pastoral care as well. Those racist acts include any discriminatory mindset that views people of any race as less than human, including acts of prejudice, as well as any discriminatory or bigoted behavior, teaching, or deeds that violate the commandments and so injure another precious human being. A person who speaks prejudicially about black people, indigenous people, Hispanic people, Hmong people or white people based on racial profiling, caricature, or an ignorant disposition violates the eighth commandment and fails to put the best construction on everything.

The pastoral art here is to tactfully call a sin a sin. This includes calling a sinner to repentance and the new life in Christ, and then applying the grace and salve of the gospel. Not always an easy task. No sinner is happy to hear they have sinned and grieved not only their neighbor, but God himself. Yet, this delicate task is also part of good soul care and cultivates the baptismal

eW0dgRg5MTjxh10258LuVaFvC65oNAUAcDvd-qP-tYRKzes_aT4sR4i1cZSPCe2bnbIt-ia52wA ; Zachary Crockett, "Three Stories of Black Owned Businesses Damaged in the Riots." (June 6, 2020) *The Hustle*.<https://the-hustle.co/black-owned-businesses-riots-george-floyd/>.

identity both perpetrators and victims of sin have in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 12 Promoting Baptismal Identity and Character²⁰

Lutherans have a robust theology of baptism that gives profound insight to understand redeemed human character and identity. Critical Race Theory and social justice ideologies seek to reduce character to collectivist identities defined by their own dictates. Therefore, Lutheran Christians, pastors especially, do well to give

The baptismal life calls us to die to self and live to Christ by serving our neighbor.

care to others based on the clear confession of faith and life inherent in our baptismal theology. This is an especially important foundation for pastoral care, particularly as it promotes a vital ethic for life given all the racist tensions, injustices, and unrest present in our communities.

The baptismal life calls us to die to self and live to Christ by serving our neighbor. We do so in the confidence and character of our baptismal identity. This identity certainly carries with it moral implications for daily living. The Small Catechism helps us understand this life as it confesses what the baptized life truly entails:

It indicates that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new

²⁰ For a full theological and pastoral development of this see, Woodford, "Preaching the Virtues of Christ: Telling the Story in the way of the Gospel for a Moral People Living in Immoral Times." *SEELSORGER: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls*. Vol. 3 (2017); and "Vice, Virtue, and Baptismal Therapy in the Care of Souls." *SEELSORGER: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls*. Vol. 2 (2016).

man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Our baptismal identity as child and heir of God united to Christ provides a spiritual way of life, which is also an ethical way of life. Baptized Christians walk the path of the dead. That is, we are united to the death of Christ (Rom 6:4). This path puts to death all our sins and evil desires (racist or otherwise), as the “new man” united to Christ daily emerges to live with the character and virtues of Christ as we face temptation, affliction, and adversity. In other words, while dangerous passions and “evil desires” disorder life, lead to sin and defile our lives, the ethic of baptism daily calls every sinner to repentance and prayer, and bestows confident hope rooted in a new identity in Christ.

To be clear, this means that a person not only confesses their sin, but also turns away from that sin with its “evil desires” in sorrow and contrition. Sinful thoughts, behaviors, and vices stop and are confessed as wrong, for which the sinner pleads for mercy and forgiveness.

Thus the sinful self is spiritually crucified and buried with Christ—it is spiritually drowned and killed. All of this has clear moral and social implications. This most certainly involves behavioral changes and actions that flow from the virtues of Christ and the fruit of the faith (Gal 5:22–23). Most Christian virtues ethics offer little or no treatment of such baptismal repentance and prayer as central components in the moral and spiritual life. Yet they are utterly essential to the Christian way of life and faith. This is especially true in light of our social justice society with its competing Critical Race ideology rooted in arbitrary definitions of equality.

Therefore, the central habits of baptismal virtue ethics are the spiritual acts of prayer, contrition and repentance. Curates do well to be mindful of these acts in their care of souls. In short, the

same faith that enacts contrition and repentance also enacts the virtues of Christ. In theological language, the law is at work accusing the sinner, condemning the sinner, and driving the sinner to repentance, bringing the sinner to the death of his sinful self. But because the sinner is also baptized, he or she is simultaneously a beloved and precious child of God, an heir to the kingdom of God (Gal 3:26–27).

In that very confidence and faith, the Christian exhibits other virtues of Christ—patience, long suffering, wisdom, courage, humility—and faces the evils, temptations, and afflictions of this world. This does not in any way reduce the egregious nature of racism and evils of prejudice but rather empowers Christians to actively navigate life in this fallen world through their identity in Christ. Day by day the baptized Christian engages the world with the moral character of Christ in genuine repentance and true faith for the good of the neighbor and to the glory of God.

Delivered from the hands of the Evil One by his cross, our Lord Jesus baptismally equips Christians to live with a divine identity, with moral integrity, and with the eternal destiny of a heavenly kingdom. Pastors can deliver these gifts again and again, Sunday after Sunday, year after year, care session after care session. They call Christians to begin each day in their baptism, trusting in Jesus who conquered injustice, oppression, and death.

This is all lived out by faith. Through baptism Christ actualizes his virtues within us, not by magic or some secret, but through the washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5–8). As the sanctified life flows out of Baptism, so the virtuous life flows out of Baptism. Luther brings this out in his Large Catechism:

Every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to do all his life. For he has always enough to do by believing firmly what Baptism promises and

brings: victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts.

Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after. For we must keep at it without ceasing, always purging whatever pertains to the old Adam, so that whatever belongs to the new creature may come forth. What is the old creature? It is what is born in us from Adam, irascible, spiteful, envious, unchaste, greedy, lazy, proud—yes—and unbelieving; it is beset with all vices and by nature has nothing good in it. Now, when we enter Christ's kingdom, this corruption must daily decrease so that the longer we live the more gentle, patient, and meek we become, and the more we break away from greed, hatred, envy, and pride. This is the right use of baptism among Christians.²¹

Therefore, pastoral care in our age of social justice is enriched by the awareness of what can be called baptismal virtue ethics. You might

Christ is always at the center.

call the pastoral application of this daily dying and rising "baptismal therapy."²² This approach emphasizes that the gospel, rather than the law, operates as the power and force behind ethical living. This is the strength of our Lutheran theology. Christ is always at the center.

²¹ *Large Catechism*, Fourth Part: Baptism, 41, 66–68.

²² For an exposition of the pastoral application of baptismal therapy including case studies, see Woodford, "Vice, Virtue, and Baptismal Therapy in the Care of Souls." *SEELSORGER: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls* Vol 2, (2016): 35–64.

Pastoral Care Through Baptismal Therapy

To be clear, the law can certainly describe the Christian life, demand that life, and guide that life, but it cannot give that life. That power comes from the gospel alone. Therefore, while the law provides essential guidance and direction for the Christian life, it is critical in quality pastoral care to lift up the virtues of Christ in the way of the gospel, as a gift, by grace through faith, rather than as a demand for hearers to imitate, emulate, or adulate.

To be sure, the law instructs in Christian character, virtue, and habits, and certainly has its valid place and uses: The law 1) describes—it shows what God in Christ accomplishes in the life of the forgiven sinner by His Spirit; 2) the law proscribes—it forbids things that are contrary to God's will and dangerous to human life; and 3) the law prescribes—it teaches what is pleasing to God by way of a life linked to Jesus by Baptism into him. But the gospel alone motivates and must always predominate.

Nonetheless, there are essential truths of the law that must be taught in an immoral age filled with injustice and oppression. Yet the law is utterly powerless to produce in us what it demands, describes, proscribes, or prescribes from us. It cannot deliver character, virtue, or habit. It leads us to repent of racism in all its forms, but it cannot produce true repentance, godliness and holiness. That's why we need the gospel to justify, sanctify, and deliver everything the law demands. As Paul says, "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4). Christ is all in all. He supplies all that we need. We are no longer under the law or "slaves to the law," but in Christ we are under grace (Rom 6:14).

The Christian, then, believes we have access to moral character, virtue, and a holy, righteous identity through Jesus Christ. This is imperative

for pastors to promote and enact as they care for people in an age of social justice. It's much more than a mere mental thought or intellectual exercise designed to encourage someone to act like Jesus. This is an exercise of faith, believing what Jesus has given us and then clearly acting upon it. As Paul said, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27). Plain and simple, baptized believers have put on the virtues of Jesus. Consequently,

He also gives us his own life to live.

baptized into Christ "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

Faith calls us to believe the gospel and trust that Jesus not only gives us his forgiveness, righteousness, and holiness to secure our standing before the Heavenly Father and gain eternity in Heaven, but that he also gives us his own life to live (Gal 2:20). Buried with him in Holy Baptism we are given Christ's own character, his identity as a son of God, and his virtues to take as our very own to lead us in a moral life in this contemporary social justice culture, now at this time, here on this earth.

CONCLUSION

Final Observations

Finally, we need to consider some specific ways that pastors can enact these profound spiritual and ethical truths for those under their care. What I offer below are some possible methods for specific pastoral care. They can certainly be utilized in our social justice society but are apt for addressing all kinds of sin.

1. Caring Conversations

Caring conversation is simply the beginning point of any extraordinary pastoral care.

Part of this process involves creating a safe, comfortable, and confidential one-on-one pastoral care environment for troubled souls to openly express the malady, sin, or struggle of life that afflicts them. The desire is to offer the troubled soul compassionate listening and understanding so the curative remedy of Christ and his holiness can be readily, regularly, and ritually received. Thus, active listening, a compassionate voice, and a calm demeanor are important to facilitating these conversations. A pattern of listening might be: listen–clarify–listen–ask–listen–clarify–listen–ask. Utilizing this listening approach will foster the ability to better diagnose any particular spiritual condition. When the time is right, another consideration is perhaps the use or eventual use of sacred space (chancel, kneeler, or altar) and liturgical aesthetics and rituals (vestments, anointing oil, or candles) to accompany these conversations and enactments of pastoral care.

2. Diagnosing the Malady: Trusting the Remedy

Once adequate listening and understanding has taken place, steps toward diagnosis can begin. Helpful to this process is to review with the individual the impressions that were received, i.e., the circumstances of the person's life, the problems they are enduring, the feelings they have, and the temptations they face. Begin peeling back the various layers of affliction. In other words, like a physician, the pastor begins with the presenting symptoms and works toward a diagnosis and cure/treatment. What is the chief complaint? What spiritual symptoms can be detected? What responses are emerging? How are they handling things on their own? How is the individual functioning? Healthy or unhealthy; inwardly as well as outwardly? Note that multiple combinations of symptoms may surface. These usually are not in and of themselves the actual problem. Rather they disclose the particular misbelief, unique

idolatry, deep wound, or affront that lies at the heart of their spiritual condition or malady.

It's important to be mindful of the various categories of symptoms that emerge so an accurate diagnosis might be obtained, and a corresponding proper cure offered. Careful consideration of the spiritual, emotional, and physical symptoms that are manifested, along with emerging behavior patterns, is a significant step toward proper diagnosis and cure. Often spiritual distress may be accompanied by emotional and physical symptoms, for which examination and treatment by qualified therapists and physicians may be necessary. In fact, pastoral care should not be substituted for quality work by a qualified mental health therapist that may also be needed. There can be great benefit when a pastor and Christian therapist work in tandem for the good of a troubled soul.

In our social justice context, it's important for pastors to be sensitive to racist language and feelings of oppression, as well as the experiences of racial oppression and injustice a soul may have experienced. These realities will be crucial for a pastor to keep in mind in the diagnostic process, but always keeping the Word of God and the will of God as the predominate factor shaping interaction and care.

Again, the aforementioned beloved black pastor, John Perkins, has led by example in this way for five decades. He was brutally beaten by police in southern Mississippi in 1970 and thrown in jail for protesting civil rights. He tells of how this great injustice and suffering actually became a positive and transformative event in his life. While recovering in the hospital from the severe beating, Perkins tells of the anger and rage that so consumed him that he was seething with hatred for all white people. Yet, he could not reconcile those feelings with how the white doctors and nurses were so compassionately caring for him. He realized his rage and anger would ultimately destroy him if he did not

release it into the hands of Christ.

From that point on, as difficult as it was to let go of that anger, Perkins, along with his whole family, has been committed to Christ-centered racial reconciliation driven by the Word of God. Even with all the bumps and bruises that go with it, they see this Christ centered reconciliation as the genuine remedy for racial injustice and oppression. In his words, "God is all about reconciliation, but we run the risk of missing him when we allow racial reconciliation, or any kind of reconciliation as the dominating force—if we allow it rather than God himself to become the ultimate goal."²³ For Perkins, gospel centered reconciliation must be at the core of the church's ministry:

[R]econciliation is the heart of the Gospel. It is the process by which God brings us to him and keeps us. It is the main activating force withing the redemptive idea. It is the process of forgiveness of sin. The Bible makes it clear that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself' (2 Cor 5:19 NKJV). It is also the process by which believers in Christ are joined to one another: 'His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility' (Eph 2:15–16). He's working out our forgiveness. It's his intention to hold us together through reconciliation. Reconciliation is working in the process of forgiveness—being forgiven and forgiving others. It's an ongoing, living thing in the Bible.²⁴

Perkins is a profound pastoral example of the Christ-centered hard work needed as pastors go

²³ John Perkins, *Dream With Me: Race, Love, and the Struggle We Must Win* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 81.

²⁴ Perkins, *Dream with Me*, 79.

about caring for their flock in the face of racial injustice and hurt.

Another example is from Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li. In their book, *Leading a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*, Li recounts the bumpy journey of how their inner city congregation became the large and healthy multi-ethnic congregation it is today. At one point these two lead pastors and one of their youth pastors engaged in difficult conversations stemming from the different racial and ethnic misunderstandings they were having about each other. One is of Chinese ethnicity, one is Hispanic, and one is African American.

Their differences became rather intense at one point. But they tell of their reconciliation and living out of Christ's command to love one another (John 13:34). They desired to be intentional in the way they led the congregation through racial tension and so they led by example using the ritual enactment of God's Word. Harry Li recounts how the culmination of their reconciliation process led him to wash the youth pastor's feet in front of the congregation as a visible act of love toward him and an enactment of John 13.²⁵ Though they are not a sacramental congregation, this act has become a regular church year ritual (done on Good Friday) as they address the racial challenges and tensions that arise within the congregation.

3. Pastorally Applying the Holiness of God²⁶

When one is defiled by sin, especially sin resulting from racism (either as victim or perpetrator), enacting God's holiness upon the

²⁵ Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 175–178.

²⁶ For a full theological development and more detailed pastoral explanation of this section see, Woodford, "Holy God, Holy Things, Holy People: Pastoral Care in Proximity to God's Holiness." *SEELSORGER: A Journal for the Contemporary Cure of Souls* Vol 1 (2015), 105–135.

soul is a wonderful pastoral approach to soul care. When someone has suffered offense, the devil will be sure to tempt the victim to retaliate. Addressing both aspects—whether one is a perpetrator or a victim—takes careful attention.

One manner in which God's holiness can be applied for this specific malady when a pastor is caring for a perpetrator is through confession and absolution. This can be done formally, following a liturgical rite with the pastor being vested, or informally in the pastor's study as part of a caring conversation, to purify his or her guilty conscience and prepare the sinner to participate in a life of God's holiness as a freed, redeemed, cleansed child of God. Likewise, a blessing can be bestowed by the pastor placing his hand on the troubled soul's head and blessing him or her with God's holy triune name; the same name that was placed upon them in baptism.

Engaging the physical senses in this way helps fortify the truth that this blessing is enactment—performative speech that actually gives what it describes. Here it's good for pastors to be specific in the language used to assure the troubled soul what is being done. For example, it's not, "May the Lord bless you and keep you," but rather, "The Lord bless you and keep you." Such blessings actively deliver certainty and enact God's holiness upon the troubled soul. Undoubtedly, this pastoral care will not be a onetime session and will very likely need to be repeated, particularly as new dimensions of spiritual defilement and contamination surface and are diagnosed.

Blessings also provide visceral treatment for a victim of racism or prejudice. Such individuals are sure to have a bad conscience with feelings of extreme hurt, sorrow, and/or anger. The pastor can instruct such a person how to use the biblical practice of lament to name the perpetrator of their injury, describe the injuries inflicted, and ask for God's righteous vengeance and intervention to heal the resulting hurt. The

individual will likely suffer immensely and horribly from the shame inflicted upon him or her. That shame has undoubtedly wreaked havoc on his or her life and contaminated them

*Pastoral care directs
the victim to Christ
for vindication.*

in countless ways. The consolation of God's holiness actively bestowed by means of blessing brings cleansing to this defiled soul and bestows honor to cover the shame.

Repeated careful enactment of God's holy word upon a troubled conscience can bring relief and renewal for the affront to their identity. It will not resolve the injustice that was suffered, but like anyone who has endured injustice, pastoral care directs the victim to Christ for vindication, even as a pastor may sensitively help the individual work toward obtaining justice as appropriate to their situation and ability.

The Power of God's Word

Pastoral care can be enacted upon the troubled conscience in the above situation by utilizing the narrative word of God in a way that allows for 1) cognitive reframing, 2) emotional unveiling, 3) imaginative engaging, and 4) spiritual sustaining in order to bring the light of God's holiness to bear upon the various wounds of the soul.

Specifically, it could be done by verbalizing a particular portion of narrative from the scriptures, tapping into the emotion and vividness of that narrative and bringing it to bear upon the troubled soul in a way that unlocks the hurt and emotion of their own soul. In their imagination they can begin to see themselves in the narrative as the one receiving the compassion and holiness that Jesus delivers. In this case, perhaps Luke 10:25–37 (the parable of the Good Samaritan) could be used. The

portrayal of someone being assaulted, beaten, stripped, left for dead, and then deemed unclean and unworthy of help, could very well resonate with a victim of racism or prejudice.

A pastor can bring the victim of racism into the story to let them hear how Jesus, the Good Samaritan (himself despised and rejected, the innocent victim of injury), has intervened for them. Spiritually enabling them to see how Christ Jesus has come to their aid, washed their wounds, paid for their care, bound up their injuries, and intimately cares for them, can enact God's holy healing upon the troubled soul by bringing the purging forces of God's word to bear upon the injustice and trauma they endured.

Another more formal ritualized blessing might be for the pastor to lay his hands upon the head of the victim and speak 1 John 1:7 over them. This is done only after adequate conversation about the verse has taken place, and specifically uses the person's name as part of the ritual. "Name, the blood of Jesus cleanses [you] from all sin." Such enactment can be an incredibly powerful outpouring of God's holiness upon a fragile soul. The declaration of the verse names the sin inflicted so cruelly against the victim, but now absorbed and removed by the blood of Christ. It was first nailed to his body. Then he took it far away and buried it in his tomb, leaving it there and replacing it with resurrection hope and his everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

If appropriate, this could then be followed by the administration of the Lord's Supper with the context of the great sin against the victim in mind. The body and blood of Christ is given into the victim's mouth. His sacred body and most holy blood sacramentally delivers the remission (removal) of all sin and strengthens and preserves the communicant in both body and soul to life everlasting.

In other words, the Holy Supper purges every

spiritual contamination of all abuse suffered from the inside out. But it also frees the victim from the shame the abuse created and imputes to the victim the purity of Christ to cleanse and sanctify that person entirely—in body, mind, and soul. At the same time, it also brings a soothing healing to the victim’s conscience. Obviously, this too is likely not a one-time occurrence of care. The intensity of such an emotional offense will likely need repeated treatment just as a single treatment of a soul will not necessarily relieve all the mental trauma a victim repeatedly relives. It may need to be repeated regularly and ritually (formally), with great care and compassion. The likely reality is that the contaminating effects of the sin against the victim may emotionally linger and be relived continually.

The Last Word

In the end, the present trauma of social justice distress is a clarion call to active ministry. Combined with acts of compassion and love by the whole body of Christ, we pastors have been given the high privilege of serving as emissaries of the Lord Jesus—the Great Shepherd of the sheep. With his words in our mouths and his sacraments in our hands we have the privilege of serving as spiritual physicians for desperately hurting souls. We can enter calmly into extremely troubled situations, because we know that we are fully authorized and commissioned servants of Christ Jesus. Our confidence is that the healing does not come from us, but from him.

The remedy for all sin, hurt, injustice and oppression is the hope and healing that comes through our Lord Jesus Christ. Pastoral care is always rooted in him and his gifts of love and grace. He is the Lord of the Church who breaks down dividing walls of hostility, reconciles the aggrieved, forgives sin, removes shame, and gives holy identity and moral character. Despite the utter chaos of our troubling times in this age

of racism and social justice, pastors are given the incredible privilege and honor of caring for souls in the confidence and power of Christ and His Word.

Within the holy fellowship of sinner/saints of all races and ethnicities, Christ Jesus makes brothers and sisters of people once locked in defiant prejudice and discrimination. The old is gone; the new has come. There is only one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope that belongs to us all by God’s grace: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Eph 4:5–6)



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