



Christian Reflection
A Series in Faith and Ethics

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
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Study Guides for

Racism

These guides integrate Bible study, prayer, and worship to help us articulate the spiritual disfigurement caused by our racialized society and chart a course toward authentic racial reconciliation through the Body of Christ. Use them individually or in a series. You may reproduce them for personal or group use.

- The Persistent Problem** 2
While whites focus on creating good-intentioned, right thinking people, people of color focus on group equality and justice. Both are important, so they need not be at war. But our focus must be on working together to undo our racialized society, and that, by definition, is not just about individuals.
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More than the other Gospel writers, Luke focuses on issues of race. From the Abrahamic covenant he gleans a radical vision of God’s people as inclusive of all who profess the lordship of Jesus Christ, regardless of socio-economic standing, physical appearance, or ethnic or racial identity.
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A distorted culture is always at the heart of racism, prompting us to react to people of other cultures in ethnocentric ways. How is our ethnocentrism – expressed in the homogeneous unit principle that says “people like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers” – infecting the practice of starting new congregations in the United States?



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Focus Article:

📖 The Persistent Problem
(*Racism*, pp. 11-18)

Suggested Article:

📖 Race in Evangelical
America
(*Racism*, pp. 82-86)

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The Persistent Problem

While whites focus on creating good-intentioned, right thinking people, people of color focus on group equality and justice. Both are important, so they need not be at war. But our focus must be on working together to undo the racialized society, and that, by definition, is not just about individuals.

Unison Prayer

Eternal God, you have reconciled a sinful world to yourself in Christ, and given your Church the ministry of reconciliation. In your new creation, everything old is passing away.

We confess that we have been slow to believe and follow you into the newness of your kingdom. We have feared and distrusted our brothers and sisters, allowing ourselves to be ruled by the divisions of race, gender, nation, and wealth that belong to the old order, which is passing away.

Holy and gracious God, pardon our sins and free our captive imaginations. Renew us in the power of your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Galatians 3:27-29

Reflection

Racism is such a persistent problem, in part, because we cannot even agree on what the problem is! “Whites tend to view racism as intended individual acts of overt prejudice and discrimination,” Michael Emerson observes. In this *individualist* definition, the core of a racist’s personality must be spiritually bent. No wonder, then, that to whites, being called “racist” is so very offensive. Most people of color, however, favor a *structuralist* view: “Racism is, at a minimum, prejudice plus power, and that power comes not from being a prejudiced individual, but from being part of a group that controls the nation’s systems.”

Why do whites tend not to notice the structural aspects of the problem? The reason may be found in what scholars call “white privilege,” which has the following three aspects:

- ▶ *White structural advantage* refers to those benefits in everyday life and institutional settings that come from having a white identity. Whites have an advantage because they “occupy the location of dominance—politically, economically, culturally, and numerically—within the racial hierarchy. They have disproportionate influence of political parties, legal system, government-controlled institutions, industry, and business.”
- ▶ *White normativity* makes the practices and beliefs of white culture standard or “just how things are” in a way that needs no social justification. Anything that diverges from this norm is deviant. So, to have access to power, one must act “white.”
- ▶ *White transparency* is a tendency of whites to not think about norms, practices, and beliefs that are white-specific. “Most whites are unaware that they are ‘raced,’ and that their race has real consequences for their lives. Rather, they believe that they earn what they get, and their achievements are nearly all based on individual effort, talent, and creativity.” This is a powerful tool for maintaining white advantage, for “how can one challenge



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white privilege if there is no such thing as white culture/white practices?" Emerson notes. "To be white means in part that one does not see the advantages garnered from being white, so any threats to taken-for-granted ways of life are indeed threatening and feel unjustified."

So, how can we move forward together toward racial reconciliation if white privilege often is invisible to whites, but as clear as day to people of color? Emerson suggests that we take the focus off of racism and put it where it belongs: our society is *racialized*, allocating what we value—"income, wealth, fine neighborhoods, quality schools, social status, respect, psychological well-being, health, life expectancy—unequally along racial lines."

To address this racialization problem, he is developing a Mutual Obligations Approach with George Yancey. It features "interracial contact under controlled conditions, listening to each other, acknowledging and defining racial problems, searching for a critical core that is agreed upon by all, giving voice to cultural uniqueness, recognizing and incorporating self- and group-interest, and devising ways that allow for negotiation of these self- and group-interests to produce an agreed upon solution." This approach may be local, messy, and difficult, but "it can be done," he concludes. "And with our undying hope in God's power and kingdom of heaven on earth, it will be done."

Study Questions

1. Discuss how whites and people of color tend to define racism differently. Have you noticed this disparity in practice?
2. According to Michael Emerson, how do white structural advantage, normativity, and transparency work together to sustain whites' position at the top of society? How can they produce dominance without whites' feeling like it is true?
3. What evidence do you see of the racialization of American society? How do the elements of the Mutual Obligations Approach address the problem of racialization?
4. Edward Gilbreath notes, "it's no longer slavery, Jim Crow or organized discrimination that we're up against in our churches, ministries and society; it's an institutionalized racialization of religion that blinds us to the systemic issues of justice and reconciliation, even as it purports to bring us together." Yet, he firmly believes that "the church is the one institution that's best equipped to overcome racial divide."[†] Can both assertions be true?

Departing Hymn: "O God of Creation, We See All around Us" (v. 3)

O God, by your Spirit, now give us a vision
of life in your kingdom through Jesus your Son—
where birthright and culture don't lead to division,
your children are welcomed as members of one.
God, now may we work with a new dedication
for justice, equality, freedom and peace,
until we are called to your great celebration
and share at your table in your banquet feast.

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2010)

Tune: ASH GROVE

[†] Edward Gilbreath, *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 174 and 21.



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Focus Article:

📖 "All the Families of the Earth Shall Be Blessed"
(*Racism*, pp. 19-25)

Suggested Article:

📖 "What Is to Prevent Me from Being Baptized?"
(*Racism*, pp. 48-49)

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"All the Families of the Earth Shall be Blessed"

More than the other Gospel writers, Luke focuses on issues of race. From the Abrahamic covenant he gleans a radical vision of God's people as inclusive of all who profess the lordship of Jesus Christ, regardless of socio-economic standing, physical appearance, or ethnic or racial identity.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Acts 8:26-39

Reflection

When God called Abram to leave his father's family and continue on to the land of Canaan, God promised that through his descendants "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Making "a great nation" in Israel was a major step in fulfilling that promise. However, for Luke the Abrahamic covenant points beyond Israel to the radically inclusive community that forms as Christ's followers share the good news of God's faithfulness with Gentiles. So, when the disciples ask, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom of Israel?" the risen Christ answers, "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).

Philip's courageous preaching is a pivotal moment in God's fulfillment of the covenant. When persecution by Saul drives many early disciples from Jerusalem, Philip takes the opportunity to share the gospel with the Samaritans, who were despised for religious and ethnic differences (Acts 8:4-8). He shatters more ethnic and racial barriers by baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch, the first Gentile received into the Body of Christ. The Ethiopian "was from a country widely believed – by authorities like Homer, Herodotus, and Strabo – to lie at the southernmost limit of the earth," Heidi Hornik notes. "Early readers would understand that this man was ostracized for several reasons. First, his skin color was dark. . . . Furthermore, he was a eunuch. This prevented him from entering into the assembly of the Lord; he would have been allowed to worship only in the outer chambers of the Temple." Philip could transcend the prejudice of his own day only through the enabling power of "the Spirit of the Lord" (8:39).

Mikeal Parsons traces, in the central figures in Luke-Acts, Luke's radical vision of an inclusive new Abrahamic community being formed by the work of Christ that continues in the Church.

► *Jesus' words and deeds express the wideness of God's mercy.* In his inaugural sermon in Nazareth, Jesus stresses that God sent Elijah and Elisha to minister to Gentiles. When "all in the synagogue were filled with rage," they try to kill him (Luke 4:28). "This story should not be taken to mean that Israel, in Luke's view, is permanently rejected," Parsons notes. "Stories of positive Jewish response to Jesus' ministry are found throughout [Luke-Acts]. But those who respond positively to Jesus' message recognize the inherent inclusiveness of his message. Those who do not hear that message of inclusion or choose to reject it do not respond positively." After Jesus sharply rebukes his disciples for asking to destroy



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an inhospitable Samaritan town (9:51-55), he tells a lawyer the parable of a “good” Samaritan (10:25-37). Later on his way to Jerusalem, when Jesus heals ten men with leprosy, only one – a Samaritan – returns to thank him. “In this new Abrahamic community, according to Luke, help was to be received and extended, regardless of ethnic identity,” Parsons writes.

- ▶ *Peter begins to understand the inclusivity of the gospel he preaches.* He tells his Jewish audience at Pentecost that God’s promised redemption “is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39). Those “who are far away” are probably the Gentiles (cf. 22:21). In his next sermon he cites the Abrahamic covenant, implying that it extends to the Gentiles (3:25-26). Nevertheless, Peter requires a radical reorientation of heart in order to fellowship with and witness to Cornelius, a Gentile soldier (10:1-33). Later Peter boldly declares to a Jewish audience that God has cleansed the hearts of Gentiles (15:9).
- ▶ *Paul is commissioned to be the apostle to the Gentiles.* Jesus tells Ananias, “Go, for [Saul] is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15-16). Acts 13-28 records Paul’s fulfillment of this commission through tours of preaching in Asia Minor and Greece, and, finally, his imprisonment in Rome, the center of the Gentile world.

“For Luke, God’s covenant people can be a blessing to the nations only by overcoming the walls of separation and division made with human hands.” If we are going to fulfill the Church’s Abrahamic mission today, Parsons concludes, “we, too, must embrace this wonderfully radical vision of God’s people, which includes *everyone* who calls upon the name of the Lord.”

Study Questions

1. In *The Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch*, how does Rembrandt capture the momentousness of this event in Acts 8:26-39?
2. How does Simeon’s speech (Luke 2:29-32) *anticipate* the radical inclusivity of the Abrahamic covenant? How is it packed with echoes of Isaiah 40:5, 42:6, 46:13, 49:6, and 52:9-10?
3. In Luke, how does Jesus show that God’s mercy transcends barriers of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic standing?
4. In Acts, what are the key contributions of Peter and Paul in shaping the Church’s mission to the Gentiles?

Departing Hymn: “O God of Creation, We See All around Us” (v. 2)

Christ Jesus, you lived in the same way you taught us;
you welcomed the people that others despised.
You talked and you ate with the poor and the outcast;
you saw every person through welcoming eyes.
Forgive our re-building the walls you have broken –
our making of barriers you came to tear down.
The gift of your cross is the world’s reconciling
with God and with all of God’s people around.

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2010)

Tune: ASH GROVE



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Focus Article:

📖 Gregory of Nyssa and the Culture of Oppression
(*Racism*, pp. 26-36)

Suggested Article:

📖 Smelling Fires of Racism
(*Racism*, pp. 70-74)

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Gregory of Nyssa and the Culture of Oppression

In the late fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa spoke out against the institution of slavery in a way that none had before, vilifying it as incompatible with Christianity. What can we learn from this Cappadocian Father about seeing beyond the veil of oppression?

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Genesis 1:26-27

Meditation¹

Each person is not just to be respected but to be revered as one created in God's image. To treat a child of God as if he or she was less than this is not just wrong, which it is; it is not just evil, as it often is; not just painful, as it often must be for the victim; it is veritably blasphemous, for it is to spit in the face of God.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Reflection

The true offense of slavery, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-394) argued in his fourth homily on the book of Ecclesiastes, is that God created humans to be free. Commenting on the Teacher's proud claim "I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house" (Ecclesiastes 2:7), Gregory wrote:

If man is in the likeness of God, and rules the whole earth, and has been granted authority over everything on earth from God, who is his buyer, tell me? Who is his seller? To God alone belongs this power; or rather, not even to God himself. For *his gracious gifts*, it says, *are irrevocable* (Romans 11:29). God would not therefore reduce the human race to slavery, since he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, spontaneously recalled us to freedom. But if God does not enslave what is free, who is he that sets his own power above God's?²

Kimberly Flint-Hamilton emphasizes how extraordinary Gregory's view was in late antiquity. "Even though Gregory was not alone in his compassion for the lot of the slaves, his conclusion to attack the very institution was unique," she notes. "Before Gregory, slave owners had been urged to treat their slaves with dignity and not abuse them. They had even been urged to manumit those servants that had proven themselves worthy. Yet only Gregory suggested that slavery, as an institution, was sinful."

Gregory interpreted Scripture intertextually, allowing key passages to shape his understanding of other passages. Here he views Ecclesiastes through the lens of the *imago Dei*. While his contemporaries agreed that God created human beings equal, they usually viewed slavery as a "sinful distinction" — an aspect of our fallen condition that we must accept. Gregory, however, taught that every human being — past, present, and future — is part of God's grand design in creation. He understood Genesis 1:26-27 to be about not just the first humans, but "the fullness of humankind, comprehended by God's



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‘foresight,’” David Bentley Hart writes. “Adam and Eve, however superlatively endowed with the gifts of grace at their origin, constitute in Gregory’s eyes only the first increments (so to speak) of that concrete community that, as a whole, reflects the beauty of its creator.”³ Gregory names this fullness of humankind, which contains people of all eras, the *pleroma*. The beauty of the *pleroma* is marred by enslaving one portion of humanity to another.

Flint-Hamilton sums up Gregory’s view: “Only in universal freedom can the fullness of *pleroma* unfold, with each individual human being contributing. Slavery, racism, and oppression in general, are completely incompatible with the will of God.”

Study Questions

1. What does Gregory of Nyssa mean by the *pleroma*, the “fullness,” of humankind? How does this concept shape his understanding of the image of God in Genesis 1:26-27?
2. Discuss how the word *pleroma* is used to describe the Church and our discipleship in Ephesians 1:8b-10, 22-23 and Colossians 2:9-10? How does this usage shape your understanding of Gregory of Nyssa’s argument?
3. Treating anyone as less than a child of God, according to Archbishop Tutu, is always “wrong,” often “evil,” always “painful... for the victim,” and “veritably blasphemous.” What does Tutu mean by each of these concepts? How does each one help us understand the nature of racialized actions?
4. “Racism likes compliant companions,” Joseph Parker notes in *Smelling Fires of Racism*. He warns, “God’s people should have in place a ‘spiritual detector’ – someone who is wise in the ways of God; someone who, like a carbon monoxide detector, can identify the poisonous, colorless, and odorless fumes that will kill us.” What would this look like in your congregation, or in the Church at large?

Departing Hymn: “O God of Creation, We See All around Us” (v. 1)

O God of creation, we see all around us:
how richly diverse are the people you’ve made!
In all of our neighbors who daily surround us,
your love for your children is ever displayed.
We’re made in your image, we’re equal before you;
yet often injustice and hatred abound.
Forgive us the ways that we sin and ignore you,
accepting the structures that push others down.

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (2010)

Tune: ASH GROVE

1. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Image Books, 1999), 197.
2. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes with Supporting Studies*, edited by Stuart George Hall (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1993), 74.
3. D. Bentley Hart, “The ‘Whole Humanity’: Gregory of Nyssa’s Critique of Slavery in Light of His Eschatology,” *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 54:1 (February 2001): 51-69, here citing 57.



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Focus Article:

📖 Christian Practices for the Journey toward Shalom
(*Racism*, pp. 55-61)

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Christian Practices for the Journey toward Shalom

How can Christians come together to talk about matters of race? The problems seem intractable. While the journey toward Shalom will be difficult and often painful, the ancient Christian practices of stability, hospitality, and foot-washing can help us on the way.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:9-11

Meditation†

The lack of safe places to discuss racial issues in the secular world means that Christians should work harder to create safe places in our churches.... Honest dialogue in a Christian setting is vital since our faith teaches us the role of human depravity in the development of racism. We will understand not only that people of other races may be insensitive to our perspective on racial issues, but that we may be insensitive to their perspective as well.

George Yancey

Reflection

“Race is hard to talk about,” Victor Hinojosa readily admits, “in large part because we carry our cultural and racial expectations with us into the life of the Church.” In America, Christians have not been able to overcome several barriers erected by their racialized culture. One barrier is fear – of being labeled a racist or of not being taken seriously. Another is what Hinojosa calls the vice of ecclesial sloth – the expectation that in church we should find peace and comfort, and no conflict. Most congregations remain segregated by choice because racial groups find it so much easier to do church with people like themselves.

But peace and personal comfort should not be our ultimate goals, Hinojosa insists. Reconciliation is not easy. To be reconciled to one another, we must “practice confession and forgiveness in difficult and painful ways. In the Church we have the chance to take seriously our sins, corporate and individual, and to deal with the structural and individual nature of racism and our racialized society.”

Hinojosa commends these three Christian practices that go hand-in-hand with honest confession and forgiveness:

- ▶ *The practice of stability* – staying with a group of people when we want to move on – is crucial because racial reconciliation is a long-term process requiring deep and sustained contact with other racial groups. It takes commitment to foster the kind of community where racial issues can be discussed. The vow of stability taken in certain classic and new monastic communities is an example for all Christians of the consistency necessary for racial reconciliation.
- ▶ *The practice of true Christian hospitality* is hard work, requiring us not merely to tolerate or be nice to others, but to welcome them into community. This is so different from the sentimentalized and commercialized form of hospitality that is popular in our culture. Rightly practiced, hospitality builds up the Church by uniting individuals’ distinct gifts of the Spirit.



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► *The ancient practice of foot washing* is a very uncomfortable experience for everyone – both those who wash and those who are washed. It forces us to admit that we are not self sufficient – that we must serve others and accept others' service. When practiced across racial lines, foot washing is a powerful reminder of our unity in Christ.

At our baptism, we take on a new identity as citizens of God's kingdom. This is why the Apostle Paul proclaims, "there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free; but Christ is all and in all!" (Colossians 3:11. Our identity in the body of Christ is more essential than any racial, ethnic, national, familial, or professional identity. "When we are called to remember our baptismal vows, we are called to remember who, and whose, we are," Hinojosa concludes. "We do so when we engage in these other formative practices of stability, hospitality, and foot washing as well."

Study Questions

1. Why is it so hard to talk about race in the Church? How do racialized cultural constructs prevent our unity in Christ?
2. Victor Hinojosa says we often think of church as a place for peace, reflection, and comfort, a place where conflict should be avoided. How can congregations be places of refuge and renewal, without falling into the trap of "ecclesial sloth"?
3. Consider how confession and forgiveness are related to practices of stability, hospitality, and foot washing. How do these facilitate racial reconciliation and unity in the Church?
4. In the departing hymn "Let Us Break Bread Together," what practices foster reconciliation and unity?

Departing Hymn: "Let Us Break Bread Together"

Let us break bread together on our knees,
let us break bread together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us drink wine together on our knees,
let us drink wine together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

Let us praise God together on our knees,
let us praise God together on our knees.
When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,
O Lord, have mercy on me.

African-American Spiritual
Tune: LET US BREAK BREAD

† George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock: Embracing Mutual Responsibility* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 132.



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Focus Article:

📖 Multiethnic Congregations
(*Racism*, pp. 62-69)

Suggested Article:

📖 Let's Get It Together:
Multiracial and Interethnic
Congregations
(*Racism*, pp. 87-93)

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Let's Get It Together: Multiethnic Congregations

Though difficult to achieve, healthy multiethnic congregations are flourishing in Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical spheres. They are neither perfectly inclusive nor immune from racial conflict, but they have broken through the racial barriers that have plagued American Christianity for so long.

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Psalm 133

Unison Response (Ephesians 2:14)

For Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

Meditation†

God will use the emerging generation...to bring about spiritual healing and racial reconciliation. Today's young people... have seen the results of shattered relationships, family brokenness, racial and ethnic hatred, wars and terrorism. They want a different path—a path of reconciliation, mutual respect and understanding, a path that leads to connection. This longing lies deep with the next generation, and we believe that God will bless their desire.

Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson

Reflection

In 1998, only seven percent of American congregations were multi-racial—with no more than eighty percent of their members in one racial group. Yet “a multiethnic (multiracial, multicultural) church movement has been taking shape and gaining momentum,” Kathleen Garces-Foley observes, “especially among evangelical Christians, but parallel movements have developed among Catholic and mainline Protestant Christians.”

- ▶ *Evangelical churches* with large congregations (over 1000 weekly attendance) are becoming multiethnic faster than smaller ones. Just as large Protestant churches were three times more likely to be multiethnic in 2007 than 1998, large evangelical ones were five times more likely to be multiethnic. Confessional statements by the Southern Baptist Convention (1994) and National Association of Evangelicals (1995) set the stage, but the impetus for change arose in local churches. Evergreen Baptist Church, Los Angeles, for instance, morphed from ninety-eight percent Asian-American to a multiethnic congregation in less than five years. Its “young adults, almost all of whom had been involved in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship...were most passionate about creating multiethnic churches.” Garces-Foley concludes, “Young, cosmopolitan evangelicals will not be comfortable in ‘ethnic’ churches (including Euro-American churches).”
- ▶ *Mainline Protestant churches* historically created ethnic congregations for minority groups. All mainline denominations have issued recent statements in support of racial equality and inclusion.



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Some, like Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), are strongly committed to congregational diversity. Pledging in 1998 to increase overall ethnic membership to twenty percent by 2010, PCUSA created The Mission of Multicultural Congregational Support to promote new church plants and help existing churches become more diverse. By 2003, seventeen percent of its churches were multiethnic. American Baptist Churches USA has the highest overall diversity, but only four percent of its congregations are multiethnic.

- ▶ *Roman Catholic parishes*, reflecting the diversity of Catholics in the neighborhoods they serve, were three times more likely to be multiethnic than Protestant churches in 1998. Historically, immigrants and African Americans were given their own “national parish” or mission churches; but since 1965, immigrants have been welcomed into local parishes by adding masses in different languages. “The result has been internal segregation among various groups in the parish, leading to the co-existence of ‘parallel parishes,’” she notes. After this “balkanization” was criticized in the 1990s, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops urged parishes to find ways to honor cultural differences and overcome cultural divisions.

Study Questions

1. How are evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Roman Catholics—with such different polities and institutional histories—creating healthy multiethnic congregations?
2. Discuss Kathleen Garces-Foley’s observation that “before all churches take up the diversity goal it is important to consider the trade off. Ethnic churches have been extremely important for racial minorities and immigrants in the United States.”
3. Kersten Bayt Priest writes, “Predictors of multiracial diversity in American congregations are charismatic worship style, younger age, ‘small group’ approach, heterogeneous neighborhood, and geographic space (‘beltway’ urban).” Why might these factors be important? To what extent do they characterize your congregation?

Departing Hymn: “The Spirit Binds Us to Our Lord” (vv. 1, 2, and 5)

The Spirit binds us to our Lord
but once in him we find
communion sweet, as oil outpoured,
with kindred hearts and minds.

Beneath his yoke, our easy tie,
we count as common store
our gifts and graces—rich supply
for those who need them more.

We, by our faith, are bound to meet
in worship of the Lord
and flood our Father’s mercy seat
with prayers in one accord.

Joshua F. Drake (2006), alt.

Suggested Tunes: ST. PETER (Reinagle) or DUNDEE

† Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change*, expanded edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 26.



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Avoiding Racism
in Starting New
Congregations
(*Racism*, pp. 75-81)

Suggested Article:

📖 Apostle to the Gentiles
(*Racism*, pp. 50-51)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu.

Christian Reflection

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Avoiding Racism in Starting New Congregations

A distorted culture is always at the heart of racism, prompting us to react to people of other cultures in ethnocentric ways. How is our ethnocentrism—expressed in the homogeneous unit principle that says “people like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers”—infecting the practice of starting new congregations in the United States?

Responsive Prayer

Faithful God, gather us together!

We have been scattered and divided.

Gracious God, gather us together!

Your people, the humble, forgiven people you have chosen to bear your good news, have come to this place to study your word and sing your praises. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Revelation 7:9-12

Reflection

When the prophet John glimpses the worship of God that continually goes on in heaven, he sees “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9). Congregations here and now should be preparing disciples to join in that “noisy, multicultural community” of worship, Damian Emetuche writes. “In God’s kingdom there is no room for individualistic faith. We are a family.”

Too often, however, our best efforts to welcome different people groups to share in God’s kingdom have been marred by ethnocentrism—the attitude that one’s own people group and cultural ways are superior. We see this in the history of missions. “The West accepted the gospel and correctly contextualized it to fit the Greco-Roman mindset,” Emetuche notes. But when Western missionaries planted churches worldwide, “indigenous churches were never given the opportunity to contextualize the gospel in their culture.”

As we share the gospel with new immigrants in America, ethnocentrism continues to distort church planting when we:

- ▶ *embrace the homogenous unit principle.* A leading church-growth strategist advises, “When marked differences of color, stature, income, cleanliness, and education are present, unbelievers understand the gospel better when expounded by their own kind of people. They prefer to join churches whose members look, talk, and act like themselves.”

This approach is not biblical, Emetuche objects. It appeals to our fallen cultural sensitivity: “we resist integration across racial, ethnic, and class barriers because we cherish personal freedom and individualism.” Not only have white church planters embraced this principle, but also “Non-Caucasians, in reaction to the racialized culture of the American church, have planted immigrant and ethnic congregations. Many of these...are not much more than subculture social organizations which further segregate the people of faith.”

- ▶ *inadequately fund nonwhite church planters.* While it is difficult for any church planter to secure ministry partners, nonwhite planters



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

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have the most trouble, Emetuche reports. "Most ethnic planters suffer financial hardship, and many work odd jobs to support their families." Gary Irby, the Puget Sound Baptist Association director of church planting, notes, "Just as denying the existence of racism is the strongest support of perpetuating it, the lack of awareness about the inequity in funding is one of the biggest issues in overcoming it."

► *fail to include people of color in leadership positions.* The decision-making bodies of most churches "continue to be largely under the direction of the descendants of Europeans," Margaret Guider has written. "They set the standards of behavior considered to be normative, if not superior, and these standards continue to be those by which the behaviors of other groups are judged. When talking about racism, the descendants of European immigrants often define reality incorrectly. As the beneficiaries of racism, they fail to understand that the 'problem' tends to be constructed in ways that repeatedly overlook the dynamics of racial privilege."

Since our best intentioned "attitudes and actions often are embedded in unacknowledged ethnocentrism," Emetuche concludes, "we need vigilant circumspection and correction by our brothers and sisters in Christ in order to recognize and repent from racist thoughts, words, and actions."

Study Questions

1. What are some specific ways that ethnocentrism distorted church planting by Western missionaries after the rise of Western political states and spread of colonization?
2. Discuss the homogenous unit principle and how it has shaped church-planting and church-growth strategies in the United States. Do you agree with this application?
3. As people accept the gospel, they must "correctly contextualize" it in their culture, Damian Emetuche notes. How would you apply this principle to church planting in a multiethnic culture like the United States?
4. Why, according to Emetuche, should more people of color be included in American church leadership positions?
5. Emetuche sees the Apostle Paul as a model of sharing the gospel across racial, ethnic, and class barriers. How is the difficulty of Paul's mission foreshadowed in Caravaggio's painting, *The Conversion of St. Paul* (on the cover of *Racism*)?

Departing Hymn: "Come, Let Us Join Our Cheerful Songs" (vv. 1 and 5)

Come, let us join our cheerful songs
with angels round the throne.
Ten thousand thousand are their tongues,
but all their joys are one.

The whole creation join in one,
to bless the sacred name
of him who sits upon the throne,
and to adore the Lamb.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Suggested Tunes: GRÄFENBERG or ST. ANNE

Appendix: Optional Lesson Plans for Teachers

For each study guide we offer two or three optional lesson plans followed by detailed suggestions on using the material in the study guide:

- ▶ An *abridged lesson plan* outlines a lesson suitable for a beginning Bible study class or a brief group session.
- ▶ A *standard lesson plan* outlines a more thorough study.
- ▶ For some guides a *dual session lesson plan* divides the study guide material so that the group can explore the topic in two meetings.

Each lesson plan is for a 30- to 45-minute meeting, with about one-third of the time being set aside for worship.

The Persistent Problem

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1, 2, and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To discuss how racial groups, on average, define racism in different ways.
2. To consider how the elements of racial privilege – structural advantage, normativity, and transparency – can work together to produce whites’ dominance in society without their feeling it is true.
3. To articulate the persistent problem as the racialization of society.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Racism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. The departing hymn “O God of Creation, We See All around Us” is sung to the familiar melody ASH GROVE, which can be found in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

For most racial groups, we know there is a highly offensive, derogatory word meant to belittle them. Is there such a word for white Americans? “When I ask my students this question – no matter their hue – they are befuddled,” sociologist Michael Emerson notes. “‘Honky’ or ‘cracker’ seem nothing more than funny-sounding words to them. Any words they can think of simply do not feel offensive or highly derogatory. Such words are all bark, and no bite.

“Then I point out to my students that indeed there is such a word, one that will get whites’ blood boiling in a heartbeat. That word? ‘Racist.’ Call a white American a racist and that person will be angered, the pulse will increase, and the skin will redden. Almost as if by instinct, the accused will lash out at the accuser, either with strong denial or with name calling of his or her own.”

“Why is this word so upsetting to so many white Americans?” Emerson asks (*Racism*, p. 11). To answer that question, he explores how different racial groups, on average, define racism differently. This difference of meaning, it turns out, is one reason why racism is a persistent problem in our society.

Unison Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading the prayer in the study guide in unison.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Galatians 3:27-29 from a modern translation.

Reflection

To begin this study of the persistent problem of race in the United States, Michael Emerson refocuses our attention on the racialization of society, rather than racism. This is important because racism is a contested concept among racial groups: whites usually give an *individualist* definition and people of color adopt a *structuralist* account of racism. Racial groups cannot work together toward a solution when they fundamentally disagree on the nature of the problem. Yet, all can agree society is racialized in that many valuable things are

unevenly distributed along racial lines. In a racialized society, “race matters considerably for people’s identities, whom they know, where they live, whom they marry, and their life chances.” He says that white privilege – a combination of white structural advantage, normativity, and transparency – reinforces whites’ dominance in society, but disguises from them the racialization of society.

Study Questions

1. Michael Emerson cites research that shows “Whites tend to view racism as intended individual acts of overt prejudice and discrimination.” According to this *individualist view*, “Groups, nations, and organizations are not racist; people are. Second, to be considered racist, the person must classify a group of people as inferior to others, and then whatever they say or do must result directly from that view. That is, they must mean for their actions to be racist for them to actually be racist. Third, racism is equated with prejudice (wrong thinking and talking about others) and individual discrimination (wrong actions against others). Finally, because of the other components of racism’s definition, if a person is a racist it is a master status, a core identity of who the person is, not just some passing act. In short, it defines the person’s essence.” (Interestingly, this individualist definition of racism is even more strongly held by white evangelical Christians than by other whites.)

Most people of color, on the other hand, give a *structuralist definition*. “Racism is, at a minimum, prejudice plus power, and that power comes not from being a prejudiced individual, but from being part of a group that controls the nation’s systems. So while anyone can be prejudiced, only whites can perpetrate racism in the United States, for they hold and have always held most of the power in American institutions.”

2. After reviewing the definitions of white structural advantage, normativity, and transparency that are given in the study guide, invite three groups to brainstorm everyday actions and institutional settings that illustrate these three dimensions of white privilege.

Members might discuss the class assignment that Emerson gives students in his race and ethnic relations course: “For the next twenty-four hours, any time you refer to someone who is white, preface it with the word white. So if you are telling someone about your professor, say ‘my white professor.’ If you are talking about your friend, say ‘my white friend.’ After the twenty-four hours are completed, write a paper about your experience. How did you feel? What were people’s reactions?” Emerson reports that students of color usually say this is not unusual to do, but white students typically find it difficult to do. How does this activity challenge white transparency and undermine white normativity?

3. “White Americans have on average ten times the wealth of black and Hispanic Americans,” Emerson writes. “That superior wealth allows white Americans to obtain the finest of neighborhoods, the best of educations, and access to many other social goods that help them pass on their advantages to their children. It allows them to help one another out in ways impossible for other groups. We can summarize it this way: What does it cost to be black, Hispanic, or American Indian in the racialized society? On average, about 40% of your income, 90% of your wealth, and five to ten years of your life.” Encourage members to give evidence from personal experience of the unequal distribution of income, wealth, fine neighborhoods, quality schools, social status, respect, psychological well-being, health, or life expectancy along racial lines.
4. Discuss evidence of racialization – unequal distribution of status, responsibilities, opportunities, and resources along racial lines – in your congregation or other Christian organizations and institutions. Are systemic issues of racial justice and reconciliation regularly identified and addressed? Three studies in this series – “Christian Practices for the Journey toward Shalom,” “Let’s Get it Together: Multiethnic Congregations,” and “Avoiding Racism in Starting New Congregations” – explore responses to racialization in Christian communities.

Departing Hymn

“O God of Creation, We See All around Us” can be found on pp. 37-39 of *Racism*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

“All the Families of the Earth Shall Be Blessed”

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review how, more than other Gospel writers, Luke focuses on issues of race.
2. To consider how Luke draws out the radical inclusivity of the Abrahamic covenant.
3. To discuss how Rembrandt depicts the momentousness of Philip’s baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 4-5 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Racism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. The departing hymn “O God of Creation, We See All around Us” is sung to the familiar melody ASH GROVE, which can be found in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

The Gospel of Luke opens with intertwining narratives of the divine announcements to Zechariah and Elizabeth and to Mary, the births and circumcisions of their sons, John the Baptist and Jesus, and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple by his parents. Beautiful psalms of praise punctuate these narratives – not so much to reveal the personal take of grateful parents, adoring angels, and amazed prophets on the holy events, but to tune our hearts to take in the major themes of God’s work in Christ Jesus that continues through the Church.

The prophet Simeon sounds a central theme – the radical inclusivity of God’s covenant with Abraham’s descendants – when he encounters the infant Christ in the Temple (Luke 2:29-32):

Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace,
according to your word;
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the presence of *all peoples*,
a light for revelation to the *Gentiles*,
and for glory to your people *Israel*.

Jesus is God’s salvation for *all people*, regardless of ethnicity or race.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to tune our hearts to welcome all people who profess the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Acts 8:26-39 from a modern translation.

Reflection

This study reviews Luke’s treatment of issues of race in his two-part work, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. Mikeal Parsons shows how God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12:3) to bless “all the families of the earth” through his descendants, “provided for Luke the scriptural warrant for the Gentile mission and the radically inclusive covenant community resulting from that mission.” Use Rembrandt’s etching *The Baptism*

of the *Ethiopian Eunuch* (on the cover and p. 48 in *Racism*) and Simeon's speech about the infant Christ (Luke 2:29-32) to introduce the theme of the new inclusive Abrahamic community. If time permits, explore the Lucan stories about Jesus, Peter, and Paul that develop this theme.

Study Questions

1. "The *Baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch* is a study that [Rembrandt] executed before his oil painting of the same name," writes Heidi Hornik. "The print, being devoid of color, helps viewers transcend the ethnic boundaries that are etched so deeply into this pivotal event. Just as Philip could see past the stereotyping and prejudice of his own day to be a witness to this man, so the print medium allows us to bracket the boundaries of race and focus only on the faithfulness of this God-fearer..." The Ethiopian eunuch, who kneels in prayer beside the pool of water, wears a simple robe undergarment. A young attendant holds his royal attire. While the animals—a dog and the horses—look this way and that, the royal guards are absorbed by the unfolding event. Symbols of earthly power—spears, a sheaf of arrows, and the carriage parasol—become mere pointers to the kneeling figure in the foreground.
2. Assign small groups to explore the five Isaiah passages in context, looking for phrases that are echoed in Simeon's speech. Isaiah 40:5 foretells that when God ends the people's exile and restores Jerusalem, "all people shall see [the glory of the LORD] together." Isaiah 42:6 describes the Suffering Servant as "a covenant to the people, a light to the nations." In Isaiah 46:13, God says, "I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory." In Isaiah 49:6, God says to the Suffering Servant, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Isaiah 52:9-10 promises the exiles, "The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God."
3. Mikeal Parsons mentions these events: Jesus highlights in his inaugural sermon that God sent the great prophets Elijah and Elisha to bring healing and salvation to Gentiles (Luke 4:16-30); Jesus tells a parable about a good Samaritan who exhibits God's love more than a priest and a Levite (10:25-37); Jesus rebukes James and John when they want to punish an inhospitable Samaritan village with heavenly destruction (9:51-56); Jesus commends the faith of a Samaritan man whom he healed from leprosy (17:11-19); Jesus says that the poor, bent woman of Luke 13:10-17 is a "daughter of Abraham," and the rich Zacchaeus is a "son of Abraham" (19:9). Encourage members to mention other words and deeds of Jesus that show how God's mercy transcends barriers of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic standing.
4. Parsons notes that in Peter's sermons delivered during the Pentecost festival (Acts 2:39) and later at Solomon's Portico (3:25-26), Peter emphasizes God's concern for bringing salvation to the Gentiles. In support of Philip's preaching in Samaria, the church in Jerusalem dispatches Peter and John to share the Holy Spirit with the new Samaritan believers (8:14-25). After Peter's ministry is radically reoriented toward the Gentiles by a heavenly vision and the conversion of the Roman centurion Cornelius (Acts 10), he brings "the apostles and believers in Judea" to understand that "God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life" (11:18). Later at the Council of Jerusalem called to set the ground rules for the Gentile mission, Peter boldly tells his Jewish audience that "in cleansing [the Gentiles'] hearts by faith [God] has made no distinction between them and us" (15:9). This is the last appearance of Peter in the Acts of the Apostles.

The Lord appoints Paul to be the apostle to the Gentiles in Acts 9:15-16. The church at Antioch sends Paul and Barnabas preach in Cyprus and southern Asia Minor (Acts 13-14), and controversy regarding their ministry to Gentiles leads to the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15). Paul's further missionary work among Gentiles is chronicled in Acts 16-28.

Departing Hymn

"O God of Creation, We See All around Us" can be found on pp. 37-39 of *Racism*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Gregory of Nyssa and the Culture of Oppression

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand Gregory of Nyssa's pioneering argument against the institution of slavery and to use it to critique oppression more generally.
2. To discuss how racism is not only wrong, painful, and often evil, but is blasphemous.
3. To consider why God's people need a "spiritual detector" for racism.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Racism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and the suggested article before the group meeting. The departing hymn "O God of Creation, We See All around Us" is sung to the familiar melody ASH GROVE, which can be found in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

In "Smelling Fires of Racism," Joseph Parker uses the metaphor of smoke to describe the culture of racist oppression – its stench chokes people and blinds them to what they are doing. Parker was a young boy in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. "I was not yet eleven years old when the following scenes were indelibly burned into my memory," he writes. "I accompanied my father – a Baptist pastor and leader in the Alabama civil rights movement – to a bombing scene. The home of Reverend A. D. King, the younger brother of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been bombed. Smoke was still rising.... That day we also went to the A. G. Gaston Motel, where another bombing had taken place. Four people were injured. Three house trailers were damaged heavily. I smelled racism's smoke a second time.

"In September, I accompanied my father to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in downtown Birmingham, the scene of another bombing. Four girls near my age, attending Sunday School classes at the church, were killed. Twenty-three other people were hurt. I smelled smoke from a fire of racism the third time....

"Those fires of racism changed me. I can still smell racism's smoke. Though its smell is different and more subdued, my memory is triggered. The smell is emitted from racially dominated systems and individual actions – even inadvertent – that continue to legitimize bigotry and discrimination. This legitimization can be found in attitudes, behaviors, social structures, ideologies, and the power to impose these on a less dominant race..." (*Racism*, 70-71).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God for grace to see clearly with Gregory of Nyssa through the smoke of racialized oppression.

Scripture Reading

Ask a three group members to read Genesis 1:26-27 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

How can we learn to see beyond what Kimberly Flint-Hamilton calls “the veil of institutionalized oppression,” the pattern of racialized beliefs, practices, and institutional arrangements that unconsciously shape our perception and understanding? She finds an important model in Gregory of Nyssa’s interpretation of the image of God as the unfolding *pleroma* (PLAY-ro-mah), or fullness, of humankind. Gregory was (to borrow Joseph Parker’s term) a “spiritual detector” for oppression in late antiquity. Consider how God’s people continue to need spiritual detectors to identify the sources of oppression today.

Study Questions

1. Gregory of Nyssa uses *pleroma* (Greek for “fullness”) to refer to humankind as an unfolding community that expresses the beauty of God. While each individual is created in God’s image, the fullness of God’s beauty is revealed through humanity in every place and all eras. Gregory understands “Let us make humankind in our image” as referring to more than just the first humans, but to the community of human beings. This stands as a corrective to another interpretation – that the image of God was fully present only in Adam and Eve, but now is marred in fallen humanity – which permits one to accept the social institution of slavery as a fitting punishment that we must endure in our fallen state.
2. Assign two groups to review the use of *pleroma* (usually translated “fullness”) in Ephesians and Colossians. Ephesians 1:8b-10, 22-23 refers to the goal or end of God’s unfolding creation as the “fullness of time”; the Church is described as “[Christ’s] body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” In each case, the *pleroma* extends through time as God’s unfolding creative and redeeming activity. According to Colossians 2:9-10, disciples “have come to fullness in [Christ]” in whom “the whole fullness of deity dwells.” The emphasis is on completeness.
3. Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s judgments are not repetitive because they highlight different aspects of oppression in general, and racialized actions in particular. Assign groups to brainstorm each of these concepts. First, “wrongness” points to the injustice, unfairness, or (more generally) the immoral nature of every action that demeans a person as less than a child of God – even if that person is a guilty offender. Second, when Tutu says such actions are often (but not always) “evil,” perhaps he means that the person who does the racialized action is often malicious, or intends to cause unjustified pain and suffering. Third, Tutu says that such actions always cause pain and suffering for the victims, even if they do not see themselves as God’s children; perhaps he means that each one is diminished in this way, whether he or she realizes it or not. Finally, he suggests that God is blasphemed in that God’s image is abused.
4. In Nebuchadnezzar’s oppression of Jewish exiles in Babylon, Joseph Parker discovers what Flint-Hamilton calls “the veil of institutionalized oppression” at work. Neither the king nor those who helped him oppress the Jews would have seen themselves as racist. Parker writes, “He saw himself as a king protecting and expanding the legitimate interests of his people and himself. Nebuchadnezzar did not have a compassionate focus on the people he dominated; he focused on them only when they (and their things) advanced his interests. But he did not act alone. He put in place systems and representatives that perpetuated these interests. Those who benefitted from these systems took advantage of what was accessible to them, even if they did not recognize the negative impact on the dominated group.”

Parker believes that a “spiritual detector – someone who is wise in the ways of God” can help us notice how we benefit from oppression. Does the “detector” need to be a victim of oppression? Does this help? What sorts of Godly wisdom must the detector possess to notice oppression, call others’ attention to it, and guide them to escape it and correct it? Encourage members to identify “detectors” in their congregation or the wider Church who helped them to recognize and resist institutionalized oppression.

Departing Hymn

“O God of Creation, We See All around Us” can be found on pp. 37-39 of *Racism*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Christian Practices on the Journey toward Shalom

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 3	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review the difficulties that congregations face in fostering open conversations about race.
2. To consider how confession and forgiveness make honest communication about race possible in the Church.
3. To understand how the Christian practices of stability, hospitality, and foot washing facilitate racial reconciliation.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Racism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Let Us Break Bread Together” locate the tune LET US BREAK BREAD in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Comment

“Our immediate impulse when strife and contention arise is often to run, to avoid resolution for the sake of preserving pride and nursing resentment,” Jon Stock has written. “In a day when people flow in and out of churches, imagine the effect that stability could have on our ability to love one another, to bear one another’s burdens, to resolve conflicts, and to forgive each other” (Jon Stock, “Stability,” in *Inhabiting the Church: Biblical Wisdom for a New Monasticism*, [Wipf and Stock, 2006], 87-118, here citing 92).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to open your hearts to Christian practices that facilitate racial reconciliation.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Colossians 3:9-11 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

This study explores why it is difficult to talk about race in church. The problem, Victor Hinojosa says, is we uncritically import into the church certain racialized attitudes from the wider culture, and we yield to ecclesial sloth—the mistaken expectation that church should be a place of unalloyed peace and comfort. He commends practices that lead toward true peace, or Shalom. Though difficult and often painful, confession and forgiveness, stability, hospitality, and foot washing can help us to find unity in Christ without denying or destroying our diversity.

Study Questions

1. One cultural barrier, Victor Hinojosa notes, is that black and white Christians think about race very differently: "African Americans generally explain racial inequality in the United States as being caused by structural factors, such as racial discrimination and the lack of access to educational opportunities. In contrast, white Americans blame the divide on individual factors, or more precisely, the failings of individual African Americans."

Furthermore, "we carry our cultural and racial expectations with us into the life of the Church. And in the Church, where we deal with matters of transcendent significance, minor cultural conflicts often become major dividing lines." Often we do not question our own racial and cultural assumptions, so we respond with frustration and stubbornness when other people's racial and cultural habits and expectations grate against our own. He gives an example of how a minor issue of time can become "spiritualized" and elevated in importance. "In some congregations, Sunday morning worship begins at 11:00 a.m. and ends precisely at 12:00 p.m. This sort of orderly arrangement is said to model the order of God in creation, and to violate it not only inconveniences people, but goes against the very nature of God. In other congregations, worship begins when it begins, and ends when it ends. This model is said to be more faithful to God's creativity, and violating this norm is said to be a failure to listen to and to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit. A frustrated Sunday School teacher in a multiracial church told researchers, 'one culture thinks it offensive not to be on time, the other thinks it offensive to be on time. No easy solution there.'"

Encourage members to examine their assumed racial and cultural norms. How do they get in the way of unity and reconciliation with others?

2. Ecclesial sloth results from sadness that church-life is not as comfortable as we want it to be. This sadness may itself in laziness (e.g., not working at racial reconciliation), or distracting busyness (e.g., focusing on other good works to avoid the problem of race). Do members see signs of ecclesial sloth in their congregation?

Ecclesial sloth is spiritually deceptive because it turns the good byproducts of God's work—peace and comfort—into our primary goal. "Some of that is right and good," Hinojosa notes, "*But such peace and comfort cannot be our ultimate goal.*" These experiences find their proper place in a congregation with higher priorities. Only when we participate in God's work of reconciling us to God and one another—which can be difficult and "might be as terrifying as it is consoling"—do we find true refuge and renewal.

3. Begin by discussing how confession and forgiveness make honest communication possible in personal relationships. Members may share examples of this from their own experience. Because many of our hurtful racial attitudes are unexamined and unacknowledged to others, Hinojosa says confession and forgiveness are required to build relationships of trust that are necessary for racial reconciliation.

Ask three groups to review the Christian practices of stability, hospitality, and foot washing. How does each practice reshape our respect and love toward others? How does each one presuppose a foundation of trust established through confession and forgiveness? How does it cultivate discipline and humility? When confronted with the cultural habits, assumptions, and expectations of other racial groups, it takes discipline and humility not to give in to fear and ecclesial sloth.

4. "Let Us Break Bread Together" alludes to the practice of Communion in the first two verses, and the practice of worship in verse three. Like baptism, Communion unites disciples into the one body of Christ. There is no more beautiful expression of the unity of the Church than these two sacraments. The practice of prayer is exemplified in the closing line of each verse. The unity of believers formed through these Christian practices leads to humble confession and a request for forgiveness, "O Lord, have mercy on me."

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Let's Get It Together: Multiethnic Congregations

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Unison Response	Unison Response
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To review how evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Roman Catholics in America are creating healthy multiethnic congregations.
2. To consider the trade-off in moving away from ethnic congregations.
3. To discuss the social factors which characterize emerging multiethnic congregations.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 10-11 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Racism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn "The Spirit Binds Us to Our Lord" locate the familiar tunes ST. PETER (Reinagle) or DUNDEE in your church's hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with an Observation

"Human beings were made in the image of God—distinct from other earthly creatures—to be in a self-aware relationship of union and fellowship with God. As an expression of this divine intimacy, the human vocation was to fill the earth and subdue it and to be God's representative or 'image' in the world," Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson observe in *The Heart of Racial Justice*. "To fulfill God's command, human beings had to become creators of kinship networks, diverse cultures and ultimately many nations. As human beings spread and diversified, racial differences also emerged. These racial differences were a part of God's intention from the beginning. They were intended to be a part of the beauty and variety of the image of God on the earth" (Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change*, expanded edition [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009], 34-35).

Multiethnic congregations can be a wonderful witness to God's beauty—if they avoid the common pitfall of pressuring minority members to assimilate to the majority group's norms.

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by thanking and praising Jesus Christ for reconciling members to God and to one another.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Psalm 133 from a modern translation.

Meditation

Invite members to reflect on the meditation during a period of silence.

Reflection

The previous study in this series, "Christian Practices on the Journey toward Shalom," explores why it is difficult to talk about race in church, and point to resources in the Christian tradition and in worship that foster

racial reconciliation within congregations. In contrast to that theological approach, this study surveys how contemporary social factors – such as features of church polity and institutional history, congregational size and demographics, location and styles of worship – influence the formation of healthy multiethnic churches. For a Christian community that God is leading toward greater racial and ethnic diversity, the information in this study is a helpful preview of the road that lies ahead as the congregation moves toward that goal.

Study Questions

1. If your study group members have extensive personal experience or strongly identify with one of the three Christian families, emphasize that tradition's approach, but look for helpful resources in the other two. Otherwise you might sort members into three smaller groups (based on their interests or backgrounds in the three traditions) to report on and amplify Kathleen Garces-Foley's survey.

Some differences may be traced to distinctive church polities. Garces-Foley notes that efforts among evangelicals often depend on the individual congregation's leadership, physical location, and opportunities for outreach. Nevertheless, confessional statements issued by national denominations, influential books from evangelical publishers, and the programs of parachurch organizations may play important roles in training and motivating members. The actions of large and influential congregations have an impact as well.

In mainline Protestant churches, official statements and organizational restructuring may play a larger role. A denomination's ethnic background and regional location of its congregations are important. In her discussion of the Catholic tradition, Garces-Foley focuses on the official statements and policies of the American bishops, especially in response to changing patterns of immigration. She traces the changing ways that the local parish has been encouraged to deal with the ethnic diversity of Catholics living in the neighborhoods it serves.

Encourage members to discover the strengths of the three Christian families and what they can learn from one another.

2. Garces-Foley notes that ethnic congregations "provide physical and social spaces for mutual support in the face of racialization and pressures to assimilate to middle-class white American norms. Moreover, ethnic churches provide spaces for sharing cultural traditions with co-ethnics and American-reared children." Therefore, she warns that "the costs of leaving an ethnic church for a multiethnic one or transforming an ethnic church into a multiethnic one are much greater for people of color. As minorities in a white-majority multiethnic church, they will likely face pressure to assimilate to the norms of the majority group."

All of the white/black interracial churches that Korie Edwards studied in *The Elusive Dream: The Power of Race in Interracial Churches* "evidence white mainstream religious practices (e.g., 'praise' music) as opposed to black church mainstream traditions (e.g., 'call and response') and activist socio-political commitments (e.g., government-supported social programs)," Kersten Bayt Priest notes in her review. "The capitulation to 'white' norms was achieved with the support of a core group of black sympathizers while the rest grudgingly dampened emotion and ceded power. Edwards found that as long as white members were young, without teenagers, and willing to experiment with worship, there was flexibility on their part. However, this changed the older their children were. White families with teens were likely to leave." Priest challenges us to "intentionally educate ourselves on how to become good neighbors" to diverse ethnic and racial groups in church.

3. Relate these predictors to the point that Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson make in the meditation – that the younger generation of Christians (in their late 20s and 30s) hunger for spiritual community that transcends racial and ethnic divides. Use these "predictors" to suggest factors for your congregation to prayerfully evaluate. But do not let the proverbial tail wag the dog. Changing things just to make one's congregation more attractive to a particular "target group" reduces life-giving worship and community to marketing strategies.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.

Avoiding Racism in Starting New Congregations

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Responsive Prayer	Responsive Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 2, 3, and 4	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To consider how distorted missionary activities during the period of Western colonialism.
2. To review how racism, and ethnocentrism more generally, continue to distort church-planting strategies in the United States.
3. To discuss how Caravaggio depicts the personal sacrifice of the Apostle Paul in communicating the gospel across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 12-13 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Racism (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and the suggested article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn “Come, Let Us Join Our Cheerful Songs” locate one of the familiar tunes GRÄFENBERG or ST. ANNE in your church’s hymnal or on the Web in the Cyber Hymnal™ (www.hymntime.com/tch/).

Begin with a Story

Damian Emetuche recounts the story of a “full-time Hispanic pastor in a congregation in which the Hispanic membership was spiritually vibrant and growing as new converts were baptized. In the same congregation, a part-time Anglo pastor served the Anglo portion of the congregation which unfortunately was dwindling in numbers and experiencing no spiritual growth. Yet, the church placed the Anglo pastor on a salary of over \$4,000 a month, while the hard working, full-time Hispanic pastor received less than \$2,000 a month. The Hispanic pastor discovered what was happening only when the bookkeeper of the church made a mistake and sent the wrong payment voucher to him. When the Hispanic pastor tearfully confronted his colleague, the Anglo pastor pretended he was not aware of his financial difficulties. The Hispanic minister asked him, ‘Is it because I am not white?’” (*Racism*, 79).

This sort of racial insensitivity and lack of financial support for ethnic church planters is all too common, Emetuche warns. It is just one of the ways that ethnocentrism continues to distort our efforts to share the gospel with new immigrants in America.

Responsive Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by reading together the responsive prayer in the study guide. The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Revelation 7:9-12 from a modern translation.

Reflection

In this study Damian Emetuche explores how ethnocentrism can distort our sharing the gospel across racial, ethnic, and class boundaries. Focusing on his area of expertise, church planting in cosmopolitan areas of the United States, he describes three manifestations of ethnocentrism – using the homogeneous unit principle to guide church starts, unequal pay for nonwhite church planters, and inadequate representation of nonwhites

in denominational leadership positions. Your group might discuss how the three problems are manifest in other church contexts as well.

Gauge the group's interest in starting a multiethnic congregation. Several books reviewed by Kersten Bayt Priest in "Let's Get It Together: Multiracial and Interethnic Congregations" would be appropriate for follow-up studies.

Study Questions

1. Damian Emetuche notes that missionaries changed indigenous names to English, Greek, or Hebrew even when native names were more theologically sound, and used Western music and translations of Western hymns in worship. Members may mention other ethnocentric practices such as missionaries leading indigenous churches and seminaries, using Western garb, importing factional jealousies among denominations, etc. "While the missionaries may have been versed in the Scriptures, they did not understand the people they were called to served, and this led to their message not being understood by the people," he concludes.
2. The homogenous unit principle states that "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers." Some church-growth strategists and church planters have interpreted this to mean that building monoethnic congregations is the most efficient use of limited resources. "Yet this does not follow the guidance of the New Testament, in which there are no homogeneous new congregations. The Jerusalem church in Acts 2 consisted of Jews from more than fifteen nations, and Gentile proselytes. The Antioch church in Acts 13 was a multicultural congregation of Jews and Gentiles. All of the Pauline house churches were located in strategic cosmopolitan centers and their members were drawn from diverse ethnic backgrounds and social standings," Emetuche objects. "This principle does no harm, of course, when it is applied in the settings of homogenous tribes – because there are no competing cultures and no part of the population is left out or discriminated against. But to apply the homogeneous unit principle in modern cosmopolitan centers today to violate the New Testament model."
3. When people groups are encouraged to properly contextualize the gospel in their cultures, they might form monoethnic congregations. If so, this contextualization principle will stand in some tension with Emetuche's rejection of the homogenous unit principle. While he does not address this tension explicitly, Emetuche might respond by pointing out that he is talking about church planting and growth in "modern cosmopolitan centers" where people of various ethnic backgrounds already live, play, and work together. Thus, contextualizing the gospel in their multiethnic community would lead to a multiethnic church.
The practical problem in forming a healthy multiethnic congregation remains how members can respect various cultural styles in worship, leadership, and Christian practices. This is a heavy burden to place on new Christians. Is it another reason for mature Christian congregations to lead the way in producing working models of multiethnic churches?
4. Due to the dynamics of racial privilege, white leaders may fail to recognize the racialized nature of church policies and structures. The story of the underpaid ethnic church planter and Gary Irby's observations illustrate the problem. People of color who are formed in Godly wisdom may provide a corrective vision to the leadership of a church or denomination.
5. "Caravaggio painted *The Conversion of St. Paul* as a pair with *Crucifixion of St. Peter* to establish a theme of suffering," says Heidi Hornik. "The suffering of Peter, the apostle to the Jews, as he is crucified upside down on a cross is immediately apparent. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul endured suffering and ridicule as he took the gospel to those outside the Jewish faith." The artist foreshadows Paul's suffering by showing him knocked on his back and almost into our space, and his commission to the Gentiles by the Roman garb he wears.

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.