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Paul's Approach to Social Superiority in the Corinthian Church Applied to Racial Superiority in the 21st Century Church

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PAUL'S APPROACH TO SOCIAL SUPERIORITY IN THE CORINTHIAN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to create a model to guide multiracial churches through a process of engaging effectively in the type of equity imagined in Scripture. Paul's letter, 1 Corinthians, was examined to determine his response to the social systems, structures, and inequities created by status divisions in Roman first-century culture. A set of principles was distilled into a working model of how Paul addressed these situations, which created classes of social superiority and inferiority. This project traced the roots of status division in Corinth to the lie of superiority that first appears in Scripture with the serpent in Eden.

The modern culture was then examined to reveal a similar dynamic surrounding racial superiority complete with a set of social systems, structures, and inequities to protect and perpetuate it. Evidence was provided to demonstrate how those inequities and systems continue to negatively impact society today as well as the Christian church in the US.

A study was conducted to determine whether multiracial churches in the International Churches of Christ (ICOC) effectively followed the principles of Paul's Corinthian model. The research determined that these churches have a high level of belief in the importance of diversity as part of the implications of the gospel and a strong belief that churches should engage in racial education and dialogue and make structural changes to address historic societal inequities in the church. Yet, although, they do have corresponding actions in the areas of education and dialogue, they do not take consistent action in making structural changes in the church to combat inequities. This was significant because it is the centerpiece of Paul's Corinthian model. A simple model was

then provided for churches to utilize Paul's Corinthian model in the contemporary

church.

EPIGRAPH

"[Christians] don't speak great things, we live them."

Marcus Minucius Felix, third century CE

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

At the apex of the creation story, we are told that God declares that human beings

would be created in his image, both male and female. For an Ancient Near Eastern

reader, this would be both familiar and shocking at the same time. Familiar, in that the

concept of kings or important rulers declaring themselves to be sons of a divine being or

an image bearer of the gods was a well-known trope. Shocking, in the assertion that all

human beings were bearers of the divine image and could function as a representative and

reflection of the will and character of God. This is vital because if all humans were

designed as image bearers, then all are equal. Communities of image bearers would be

communities of equality and partnership where each part reflected God's character and

will to the other parts. Image bearing, then, is marked by equality.

Just two chapters later, we are told that a serpent appears, complete with

contextual clues that would likely have led ancient readers to conclude that this serpent

was a representative of the divine council.[1] The creature seems bent on sowing chaos and

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[1] Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 83–93.

deception.[2] The core lie is convincing these humans that they are superior to the role of an image bearer. They can be like the divine beings themselves rather than merely representing and reflecting their glory. They readily bite into this great lie which has at least two major negative effects central to the present topic. The first is that they no longer function correctly as images of God. The second flows from the first. The concept or category of superiority has been introduced into the human realm. Once that has been unleashed, it immediately opens the door for the concept and category of inferiority. No longer functioning as true image bearers, humans will spiral into the conflict surrounding the assertion of the superiority of some over those deemed as inferior. The equality created by the vocation of image-bearing has vanished.

Since this moment of the great lie of superiority, various versions have been spun and adopted by every human culture in every time and place. Each society has its unique spin and typically has multiple versions operating at the same time. But there is almost always one dominant version of this grand deception. In first-century Corinth, the dominant version of this lie was that of social status. Those of elite status were more deserving of privilege, advantage, and position than the non-elites. In a word, they were superior. What concerned Paul was not so much that these citizens of Rome had accepted this lie and built their culture around it, but that the citizens of heaven, the disciples in the church in Corinth had left this lie and its impact largely unexamined. This meant that it was being built into the life of the very church that was to be the embodiment of the new creation and restored image-bearing.

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[2] John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 128–136. Walton argues that the serpent would have been seen as a chaos creature sent by a member of the divine realm.

A new version of the lie of superiority developed slowly and in stages during the Middle Ages into what would eventually come to be known as race. Once constructed, this idea would lead to upheaval and change the likes of which the world had never seen. It would lead to colonialism, chattel slavery on a global scale, a massive redistribution of land, wealth, and natural resources, and a stunning concentration of power in the hands of those deemed the superior race. This version of the great lie continues to wreak havoc in the world today, both directly and through the ongoing ramifications and effects of previous centuries.

The problem of racial superiority is not confined to the past, nor is it quarantined in the secular world. It has affected the church deeply and continues to do so to this day. The church has failed in most attempts to counteract or conquer this problem of race. Could it be because we have not considered carefully and consistently the connection between different versions of the same lie of superiority? If we did that, would we find that Paul's instructions in letters like 1 Corinthians, as he guided the church through their battles with status superiority, hold the principles and keys for fully overcoming our dilemmas with racial superiority?

The Problem and Its Context

Statement of the Problem

This project addressed the inadequacy of multiethnic churches in the ICOC of the United States to provide a model to address and counteract historical racial inequities within the church's life.

In response to the problem, the research (a) primarily explored Paul's response in 1 Corinthians, with additional information from Ephesians, to social inequities in the

early church, (b) reviewed the current literature on the history of racial inequity in the United States from 1866 to the present and the challenges of racial inequity for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) congregants in multiethnic churches, (c) conducted mixed-methods research through a survey of representative churches from all US regions of the ICOC and follow-up interviews with a selection of participants and d) created a model for racial equity in multiethnic churches in the United States in the ICOC.

<p style="text-align:center">Subproblems</p>

The first subproblem was to identify the issues of superiority and inferiority as social systems manifested in the first-century world of the Apostle Paul and to examine how he identified different forms of those social inequities and divisions taking root in the congregations in Corinth, and Ephesus, as well as his gospel-based prescription for the church to respond to the resulting divisions and inequities. The survey of Paul's literature included the background of image-bearing and human abandonment of that role in Genesis 1-3, his view of the powers and authorities or elemental forces of the world as the root cause of cultures and societies rejecting image-bearing and embracing the model of superior and inferior statuses, causing division and inequity in the culture. The second subproblem was a review of current literature on the history of racial division and inequity in the United States, focusing on the post-slavery period of 1866 to the present day, as a current version of the rejection of image-bearing and evidence of the lie of superiority, identifying the ongoing inequities and divisions in the contemporary church based on systems and structures of racial superiority and division and examining the challenges of racial inequity for BIPOC congregants in multiethnic churches. The third subproblem was to conduct qualitative research to determine the current responses of

local multiethnic churches in the ICOC in the US to racial division and inequity and to analyze any models for addressing these issues that are presently employed by individual congregations within the ICOC. The researcher collected data through a survey of representative churches based on both congregation size and location in all ICOC regions within the United States and clarified some of the data through selective follow-up interviews. The fourth subproblem was to create a model for racial equity and reconciliation in multiethnic churches in the ICOC.

Definition of Terms

The powers and authorities, or just powers for short, is a term that Paul used to refer to fallen members of the divine council. Both the Old and New Testaments refer to the powers and authorities and use several other terms, including the elemental things of the world (Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20) and the dominion or authority of darkness (Col. 1:13). The powers and authorities were often so closely identified with earthly rulers and forces that it was difficult to distinguish them from each other. Scripture routinely describes the powers and authorities as personal beings but just as often the terminology refers to impersonal forces of systemic oppression and societal inequity. While it can be difficult to determine biblically what exactly the powers and authorities were thought to be, there is no mistaking that they were presented in the biblical witness as the cause of structural oppression and inequity as well as division among human groups that influence such cultural systems as social status inequities, nationalism, and racism.

The powers were presented in biblical terms as being the force behind the great lie of superiority. This paper uses the term "great lie" to refer specifically to the lie of superiority. This is not a term that appears directly in Scripture, but the concept first

appeared in the Bible in Genesis 3, where the serpent convinced the humans that they were superior to the calling of image bearer. Creating a category of superiority also opened the possibility that others are inferior. Different versions of this great lie have been subsequently present in every human society since that time, with various versions typically operating simultaneously at any one time and place. In the first century, one of the most prevalent versions of the great lie was that of social status. In the present day, the lie of racial superiority is the most influential and destructive version.

In a first-century context, status referred to the honor or social privilege and ranking that each person held. This status was not solely contingent upon economic standing, but typically elite status brought wealth and opportunity while low status kept most people on the lower economic rungs. Status in the ancient world is not synonymous with the more modern classification of class, though there is some overlap between the two ideas. This status superiority was a prominent version of the great lie in the first-century world. One of the more prevalent versions of that same lie in the 21st century is racial superiority. The concept of "racism" in this paper refers to systemic forces of inequity based on racial privilege and power, and will not be used to refer to individual feelings or actions. Individuals of any group can be guilty of bias, bigotry, and prejudice. Those concepts are related to but different from racism or racial superiority. Racial superiority will be treated as a group dynamic available to those with power of one sort or another within society.

Cultural structures and systems that were built on racial beliefs of superiority are identified in this paper as racial inequities and vestigial structures. The term "racial inequities" used in this paper refers to systems of culture and power established because

of the acceptance of the superiority of one group over others and the belief that they deserve societal advantages based on their superiority. Over time, societies view these inequities as normal, acceptable, and even good, and subsequently they become all but invisible to those from that culture. "Vestigial structures" refers to systems in a society that has professed to denounce personal attitudes of superiority, but which continue to operate within that society. These systems were originally put in place because of the belief in the superiority of one group over others. While societies may no longer consider that belief acceptable, the systems that protected that advantage remain long after the explicit belief has been jettisoned.

Social and racial inequities result from advantages given over a period to one group deemed superior and worthy of special protection or advantage. The reasons for that belief of superiority vary according to time and place, but the characteristics of advantage and systems created to further that advantage remain similar. The term "inequity," which refers to different circumstances and advantages given over a period that create differences in position and opportunity, was preferred over "inequality," which refers to the lack of everyone having the same resources regardless of circumstances.

The ICOC is self-identified as a non-denominational brotherhood of common fellowship. The ICOC churches find their roots in the Restoration movement of the 19th century, particularly the Stone-Campbell movement.[3] The Churches of Christ arose from that movement along with other groups that identify a common heritage, such as the

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[3] Foster C. Stanback, *Into All Nations: A History of the International Churches of Christ* (Spring, TX: Illumination Publishers International, 2005), 24–31.

Independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ. Throughout the 1980s, congregations in the churches of Christ devoted to individual discipling, intentional evangelism, church growth, and multiracialism, increasingly identified with one another and became progressively more alienated from the larger fellowship of the churches of Christ. By the 1990s, those churches had completely separated from the churches of Christ and identified themselves as the International Churches of Christ. As of 2021, the ICOC consisted of over seven hundred churches across the globe.[4]

Most ICOC churches in the United States are considered to be multiethnic both internally and by typical sociological standards. The accepted standard for a multiethnic church in the United States, popularized by Smith and Emerson, is one whose membership does not exceed 80% representation of any ethnic group.[5] ICOC churches maintain ethnic, social, racial, tribal, and economic diversity as a core value and quality of all its churches globally. The general standard for multiethnicity in US churches is that the demographics of a church reflect the demographics of the city. In smaller communities with lower percentages of ethnic and racial diversity, ICOC churches are intentionally striving to be ethnically and racially diverse even when the surrounding community is not. Yet a church that met the mark of being statistically multiethnic did not imply that the church was culturally integrated or had reached a state of equal representation in leadership or influence.

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[4] "ICOC Churches," accessed June 7, 2022, https://icocco-op.org/church-list/.

[5] Michael O. Emerson, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 85.

The acronym BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) was used in this project to refer to persons who are not white while avoiding the term "non-white," which infers that the standard strand of humanity is those considered to be white.

Delimitations of the Problem

The first delimitation was that the analysis of contemporary churches was limited to ICOC churches in the United States. The ICOC was historically spawned from within the churches of Christ. The churches of Christ came from the 19th-century Restoration movement which developed out of the Protestant movement in the United States.

The second delimitation was a focus on multiethnic churches which excludes any churches that have more than an 80% membership population of any one ethnic group. Multiethnic churches may share many elements in common with non-multiethnic congregations with similar traditions and beliefs, but they have their unique characteristics, challenges, and needs.

The third delimitation was in the scriptural study which is limited to Paul's responses to social inequities and divisions in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. Although Paul's treatment of social status superiority and similar versions of the great lie, as well as his handling of the topic of the powers and authorities, was not limited to these two books, they fairly represent his theology on those topics. Those two books were selected as fair representations of Paul's larger body of work.

The fourth delimitation was that the research will include a minimum of one church under 500 and one church over 500 for each of the eleven regions or families of churches in the US ICOC. Each church represented congregations of similar size and experiences in their region of the country.

Assumptions

The first assumption was that the cultural and historical background and context of Paul's letters can be understood to a degree that is dependable and helpful in determining how to best understand the situations he addresses in his correspondences, as well as how to apply his prescriptions to similar contemporary situations. A danger is always present in presuming to be able to recreate the historical and cultural context of any biblical letter. Yet, with care given to what has been established by experts in the field, certain conclusions can be reached with a fair degree of certainty.

The second assumption was that churches will respond accurately and truthfully to surveys regarding actions and attitudes toward racial equity. Challenges are always present in surveys, such as a clear understanding of the question on the part of the responder and the temptation to represent the exception within a congregation as the rule. Yet the researcher approached the surveys conducted as fair and accurate representations of the mindsets and practices of each congregation at the time they were administered.

The third assumption was that multiethnic churches are the natural result of adherence to the gospel witness of a New Testament church. While it is not claimed that churches that are not multiethnic are in a state of heresy or rebellion, it was assumed that the biblical call for churches was to be a gathering of all nations and that the normative practice of the apostolic church was to represent that call to diversity. It was presumed that there was no direction given or practice recorded in the early church of dividing and creating separate churches formed around ethnic, national, or social divisions.

The fourth assumption was that the ICOC churches in the US are multiethnic and desire to be unified around issues of race and culture. This was confirmed by both the overt statements in ICOC literature and their historical practices.

The fifth assumption was that the same historical racial tensions and inequities in the allocation of resources that affect the United States will affect US ICOC multiethnic churches. While there were certainly differences between ICOC multiethnic congregations and those of other traditions and fellowships, the common experiences of multiethnic protestant congregations regardless of specific unique practices and doctrinal beliefs far outweigh the differences. This meant that historical inequities in the United States have had similar impacts on the cultural experiences of all multiethnic protestant churches.

The Setting of the Project

The setting for the project was among the ICOC in the United States. As of 2022, the ICOC churches in the US were divided into eleven regions known as families of churches. For this project, the researcher selected at least one church with under 500 members and at least one church with over 500 members from each family of churches. One of the hallmarks of ICOC churches was that each congregation in the United States was diverse racially and ethnically. There were no definitive studies to document that ICOC congregations meet the criterion of being multiethnic churches as of 2022, but as it was a core value and expectation in the ICOC, the general internal belief was that all churches in the US were multiethnic, with a few exceptions possible for newer congregations in smaller towns.

The ICOC churches have been intentionally diverse since they began as a separate movement within the churches of Christ in the 1980s. Yet it became the cultural ethos of the movement from at least the early 1990s to not talk publicly about racial issues directly beyond valuing diversity within the church. The standard belief and teaching since the 1990s were that when one became a disciple, racism, viewed as an individual action only, was no longer an issue because it was a sin that was repented of. The assumption was that if all individuals are free of racism, then the church would automatically be free of it as well. While most ICOC churches were multiethnic and diverse, this led to an ethos of not talking about racial issues or tensions. The accepted practice was that focusing on issues of race, racial division, or racial tension in the culture or the church would be divisive and thus sinful. This overlooked the fact that many BIPOC leaders and members tried to express that the churches of the ICOC were not dealing with problems of cultural dominance, racial tension, and racial inequities and that the needs of BIPOC members were overlooked.

The ICOC made moderate efforts beginning in 2012 to move issues of cultural dominance and racial inequity to the forefront, but many leaders in the United States responded with seeming indifference or actions that did not extend much beyond words. Those efforts were aided in 2017 with the release of a book, *Crossing the Line: Culture, Race, and Kingdom*[6] through Illumination Publishers International, the unofficial publishing arm of the ICOC. Upon the release of that book, many congregations began to have discussions that were previously taboo, but many held onto the old ethos of

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[6] Michael Burns, *Crossing the Line: Culture, Race, and Kingdom* (Spring, TX: Illumination Publishers International, 2017).

believing that dialogue and action beyond the presence of diversity were unnecessary.

Following the George Floyd murder of May 2020, the outcry to deal with issues long

ignored and the conversation over cultural dominance and racial inequity in both society

and the ICOC churches reached new heights. An unprecedented number of congregations

held workshops and had discussions revolving around these issues.

In 2017, the Elders Service Team of the ICOC formally commissioned a group

that had been operating informally since 2012. That group would eventually take on the

moniker The SCUAD (Social, Cultural, Unity. and Diversity) and would seek to

champion racial conversation, education, and action among ICOC churches. The group

was not widely known in US churches until 2020. In July 2020, The SCUAD called for

every local congregation to have its own local SCUAD group.

By 2021, The SCUAD estimated that over 70% of ICOC churches in the US had

developed a local SCUAD, though no empirical data yet existed. During the latter half of

2021, however, a backlash of undetermined size developed against SCUAD groups with

claims that critical race theory (CRT) was motivating and informing their general

initiative. While this was not the case, according to SCUAD members, this became the

standard argument for those championing the old ethos of not talking about racial issues,

viewing the conversation of those issues as divisive and anti-gospel. This was

accompanied by charges from many local SCUADs that they were being pacified in their

congregations, that they were patronized, or marginalized by giving lip service to

discussions with no concrete or meaningful actions taking place.

By 2022, most ICOC congregations had engaged in the issues of racial inclusion,

diversity, and justice in the forms of encouraging communication and discussion or in the

arena of education. It seemed, however, that very few had undertaken to carefully examine their history, beliefs, practices, and systems and subsequently engaged in significant structural change.

The Importance of the Project

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher

The researcher has been a member of the ICOC since his conversion to Christianity in 1999. He has been a full-time minister in the fellowship since 2004. In 2017 he authored the book, *Crossing the Line: Culture, Race, and Kingdom*, which was, in many respects, the inauguration of the discussion and examination of multiethnicity and race in the ICOC. He has been a member of The SCUAD since 2017 and has been a well-known speaker and author on issues of race and culture throughout the global ICOC movement.

Issues of race and multiethnicity were not just the passion and ministry focus of the researcher but are also personal, given his 1997 marriage to an African American woman and his two sons who identify as black Americans. The researcher believed that a central aspect of the gospel is gathering all nations and ethnic groups into a single family centered on Christ. This counteracts the dividing work of the powers and authorities and is the manifold wisdom of God on display to the world, especially to the powers (Eph. 3:10).

The Importance of the Project to the Immediate Ministry Context

The ICOC churches were racially diverse in most congregations in the United States. This meant that issues of race and culture were ever-present, particularly in a fellowship of churches that did not address such issues for decades. The need for deep

conversations, change, and meaningful action increased critically since the racial awakening of 2020 in the United States and around the world.

As a fellowship that was completely integrated and had been since its inception, the ICOC was uniquely positioned to be a leader in racial discussions and implementation of the new creation ethos of racial unity, but it lagged due to the refusal to acknowledge and deal with tensions and problems. Although the ICOC had allowed for the formation of The SCUAD internationally and locally with local groups developed both in the United States and in churches outside the US, there was no comprehensive model for churches to address the structural divisions and issues inherent in multiethnic churches. The lack of a model combined with a history of not addressing racial and cultural issues in society and the church resulted in either disparate responses and actions across local congregations or complete inactivity. The lack of a healthy model that can be applied in all congregations left ICOC churches vulnerable to the types of racial division seen in the secular world and ultimately, to potential schism.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

The American church's record on racial inequity has been the country's original sin since before the US achieved its independence as a country. As of 2022, the United States was one of the most diverse nations on the planet yet continued to struggle with racial division and inequity. Although this should be different in Christ, the sad reality, as Martin Luther King Jr. famously asserted during his lifetime, was that Sunday at 11 a.m. was one of, if not the most, segregated hours of the week.[7] What was true during his life

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[7] Ned Brooks, "Meet the Press with Dr. Martin Luther King, April 17, 1960," *Meet the Press*, NBC, April 17, 1960.

continued to be true in 2022. The church was not always the manifold wisdom of God on display to the powers and the world in this area. Rather, the church reflected the same dysfunctions of the country. A meaningful model of multiethnic churches that display the new creation of the gospel, serve as a light to the world, and remove the dividing wall of hostility has been elusive but is desperately needed in the world today.

CHAPTER TWO

Introduction

As Paul opened his letter to the church in Corinth, which is now known as 1

Corinthians, he declared that there should be no divisions among them. The word

"divisions" is perhaps misleading for a modern audience. These were not simply

doctrinal divisions, power struggles, or personal arguments.[8] Rather, Paul used a term

(*schismata*) that, despite similarities to the English term "schism," does not refer to

formal parties or factions. Rather, it meant to tear or divide.[9] Thus, Paul was referring to

divided opinions that were starting to tear them apart. His concern was that the

Corinthians were not living as the unique people of God with no status levels or hierarchy

of worth and value. Instead, there was an underlying confusion about their identity, which

led them to mimic the social-status divisions of the world.[10]

This was a much bigger issue for the apostle than simply preferring one teacher of

God's word over another. The very heart of the gospel was at stake. This was so vital that

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[8] Anthony Thiselton, *1 Corinthians: A Shorter Exegetical & Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2006), 39.

[9] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, Revised Edition*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2014), 54.

[10] C.K. Robertson, *Conflict in Corinth: Redefining the System*, vol. 42, Studies in Biblical Literature, ed. Hemchand Gossai (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing), 2.

Paul painstakingly pointed out incident after incident in which the church had accepted, allowed, or even encouraged status divisions in the life of the body. This was a systemic issue in the Roman world and was quickly becoming a structural concern in the construction of the church ethos, so, Paul wasted no time as he addressed the danger and showed the church how to overcome it.

In this section, first will be demonstrated the importance of image bearing to Paul's theology and vision for social status in the body of Christ. Paul's dissection of the divisions that were taking root in the church will then be discussed before examining his profound but simple solutions for the church. Embedded throughout his dialogue with Corinth is the underlying assumption that the problems they experienced were the work of the powers and authorities. With that in mind, Paul's letter to the Ephesians will be examined to more thoroughly mine his understanding of these powers and authorities as well as the response that God's people should have to them.

Image-Bearing and the Lie of Superiority

Deeply entrenched in Paul's theology and ecclesiology is his belief that humans were created to be image bearers of God and participate in image-bearing communities (Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 11:7; 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10). God created humanity as image bearers (Gen. 1:26-27) to serve as his agent in the world, a calling that human will and rebellion corrupted (Gen. 3). Despite that, God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a family of nations and that all humanity would be blessed through him and his descendants (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:4–5). The Old Testament Scriptures continually bore witness to this promise of including all peoples into the family of God's people but is

nowhere seen more clearly than in Isaiah 66:18, where God promises that he will "gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory."[11]

<div align="center">Image Bearers</div>

From the opening chapter of Genesis, an explosive truth of equality and inclusion is declared. At the climax of God's ordering of creation, he determines to create human beings in his image. In *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, John Walton recounts the practice in the Ancient Near East of building temples that would represent the dominion of a god and having a seven-day inauguration ceremony, which was often highlighted by the statue or image of the god being placed in the temple on the sixth day.[12] Likewise, according to the standard thinking in the Ancient Near Eastern context, bearing the image of the divine was a role of authority typically reserved for kings and rulers.[13] It was no small claim for the Genesis author to assert that all human beings were equal as image bearers. All humans were equal, both male and female, elite and non-elite.

The picture that emerges from the opening chapters of Genesis is that God designed his creation to be cared for and tended by image bearers. The image bearers would spread out across the creation, living with the common purpose of spreading the order of God's garden temple to the corners of the world. These image-bearing communities would live in harmony and unity with one another. And because there are no levels of image bearers, there would be no hierarchies, no categories of higher and

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[11] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from The Holy Bible, New International Version (Nashville, TN: Biblica, 2011).

[12] John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis 1* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 71–91.

[13] Peter Enns, "What Does the 'Image of God' Mean?," BioLogos, July 27, 2010, accessed September 30, 2021, www.biologos.org/articles/what-does-image-of-god-mean.

lower status, and no injustices of a select few acting for their advantage at the expense of all others. This is how humanity was designed to function and how the world was crafted to operate.

It would stand to reason that if the role of image bearer was designed to be universally characteristic of all humans and if the final status of God's people reflects that universality in its makeup and substance (Rev. 5–9; 7:9), then any divides that we find in humanity that are rooted in mere differences would be contrary to God's design and perfect will for his creation.

A survey of human history demonstrates anything but a glorious tale of all humans being treated or even thought of as equal. Sadder still is the fact that the church, the very people that should have been trumpeting the truth of image-bearing and the role of God's people in gathering the nations and breaking down the walls of division, has instead often been implicit and at times even at the forefront, of harboring mindsets and engaging in behavior that is quite opposed to biblical truth.

The seeds of this division lay in Genesis 3. As the chapter opens, the human beings that were to benevolently rule over the created order are suddenly confronted by a serpent that can speak. John Walton asserts that the serpent would have been recognized by ancient audiences as a familiar trope. This was a chaos creature, sent from the divine realm to disrupt the created order.[14] Taking a slightly different perspective, Michael Heiser argues that the serpent would have been understood by Ancient Near Eastern audiences to be a rebellious member of the divine council.[15] While there is a mild

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[14] John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*: *Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 128–139.

[15] Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 73–74.

disagreement here, the primary point remains: Rogue members of the divine realm are actively working to undo the order and harmony of God's creation.

The serpent convinces the humans that they were created for more than mere image bearing—they were superior to that. They could attain an existence of being gods themselves. They were more than just in the image of something or someone else. This is a lie of identity. Humans were the apex of creation, not made to just look out for their interests in a state of self-preservation or be led around by instinct as are beasts. Humans were created to reflect God's will and identity. This is indeed a high calling. But the serpent holds out the lie of them being even greater than that. He calls them to indulge in doing their own will. And that is an immediate problem because only God's will calls humans to live for the complete and perfect good of others. For any created being, following their own will devolves quickly into self-interest.

Thus, in Genesis 3, the serpent unleashes the lies of identity and superiority. It is the idea that humans can attain something greater that will bring them more benefit than being an image bearer. This great lie of superiority has the immediate impact of separating humans from God's will. That leads to a loss of our created function and into chaos, as is demonstrated by the fact that the very next account, in Genesis 4, depicts one brother killing another.

There are two highly destructive aspects of humanity woven into the web of this great lie. The first is that the primary function of human beings is not that of image-bearing. This separates humans from their created role, which was to preserve order in God's creation as well as harmony and equality between communities of image bearers.

The second is inherent to opening the category of "superior." Once that category is created there is a second category that materializes by default. That is the category of "inferior." If humans can attain a level of divine status above image-bearing, or in other words, if they are superior, then others will be inferior. Once human beings chose this path, the unity and equality of an image-bearing world were utterly destroyed.

The violence and division of chapter 4 demonstrate the second disastrous impact of the loss of image bearing. Believing the lie that they are superior to image-bearing, immediately creates division.

Once the lie that some can become like God and are superior to that is embraced, separation from other groups or individuals occurs and attempts are made to put them in lower categories of "the other". They are classified as something different, something less. Martin Buber describes this as moving from the God-created categories of "I and thou" to the categories of "I and it."[16] The lie of superiority promises humans that they can be something more than they were created to be while also convincing them that others are something less than they are.

This great lie has been spun in countless different versions by the serpent at every time and place in human history since the Garden, and humans fall for it again and again. It does not matter whether the divider is nationality, status, race, or anything else. These are all different versions of the same lie: We are like God in being above image-bearing, so my group is superior to your group. It is this lie that is at the heart of nearly all human division and chaos.

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[16] Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1970), 53–85.

That means that this great lie is arguably one of the most influential and destructive aspects of sin and the fallen world. It creates societies and cultures that no longer embrace the vision of image-bearing, opting instead for the categories of strength, privilege, status, and superiority. But this is just for a select few. Once any version of the great lie of superiority is accepted into a society, it creates hordes of inferior individuals or groups and subjects them to the inequities and injustices that appear where there is no image bearing.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul recognizes that the Corinthians have fallen prey to one of the versions of this great lie from the culture that surrounds them. They accepted the system of social superiority and status from the Roman culture and allowed it to operate indiscriminately in the life of the church.

The Roman Version of the Great Lie

The whole of Roman society was built on the idea of attaining or maintaining the highest status possible. Roman culture was constructed around the fact that about 3% of the population was considered to comprise the elite class. The elite class was split into Senators, Equestrians, and Decurions, while the non-elite classes were broken into freeborn, freedmen, and slaves, in order from the highest to the lowest position in society.[17] The lower the class, the more they had to obey those above them and the less freedom they had. The higher they were, the less they needed to bother with obedience, and the more easily they could move toward more freedom. So, obedience was not considered a virtue, and neither was humility. Social climbing and earning a place of

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[17] Joseph Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2013), 27.

honor in the eyes of others were not just valued, they were expected. Romans would do everything in their power to amass impressive titles and societal positions, to accomplish things that gained attention, to show others how great they were, and to take advantage of every opportunity to get ahead. This was normal, and to do almost anything to gain esteem from others and move up the social scale was considered human nature and even virtuous. The Roman satirist Lucian noted the chasm in wealth, privileges, and resources between elites and non-elites:

> We should be less distressed about it [economic justice], you may be sure, if we did not see the rich living in such bliss, who, though they have such gold, such silver in their safes, though they have all that clothing and own slaves and carriage-horses and tenements and farms, each and all in large numbers, not only have never shared them with us but never deign even to notice ordinary people.[18]

This competition for status level and prestige was not strictly limited to the elite maintaining their privileges and advantages over the non-elites. Even in the ranks of the non-elites, people strove to find a status advantage over lower categories within the non-elites.[19] It is fair to say that everyone in the Roman Empire played the game of status, establishing their particular claim to honor and status through boasting.

Paul ministered to cultures ensnared with this version of the great lie. The equality of image-bearing had completely broken down and had been long abandoned. Instead of unity, equity, justice, and cooperation, the Roman culture embraced hierarchy, division, levels of human worth, and competition. And they were enthusiastic about spreading their culture throughout the world. The Empire had become an anti-Eden where the vision of

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[18] Hellerman, *Embracing*, 28.

[19] Hellerman, *Embracing*, 32–33.

human existence was nearly the exact opposite of the beauty of image-bearing communities.

In Paul's mind, this is the work of what he refers to as the powers and authorities, although he has several different monikers to describe this aspect of the spiritual realm. Throughout his first surviving letter to the Corinthian believers, Paul challenges them to see how they have allowed the mindsets, beliefs, and systems of this social superiority into the life of the church. In doing so, he presumes but only briefly references the work of these powers and authorities as the agents who have sown the world's wisdom that has been accepted and has caused division in the body (1 Cor. 2:6, 8). It is helpful, then, to examine Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he expounds in clearer detail on the cosmic battle that he envisions between image bearers and the powers and authorities. Paul's direction and guidance in these matters will be analyzed through a study of 1 Corinthians and Ephesians to discover insights applicable to the contemporary church as it faces its inequities, division, and challenges to unity.

Paul's Letter to the Corinthians

The Corinthian Setting

Corinth was originally an important Greek city but was razed to the ground in 146 BC by the powerful Roman Army. It lay nearly desolate for a century until Rome reconstructed the entire city as a Roman outpost, eventually making it the provincial capital of Greece, which was by then under Roman influence. Corinth was a bustling and diverse metropolis full of Romans, Greeks, Jews, and others from around the known

world, and included all socio-economic levels as well.[20] During the first century, Corinth

was home to the famous Isthmian games, a spectacle of competition from all stretches of

the Roman Empire second only to the Olympic Games themselves.[21]

Corinth quickly became a center for trade and commerce and to the highest

degree embraced Roman appreciation of competition, self-sufficiency, consumerism, and

a culture of success. It was the place to be for those that wanted to make their fortune and

maximize the potential of their status. Anthony Thiselton remarks that:

> Every condition was right: a cosmopolitan international center under secure Roman government order, with shipping routes to Rome and Ephesus and the east; a plentiful supply of natural resources for manufacturing; and a vibrant business culture where quick success (or sometimes failure) was part of the cultural ethos. Competition, patronage, consumerism, and multiform layers and levels of success were part of the air breathed by the citizens of Corinth.[22]

Status was king in Corinth, and it created a culture where self-promotion and

doing whatever it took to get ahead were enmeshed in every part of life. The wealthy and

high-status citizens believed that they had superior knowledge, superior rights, and

superior worth compared to the weak around them.

These levels of status or class had many terms that described one aspect or

another of one's standing. These include rich and poor; wise and foolish; nobly born and

ignobly born; free and slave; honorable and dishonored; strong and weak.

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[20] S.J. Hafemann, "Corinthians, Letters to the," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 172–173.

[21] Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2001), 10.

[22] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 6.

The distinctions of having high status or low status went way beyond just terminology or living in a better neighborhood. It did often determine where someone could live, but it also dictated social circles. For example, it would simply not be socially acceptable to associate or even share table fellowship with someone of a lower status.

Social status was indicative of how valued you were by others with those at the higher levels presumed to be of greater importance and worth and thus deserving of everything that freedom and society had to offer. The non-elites were there, in part, to provide for the elites. But it wasn't a strictly one-way flow. There was a symbiotic relationship of reliance that made the strong and the weak dependent on one another. The weak needed the protection, power, and economic provision of the strong. But the strong needed the weak to play the game. They were to praise the elites, show honor and deference to them, and supply them with the manual labor that provided the wealth of those who owned the businesses but did not work themselves. The lower classes worked for a subsistence-level living, while one of the benefits of being rich and having higher status was a life of freedom and leisure, which did not include physical labor.

Virtually everything was tilted in favor of the nobles, who saw themselves as wise. Those viewed as foolish nonelites were not allowed, for example, to sue or take a higher-status person to court. The civil courts were designed to keep social inequities in place. They were places where the rich could drag those lower than them to emphasize their advantage and power.

Paul certainly did not arrive in Corinth making any attempt to appeal to them at a culturally satisfying level. Instead, he came not with "eloquence or human wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1), but "resolved to know nothing… except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1

Cor. 2:2). Paul continues in this passage and says that he came in weakness and with fear. He was trembling as he spurned the cultural expectations of an impressive and powerful speaker taking the town by storm and made no attempt to impress them with words that would be considered wise and persuasive on the scale of their cultural standards. He came solely with the power of the Spirit and with the gospel, a message that was perceived as weak and foolish nonsense by those in Corinth.

Paul established the church in Corinth and spent about a year and a half with them, carefully teaching, explaining, and modeling the gospel. But after he left, it quickly became apparent to him that they still had much to learn. So, communication between Paul and Corinth continued long after his departure, both through oral reports from those who visited Paul while he was off planting and visiting other churches and through letters.

Paul and Social Division in Corinth – 1 Corinthians 1–4

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a master class on recognizing, analyzing, and addressing the manifestations of division in both societies and the church that result from rejecting the godly vocation of image-bearing and accepting the worldly wisdom of the superiority of some humans over others.

Early in his correspondence to the Corinthian congregation, Paul urges that there must be no divisions among them (1 Cor. 1:10). The context of the remainder of the letter will demonstrate that it is largely the category of social divisions to which he refers. They were mimicking the world's ways of thinking and acting and had allowed the social status games of the surrounding society to infiltrate their community ethos and actions.

Most of the Corinthian congregation belonged to the middle and lower classes, although there were some from the upper classes (1 Cor. 1:26).[23] It is this disconnect between the upper- and lower-class or status-group Christians that is at the root of most of their divisions. Paul uses several first-century idioms related to social status such as wise, foolish, weak, and strong, that bore reference to honor and social status for the original readers.[24] Based on either an earlier letter or reports from Chloe's household (1 Cor. 1:11), factions based on each group's preferred teacher-client relationship had developed over baptisms (1 Cor. 1:12–13). This was caused by mirroring the cultural practice of advancing socially by entering friendships or patron-client relationships with people of increased status. This was vital because there were two primary ways that honor and esteem could be advanced: either by entering a patron-client relationship with someone of higher status or by entering friendships with equal-status persons and increasing one's connections.[25] It is this division that Paul redirects and reframes in the first four chapters, acknowledging that this wisdom of the cross is perceived as foolish to the Gentile way of thinking (1 Cor. 1:23).

Throughout the first four chapters, Paul charges the Corinthian congregation with mimicking the social status games of the Roman culture regarding teachers. Just as the Roman culture created factions and drew social-status lines based on which teacher one was associated with, so the Corinthians were creating status divisions by aligning with

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[23] Corin Mihaila, "The Social Background of 1 Corinthians 1–4," *Perichoresis* 17 (2019): 27–40.

[24] Sunk Uk Lim, "The Political Economy of Eating Idol Meat: Practice, Structure, and Subversion in 1 Corinthians 8 through the Sociological Lens of Pierre Bourdieu," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 34, no. 2 (2012): 163.

[25] David DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 96–99.

particular teachers or schools of teaching (1 Cor. 1:12). Paul labels this with various characterizations including emptying the cross of its power (1 Cor. 1:17), living by the wisdom of the world rather than the wisdom of the gospel (1 Cor. 2), living as worldly infants that are not ready for solid food (1 Cor. 3:1–4), destroying God's temple (1 Cor. 3:17), being wise by the standards of the present age (1 Cor. 3:18), acting as though they did not receive the gospel at all (1 Cor. 4:7), thinking they were of higher status than the apostles (1 Cor. 4:10), and being arrogant (1 Cor. 4:18).

Paul's concern was the danger this aspect of worldly culture posed to the church. The cultural practice was to enter a patron-client relationship with a teacher or philosopher, a practice that would presumably raise one's status by being associated with a well-known and important teacher. This created factions and competitiveness among the supporters of these teachers.[26] But even more foundationally, the Corinthian Christians' participation in status games and factions legitimized the lie of superiority in the community. Paul understood that to allow it to stand in even one circumstance would be to leave the door propped open for the entire system to be reproduced in the life of the church.

The apostle opposes these status games by demonstrating consistently that this is worldly wisdom and unfit for a mature Christian community. But he also subverts it by depicting himself and Apollos as low-status servants rather than men who would increase the status of their loyal followers. When the Corinthians' instinct was to puff themselves up (1 Cor. 4:6) by identifying with the tradition of Paul or Apollos (1 Cor. 3:4), Paul responded by pointing out that the teachers are merely human beings (1 Cor. 3:4). What

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[26] Winter, *After Paul*, 36–38.

is Apollos? What is Paul? He asked. Rather than playing along by boasting about their status, Paul refuses, claiming that they are simple servants (1 Cor. 3:5; 4:1) who have been assigned a task. They are laborers (1 Cor. 3:5–9), something that would have identified them with the lower social classes.

Special Treatment of the Elite: 1 Corinthians 5:1–8

In 1 Corinthians 5, the apostle challenges the congregation for allowing a young man's disturbing sexual sin with his stepmother. Incest of this nature was so serious in Roman that did not fall under the normal statute of limitations for similar crimes of adultery and could result in banishment from the city.[27] Roman criminal law disallowed such acts, but they would have been overlooked if the transgressor belonged to the social elite.[28]

The mindset of the great lie is that some people are superior because they have a higher status. Those people, it was believed, deserved greater freedoms and latitude due to their power, prestige, responsibility, and worth. Thus, their aberrant behavior would be overlooked and excused as acceptable solely because of their level of status.

The Corinthian congregation was not proud of and boasting about the deeds of this man. They were proud of his status based on the cultural practice of advancing socially by entering friendships or patron-client relationships with people of increased status. One of their own was an elite in the world. That was what they were focused on. And, of course, it was the normal cultural practice to have a different standard of behavior and punishment for those of the higher classes. Even though they were in Christ,

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[27] Winter, *After Paul*, 46.

[28] Winter, *After Paul*, 44–57.

they had become blind to this as an injustice. They were exalting his worldly status as the marker for his identity rather than his identity in Christ. Boasting about his status, says Paul, is not good. "Don't you know," he rebukes them, "that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough?" (1 Cor. 5:6). Allowing this aspect of the great lie into the mindset and structure of the community would eventually bring the entirety of the lie into the church. None of the Christians would likely have thought of themselves as bigoted toward anyone or showing favoritism of any kind. Boasting about someone's status and not holding them accountable for certain practices because of their wealth, position, or power was so normal that no one thought it evil, out of place, or at odds with the Christian life.

Paul takes the position that what they should be focusing on is the sin of this man before God, not giving him a pass because of his status. If he is unrepentant, he should not be part of the community, even if he is elite. Paul makes clear, however, that this is not trying to fix the world (1 Cor. 5:9–10), an impossible task anyway. This is about them opening their eyes and handling this according to God's wisdom rather than that of the world.

The believers were trying to increase the social standing of the community by boasting about the impressive status of this young man and then conforming to the social convention by overlooking his behavior.[29] This was unacceptable to Paul for a community following the wisdom of God and was another dangerous example of allowing the effect of the great lie of superiority and status into their ranks.

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[29] Winter, *After Paul*, 53.

Taking Advantage of the Non-Elite: 1 Corinthians 6:1–11

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul turns his attention to a situation where Christians of higher status were taking lower-status believers to court, thus taking advantage of them.[30] This would have been common in the Roman world where civil courts were designed to preserve the privilege of social status rather than strictly seek equity and justice. Thiselton characterizes it as an "attempt on the part of a Christian to use superior economic or social power to manipulate a more vulnerable fellow believer into losing the dispute."[31] Paul's solution is that they embrace the cultural expectation of keeping family matters internal and not going to court. In other words, they should behave like a kin group rather than separate groups of competing social statuses. If the sole source of Christian status is being in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), then any instance of manipulating or taking advantage of status at the expense of another is an affront to the gospel.

This is another instance where the wisdom of the surrounding culture was left as the default ethos rather than embracing that of the new creation. If verses 1–11 are read devoid of context, it appears that Paul simply took issue with any believer taking another to court, which would be a misleading conclusion in the modern context.

Paul's reference here is to Roman civil courts.[32] On one level, he was against believers taking other believers to court, but this should not be read as a comprehensive ban on ever doing so. Roman culture dictated that it was deeply frowned upon for family members to take other family members to court. If Christians were doing that, they were

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[30] Alan C. Mitchell, SJ, "Rich and Poor in the Courts of Corinth: Litigiousness and Status in 1 Corinthians 6:1–11," *New Testament Studies* 39, no. 4 (1993): 562–586.

[31] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 89.

[32] Winter, *After Paul*, 58–59.

sending a signal to the society around them that the teachings of Jesus that they were family (Mark 3:31–35), and their insistence that because of this they were brothers and sisters in Christ would be made to seem a sham.

But there is yet another important cultural layer. Roman civil courts were not designed to procure justice for all. Their primary purpose was to preserve the social order, and that included the advantages due to the elites.[33] Courts were a place where the high-status members of society could assert their privilege and take advantage of the weak. Lower-status people were generally not allowed or functionally unable to bring suit against those of a higher status. The system was unjust and built upon the tenets of the great lie. If the status superiority of the great was accepted as a true, just, and right institution, then the inequity of the courts seemed like nothing more than giving respect and honor where it was due. Through the eyes of the wisdom of the world, the Roman courts appeared to make sense.

The higher-status believers that were involved in these situations would likely have claimed that they had no personal prejudice toward those of lower classes. After all, were they not members of the same church body? Were they not the same in Christ? This didn't have anything to do with treating anyone in an ungodly manner. It was a simple legal dispute that would be handled in court. Surely, they believed this to be separate from their life of faith and certainly not something that compromised it in any way. They were, says Winter, "simply acting as the elite had always done in Corinth when a conflicting situation arose."[34] They were taking the shape of their culture.

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[33] Winter, *After Paul*, 62–64.

[34] Winter, *After Paul*, 74.

Paul saw it differently. They were people of the new creation called to live the way the world was supposed to be without sin, and one day will be. They were to be people who operated, as much as possible, free of the effects of the great lie. They would one day be part of the resurrected and remade world. Judges should be arbiters of justice, and that would be their role in the age to come. Rather than being image bearers, they were subjecting their more vulnerable brothers and sisters to the inequities of the great lie. They had ushered its systems and structures right into the accepted life of the church. And rather than being a light to the world and showing how true justice was done, they were partaking in an unjust system themselves and subjecting the vulnerable to its inequities. They had failed already.

It would be far better, argued Paul, for the honored and privileged among them to give up their rights and even be wronged than to subject brothers and sisters to the same inequities that they faced every day in the world. The elites, of course, would not have interpreted things in that way initially. They were all playing by the same rules of the court, were they not? And that is precisely what the apostle wants them to see. They have been blinded to the systems and beliefs of the great lie. This was serious, for when they did this "to [their] brothers and sisters" (1 Cor. 6:8), they put themselves into the category of "wrongdoers" who "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9).

Not All Rights Are Beneficial: 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

On the heels of his discussion regarding Christians abusing their rights through the unjust legal system of Rome, Paul begins a longer section in which he addresses several specific issues as well as the role of rights in the Christian community that

stretches to the end of chapter 10. Paul cites a Roman slogan of the social elite, "I have the right to do anything" (1 Cor. 6:12),[35] before launching into a refutation of such thinking as out of place for the people of the new creation. Rather than asserting their rights, which emphasized and increased social divisions, Paul called for a love motive that was willing to give up rights, comfort, and status. The apostle cleverly utilizes lax attitudes toward sexuality and the use of the body to demonstrate that what one does in action or with their body cannot be separated from what one believes.

No Favored Identities: 1 Corinthians 7:1-40

While he addresses several issues surrounding marriage, singlehood, celibacy, and divorce, Paul continues to stress identity and status. There were some in Corinth that argued that singlehood and celibacy were superior identities to being married, while others may have argued just the opposite. Paul utilizes these topics to address many issues revolving around marriage and singlehood but does so through the framework of helping the Corinthians to comprehend that there are no superior statuses in the body of Christ. Each direction was a valid choice depending on one's gifts and context.

There simply was no position of superior identity that Paul could allow to go unexamined in the Corinthian church. To do so would have kept the church vulnerable to the systems and mindsets of the great lie. To illustrate this truth, Paul brings out two very relevant examples of other areas where there were temptations to exalt superiority of position or status. Paul rejected ethnic superiority between the circumcised Jews and the uncircumcised Gentiles as well as the status of slave or free. This was not a case of Paul calling them to be blind to their differences and pretend they did not exist, effectively

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[35] Winter, *After Paul*, 89–90.

locking the disadvantaged into their position. His point is that they were creating an alternate community and reality where there were no advantages to these identities. They need not be obsessed with social climbing or gaining a higher status like the people around them. If they were of a lower status like slaves, that need not trouble them in the body of Christ if it were operating as it should, which it had not been. This is why Paul is so direct and confrontational in this letter. Yet he does not slip into a naivete either. They still experienced the realities of being in lower-status groups in the world, so he does qualify his comments. No, they didn't need to status climb in the body of Christ, but if they could become free, then they should.

Paul struck a tension when it came to identities and statuses that required a great deal of discernment. There should be no hierarchies, special privileges, or status levels. None of those identity markers was superior to the other. If they were operating correctly, they need not worry about their status in the body of Christ. Yet the reality is that they will still face injustice and negative treatment based on those identities in the present age and should not simply resign themselves to lower status as though God wanted them in that position.

Taking Advantage of Status at the Expense of Others: 1 Corinthians 8:1–13

In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul addresses the controversy within the church over whether it was acceptable to eat meat sacrificed at pagan temples. While a numerical minority, the high-status Christians were a dominant group in terms of power as well as having more significant opportunities for education and knowledge.[36] This had carried over into the attitudes of socially strong Christians, who seemed to think that their knowledge had

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[36] Lim, "Political Economy," 164.

allowed them the insight that idolatry and eating meat at the elite meals that they would have access to were not connected at all. The weak didn't have this "special" basic knowledge. Eating meat was incredibly expensive, and these types of meals were not something they had to navigate or think about often, if at all. The strong felt that their social capital and knowledge gave them religious authority, and this gave them the right to do whatever was not overtly sinful. This turned this economic divide into a religious divide as well because the weak were scandalized by the idea of their Christian siblings partaking in idolatrous activities. Eating meat in the high-brow temple dining rooms was a normal and proper meal for the strong. It was pure idolatry to the weak, who had no social framework to assume otherwise.

Given their greater access to knowledge and the normalcy of eating meat in such situations, it would have seemed normal to those of high status, while eating this type of meal would have been a rare occasion for those of lower status, so they were unfamiliar with reasons to engage in such meals and much more sensitive to the potentially idolatrous connotations. Paul avoids inherently condemning the eating of meat but instead calls for a status reversal rooted in love for one another. If eating meat damages their lower-status siblings in the faith, then they should consider them in love, something unheard of in Greco-Roman culture, and refuse to eat meat. They should give up their privileges, refuse the dominant socioeconomic structure related to the habit of meat-eating, and support the weak.[37]

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[37] Lim, "Political Economy," 171.

Giving Up Rights: 1 Corinthians 9:1–27

Paul continues his larger section on the role of rights in the Christian community especially as it related to divides between status and class. Paul took a risky move by refusing patronage from the Corinthians as he was worried that they were too immature for such a relationship and would view it through the lens of the Roman culture. That meant for Paul to take support from them would come with significant strings of the social status game attached, and he wanted no part of that for him or them. He boldly uses that as an example of giving up rights. As an apostle and minister of the gospel, he had every right to the financial support of his ministry. He offers several examples to make the point that he had the right to share directly in the fruit of his ministry.[38] Yet he freely sacrificed that right for their benefit.

Paul highlights that though he was free, he willingly took on a lower status, that of a slave, for the sake of the gospel and the promotion of others. He was willing to share in the identity and circumstances of groups that were considered socially inferior by other groups.[39] He made himself a slave, a group that was anathema to the free. To the Gentiles, the Jews were socially inferior. To those who were faithful observers of the law, people who did not live under the law were inferior. And to the strong, the weak were, well…weak.[40] Paul was willing to be flexible and adaptable. He refused to see categories of worth and advantage. To preserve societal privilege or status would be an affront to the

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[38] Harry P. Nasuti, "The Woes of the Prophets and the Rights of the Apostle: The Internal Dynamics of 1 Corinthians 9," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (Jan. 1, 1988): 259–262.

[39] Daniel P. Leyrer, "All Things to All People: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 with Application to North American Outreach," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 102, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 98–99.

[40] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 144.

gospel. He was "willing to associate with people of low position" (Rom. 12:16). That meant more than just being in their presence or attending the same church. Paul was willing to take on their lifestyle, see the world from their perspective, understand their culture, and live as equals with them. Yet he knows that it will not be easy for them to make this way of life a reality in their community life, and appeals to the type of training that an athlete would undertake.

A Warning About Rights: 1 Corinthians 10:1–34

Paul finishes off his excursion into the role of rights for image bearers by offering a warning from Israel's history. Just because they went through a baptism of sorts and ate a community meal not unlike the Lord's Supper together did not mean that they were not prone to fall to temptation. They could fall, and so could the Corinthians if they were not careful. Mimicking the surrounding culture by accepting the lie of superiority and refusing to give up their rights for the sake of others could be extremely hazardous to their community health.

Paul returns to the claim of the social elite, that they had the right to do anything but refutes that in light of what was beneficial and constructive to the body (1 Cor. 10:23), what was good for others (1 Cor. 10:24), and what glorified the Lord (1 Cor. 10:31). Paul says that his goal is to "please everyone in every way" (1 Cor. 10:33) by not causing others to stumble (1 Cor. 10:32) because he is busy exercising his freedoms. He is not, he concludes in this passage, seeking his good, "but the good of many, so that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33).

Status in Worship Settings: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16

Conflicts arising out of the milieu of social class and status continue to take center stage in chapter 11. Attire in the first century was the clearest and most visible indicator of social rank, and that is at the heart of Paul's direction on wearing head coverings.[41] It was normal for high-status men to wear a head covering during religious ceremonies to emphasize their status and piety.[42] Paul established a new norm by eliminating the coverings and the indicators of status that were mimicking the behavior of the world around them. Women's head coverings were not indicative of social status, rather, wearing no head covering would have potentially brought shame to the community, so they were to be worn to maintain certain boundary markers.[43] Paul's goal here and elsewhere is not to simply discard social structure for its own sake, but to eliminate markers that cause division and segregation. At the same time, he does not appeal to the status hierarchy in gender by referring to man as the head of the woman as is sometimes claimed. Rather, he uses the term head to denote the public face or the one who bore the primary identity in the relationship.[44]

The Meal of No Status: 1 Corinthians 11:17–34

As Paul arrives at the topic of their common meetings, he takes the harshest tone of the letter, asserting that they are doing more harm than good (1 Cor. 11:17). The concept of honor was seen as such a part of human nature, per Cicero, that "even slaves

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[41] Mark Finney, "Honour, Head-coverings and Headship: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 in its Social Context," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 1 (2010): 35.

[42] Winter, *After Paul*, 122.

[43] Finney, "Honour," 53.

[44] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 171.

jockeyed with one another over 'glory and Pre-eminence."[45] Following the social customs of the day, the privileged were eating their meals before the hard-working lower-class and enslaved people could arrive, and when they did arrive, they were served less food and drink and of a much lower quality, while likely being segregated in a portion of the house away from those with social prestige who were seated at the triclinium. These privileged had the freedom to enjoy leisure time and did not do physical labor, so they were available to meet and begin eating whenever they desired. But slaves and non-elites had no such luxury. They had to labor and toil until their work was done. None of this was questioned or seemed anything other than the rightful fruit of one's social status and class.

It quickly became a huge problem when applied to Christian gatherings. They were running the Lord's Supper according to the unwritten social rules of the day, perpetuating social division. This was nothing less than "humiliating those who have nothing" (1 Cor. 11:22). They likely would have claimed no ill will toward their weaker brothers and sisters, but Paul disagrees vehemently.

Part of this common meal was the taking of the bread, the body of Christ, and the cup, the new covenant of the Lord's blood. This meal was defining. It proclaimed the Lord's death until he returned. This meant that the cross had ushered in the new reality of the new creation. Victory and change didn't come through power and status divisions but through the way of self-sacrifice and a community that had erased the divisions of the great lie. If that was not on display, then neither was the Lord's death. This was

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[45] Mark Finney, "Social Identity and Conflict in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 in Context," in *T & T Clark Handbook for Social Identity and the New Testament*, eds. Coleman A. Baker and Brian Tucker (United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 273.

problematic on many levels. Eating in a socially divided fashion demonstrated that at fundamental levels they still accepted the mindsets and beliefs of the great lie. They failed to examine these mindsets and smuggled them into the church rather than taking them captive (see 2 Cor. 10:2–5). There's more though. They were also mimicking the systems and structures of the great lie from the culture around them and baking them into the recipe of the church. It is important to be reminded here that it is likely that none of the disciples were doing this intentionally. None of the nobly born Christians were purposely embracing attitudes of superiority or actively hating or looking down upon their less fortunate brothers and sisters. They were simply numb and blind to the whole reality. These types of systemic behaviors tend to become normalized and virtually invisible within a society. If the church did not overturn these systems of superiority, then what hope was left?

What they were doing was unworthy of the Lord, according to Paul. They were sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. The communion meal was intended to be the ultimate conspiracy. It was an act of rebellion as the people of God by embracing and declaring the Lord's death. If part of the force of the breaking in of the kingdom of God was that it created a new economic and social reality in the world, the communion meal must embody that.

Thus, Paul called the believers to examine themselves. Were they living out this new reality or were they claiming to be God's people but living by the rules of the old order and its prevarications? In verse 27, Paul uses the imagery of the body and blood to refer to the communion meal itself. He plays on that imagery in verse 29, asserting that "those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on

themselves." Here, though, the body of Christ is now the church that has failed to examine its mindsets and systems. If they had taken more concern and intentionality toward these matters, as they deserve, this spiritual judgment would not be happening to their community. They were struggling, in part, because they failed to be the people of hospitality, loving and welcoming the marginalized and dishonored. Yet Paul, with a hint of resignation in his words, proclaims that this type of present judgment is far better than being condemned along with the world (v. 32). That presumes that they will heed his words and make the necessary changes, starting with eating together. And if anyone is that hungry, they should, at the very least, eat at home and not humiliate their brothers and sisters with a meal of inequity.

This was the humiliation of their weaker brethren[46] to the point that Paul says it is no longer the Lord's Supper. It was simply a reflection of the honor-based meals of the surrounding culture. His prescription is that they take actions that are a reversal of normal status expectations, namely, the strong should adjust their behavior to accommodate the needs of the weak, thus discerning the body of Christ.[47]

Status Games, Spiritual Gifts, and the Body: 1 Corinthians 12:1–21

In chapter 12, Paul finds similarly disturbing parroting of the Roman pursuit of prestige and honor in their approach to spiritual gifts. There are different kinds of gifts, but this should not lead to status levels among them. This appears to be precisely what

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[46] Joanna Harader, "Tension at the Table: 1 Corinthians 11:23–32," *Review and Expositor* 116 (2019): 361.

[47] Finney, "Honour," 283.

happened, however. These gifts were not intended to build up the status of individuals but to be utilized for the good of the whole body.

It was common to compare the body to the Roman state to emphasize hierarchy.[48] Paul utilizes the metaphor but flips it on its head to show the Corinthians what the egalitarian body of Christ should look like. Lower parts should not feel that they are not part of the body. And higher parts of the body such as the head and eye should not declare that lower parts of the body such as the hand or the foot are unnecessary (1 Cor. 12:21).

A Community with No Status: 1 Corinthians 12:22–27

Having established that one Spirit is forming one body, Paul lays out the solution to all the potential division and disunity created by status. Even the most highly honored and socially strong parts of the body should not think that they do not need the less honorable parts. The apostle clarifies that despite societal norms, the weaker are indispensable; they will not find their true worth in their status; they should be treated with special honor, while the honorable need no special treatment.

Paul began this letter with concern that there can be no divisions in the body. He now returns to that thought in chapter 12. God put the body together with various and diverse parts and there can be no divisions between those parts. Versions of the great lie that could divide the body of Christ should be done away with.

It is here that Paul begins to offer his solution. The body of Christ must be an alternate society, living by different means and creating a truly distinct reality. He infers

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[48] Matthew R. Malcolm, *The World of 1 Corinthians: An Exegetical Source Book of Literary and Visual Backgrounds* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 118–119.

three specific steps. First, they must examine and identify the practices and beliefs in society that have created inequities. Failure to be acutely aware of them will doom them to replicate them. Second, they must scrutinize the body to find evidence of mirroring those inequities. Failure to consider how they are recreating these inequities in community life or simply allowing them to exist in the life of the church is a betrayal of the new creation that should be the reality in the body of Christ. Third, they must take intentional and counter-cultural measures to eradicate those inequities within the boundaries of kingdom life. This will involve treating groups differently. This is not favoritism but is the gospel in action.

The solution that Paul offers will sound unfair, unjust, and even dangerous to the ears of modern cultures rooted in individualism. In verses 22–23, Paul, through metaphor, describes the parts of the body that were thought to be of inferior status, less honorable, unpresentable, and the parts that lacked honor. These parts of the body are needed by those that would be considered superior by society. And they should be treated with "special honor." Conversely, the honorable "need no special treatment." For Paul, this was not favoritism. It was an action initiated by God to ensure that the divisions and effects of the existing great lie did not remain divisive within the body of Christ.

They needed to look at the deep effects of the great lie and work to erase them from the life of the church. Even if it were stated unequivocally that there would be no status lines drawn in the church and that was carried out perfectly, that would not by itself create a balance because each person or family would still bring with them into the body of Christ the inequities created by the sin of superiority.

If there were inequities of importance, influence, power, and status, those must be eliminated. Here there was no slave or free or any other social distinction of advantage and division (Gal. 3:28). If there were economic inequities caused by sin, for example, those must be addressed (see 2 Cor. 8–9 for an example of that). The marginalized must not be subjected to the same inequities that they face in the world. Only the body acting in justice and righteousness could change its reality. The church that refused was no longer acting as an agent of the new creation.

Paul urges them to become a community where if one part suffered, every part suffered (1 Cor. 12:26). His point here is that they would identify with the indignities and inequities of being a lower-status person. They would be willing to associate with people of lower positions (Rom. 12:16). They would not just be in proximity to those people but would intertwine their lives with them and take on the challenges of their status in the world as their own. And when these non-elites were lifted in the body of Christ and rejoiced, they would rejoice with them (1 Cor. 12:26) rather than giving way to envy or claims that they were treated with favoritism.

Solutions Rooted in Love, Selfless Order, and Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 13–15

Having laid out solutions that went beyond mere communication, education, or mutual understanding and ventured into a full restructuring of the structures and systems of how their community functioned, Paul showed the Corinthians that these remedies to their situations must be rooted in love, which he refers to as "the most excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31).

1 Corinthians 13 initially appears so different in character and tone from its surrounding context that there has been a temptation to view it as a later insertion or

possibly an earlier work. Thiselton, quoting C.T. Craig, notes, "On closer examination, it is seen that almost every word in the chapter has been chosen with this particular situation in mind."[49] Paul begins by noting that even if the most impressive spiritual gifts were possessed by a brother or sister in the church, if they were not administered with love, they would be detrimental to the body (1 Cor. 13:1–3). Without love, such gifts would be misused, misapplied, or misappropriated.

In verses 4–7, Paul turns to a description of love that utilizes several concepts connected with both general Christian virtue and that also had special relevance for the context of status divisions, improper use of rights, and manipulation of others. In general, love begins with patience and kindness, but it also intentionally does not boast (of one's status). It does not become proud or puffed up (1 Cor. 8:1). It does not dishonor others (by subjecting them to status superiority games). It is not self-seeking (of one's rights). It is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrong nor wishes negative things to befall another. It does not delight in evil (revel in the advantages of evil systems) but rejoices with the truth (of the gospel way of life). What love does instead is to protect one another, believe in one another, rest in hope, and never give up. They would not perfectly reach the life of the new creation and throw away all inequity and division in the present age but must never stop striving for it. The gifts that they so eagerly desired to bring them status and prestige were temporary. They will not remain in the age to come. But love will. It is the most important virtue of the Christian community.

Paul then proceeds to demonstrate that this sacrificial love would manifest itself through a selfless approach to the spiritual gifts and ordering of the life of the body (1

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[49] Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 217.

Cor. 14) as it reflected and anticipated the great hope of physical resurrection (1 Cor. 15),

knowing that it would be challenging (1 Cor. 9:24–27), but was a labor that was not in

vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

Submit to Such People: 1 Corinthians 16:15–16

Paul has one more point to make about laying down one's life and giving up

social and economic advantages for the sake of the gospel. Winter makes a convincing

case that Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15) was a Christian of some means and higher status.[50]

The cultural expectations for him would have been clear. Those of lower status should

serve him, give honor to him, and act in deference in all appropriate situations. Yet, this

was not the way of Stephanas' household. They counterculturally "devoted themselves to

the service of the Lord's people" (1 Cor. 16:15). They turned normal expectations and

conventions upside down. They served rather than being served. "I urge you" Paul

pleaded with the Corinthians, "to submit" (1 Cor. 16:16) to these kinds of people. These

were the kind of leaders that they should follow and emulate. They modeled the self-

sacrificial life of having no divisions among them.

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians

As Paul addresses the issues surrounding social inequity that had been accepted

into church life, he references the "wisdom of this age" and the "rulers of this age" (1

Cor. 2:6) in contrast to God's wisdom that should be taking hold in the community. This

reveals an important aspect of Paul's worldview: The powers and authorities are

responsible for cultural and systemic divisions and inequities.[51] This becomes a vital

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[50] Winter, *After Paul*, 184–205.

[51] Timothy Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 49–50.

aspect to understand in a contemporary environment that increasingly rejects systemic and structural sin. To fully reveal Paul's worldview of a cosmic battle involving the powers and authorities, it is clarifying to consider his treatment of that theme in Ephesians.

Paul and the Dividing Activity of the Powers and Authorities in Ephesians

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is more general in nature than the letter directed to the specific problems covered in his missive to the Corinthian congregation. In Ephesians, he addressed division threatening the community, focusing on the root cause of Christian divides as a cosmic battle with the powers and authorities, as well as the importance of remaining united as the embodiment and evidence of Christ's victory over the powers. It is vital to understand Paul's framework in Ephesians because he saw the primary threat to their unity not as the work of individual sin or prejudice but as the much larger menace of the very cultural systems and structures of the society around them. These cultures and systems, argued Paul, were the work of the powers, and the church will not maintain unity without recognizing the enemy they face. Recognizing the disruptive work of the powers is vital, as they work to divide humanity through the systems and structures of nations, ethnicities, social systems, and a host of other societal organizations. The work of the powers and authorities begins to feel normal and often becomes invisible to people within a culture that is impacted by their chaos, so Paul was careful to point out their work in both his letter to the Corinthians and to the Ephesians where unity was a central concern.

The Danger of the Powers and Authorities: Ephesians 6:12

When analyzing Ephesians, it helps to start near the end of the letter where Paul reminds his readers that the real battle they face is not against flesh and blood but against the powers and authorities (Eph. 6:12). This would likely have been familiar ground for a first-century audience but is rather novel for most contemporary readers.

Paul's worldview was rooted in the Old Testament, where the powers were depicted as members of the divine council or holy assembly (Ps. 89:5–8) who were given the ruling authority of some nature over the nations to help them maintain justice and order, but they rebelled against and abandoned this vocation (Ps. 82:1–5). These divine powers, wrote Paul, were part of creation (Col. 1:16) but were now working to create division rather than justice. They were so intertwined with the work and identity of worldly rulers, systems, and structures that God says he will judge them together and will one day "punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon" (Isa. 24:21–22). There was a great deal of speculation during the intertestamental period about who the powers and authorities were, where they came from, and exactly how they operated, but Paul avoided those temptations, describing their influence but being content with leaving the details in the shadows in which the Old Testament paints them.[52] This allowed Paul to focus on the church remaining an alternative society that maintained purity and freedom and did not foster the parasitic growth of the powers.[53]

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[52] Gombis, *Drama*, 142–145.

[53] Marva Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 30.

Christ's Defeat of the Powers: Ephesians 1

Paul had all this in mind when proclaiming that the powers and authorities were the true enemies of the unity of the church. Thus, he begins his letter with a majestic prayer about all that they share in Christ (Eph. 1:1–14). They are in Christ who has defeated the powers and authorities, not only in the present age but also in the age to come (Eph. 1:20–23). To claim the defeat of these powers was a bold move by Paul. The world around them was still characterized by division, injustice, inequity, and war. These were the calling cards of the powers and authorities. So, by what evidence did Paul claim that Christ had defeated them?

The Evidence of Christ's Victory: Ephesians 2

Before he reveals his evidence, Paul continues by demonstrating that all the people groups in the church were once enslaved by the powers. He addresses the specific issue more thoroughly in 1 Corinthians 2, but he assumes that they influence cultural patterns of thinking and wisdom so that even when societies and individuals try to exercise wisdom to escape the negative effects of the powers, they use earthly wisdom to do so—the very wisdom influenced and corrupted by the powers. It was a hopeless loop (Eph. 2:1–3). Yet, the good news is that Christ has freed us from the corrupting influence and disastrous effects of the powers, seating us with him in the heavenly realms (Eph. 2:4–7). No group is wise enough or industrious enough to escape the powers by themselves; it is the grace found in Christ that unites all people (Eph. 2:8–10).

So, what is the evidence that Christ had defeated the powers when the world was still full of division and inequity? Paul's answer is clear. It is the diverse church of all nations that have been brought together into justice and equality through Christ's tearing

down of the wall of hostility (Eph 2:11–22). The church, unified and diverse, living

together as one family, was Paul's evidence that the powers are under the feet of Christ.

The Wisdom of Christ on Display in the Church: Ephesians 3

As groups that were once enemies united (in Paul's example here, the Jews and

Gentiles), the mystery of Christ was now revealed to the world. The powers wished to

divide humanity, but in Christ, that work had been undone (Eph. 3:1–6). Paul declared

that God, by bringing together different tribes, languages, people groups, and nations (see

Rev. 5:9), had revealed his wisdom to the powers and authorities through the church

(Eph. 3:10).

The Necessity of Unity: Ephesians 4:1–6:9

It is because of all this that Paul calls for them to strive for unity in the body (Eph.

4:1–32) and walk in the self-giving way of love, which acts for the benefit of one another

(Eph. 5:1–6:9). This culminates in the principles of behavior in the households of the

Christian community. Paul diverts from the custom of only addressing the socially

superior and gives agency to the social inferiors, namely women, slaves, and children,

and assign obligations to the head of the household. This all was counter-cultural and

depicted the principles of an image-bearing community rather than one built on the

human wisdom of the age.

Fighting the Effects of the Powers: Ephesians 6:10–17

As he brings his letter to a close, Paul reminds them that it is not the actions of

individuals that are the true threat to their unity. It is indeed the struggle against the work

of the powers. It is the systems of injustice and inequity, the cultures and mindsets of

division, and the wisdom of the world that will work its way into the church and forfeit

the very victory that Christ has won on their behalf (Eph. 6:10–12). On the heels of

calling them to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1), Paul appeals to the divine warrior image

of Isaiah 59, where YHWH can find no one among his people that is living justly, so, he

is depicted as the one who dons armor to fight against injustice. Paul is thus urging them

to stand up against the effects of injustice and inequity among them, although he omits

the reference to vengeance from Isaiah 59, an action that belonged exclusively to the

Lord (Rom. 12:19). In other words, they were not to attempt to fight the powers

themselves but to be on guard against the effects that the powers have on society and

their church community.

Summary

For Paul, it was the powers and authorities that propagated the various versions of

the lie of superiority which were then built into the constructs of cultures and societies.

Where there were systemic inequity and hierarchical divisions, the powers had been at

work. As has been demonstrated, one of the most prevalent versions of the lie in Roman

culture was that of social status. In exposing the work of the powers and authorities in

Corinth, Paul wished for the believers to comprehend that they had fallen prey to those

same powers by remaining blind to the cultural forces of status inequity and failing to

address the effects of that lie in the life of their spiritual community. This was an absolute

failure to become the embodiment of the gospel and to be the image-bearing agents of

God.

In the 21st century, humanity continues to be plagued by various versions of the

lie of superiority, some old and some new. Since the 15th century, the world has been

uniquely impacted by the idea of race and racial superiority. It is arguably the version

with the biggest footprint in the modern world. It is different from anything Paul dealt

with in the first century in specifics, but it is, in its core substance, the same lie that the

apostle addressed with the Corinthian church. Thus, Paul's handling of the issue in

Corinth is profoundly relevant to the contemporary context.

CHAPTER THREE

The book of Genesis opens with a description of God transforming the wild and waste of his creation and ordering the land to make it a fit environment for image-bearing. In just the third chapter, however, those image-bearers were shown abandoning their vocation to subdue and order the creation. Instead, they interacted with and were bested by a creature of some sort that would have been understood as being from the divine realm.[54] [55] Human beings had abandoned their role as image-bearers, striving for a position reserved for God. One of the fallouts of that was that it ushered the categories of superiority and inferiority into the world. Since then, every human society and culture has vacated the vocation of the image bearer and fallen victim to various versions of the lie of superiority. In the first century, social and ethnic divisions were the most prevalent versions operating within the Roman world.

In the 15th century, a new version ripped through the world. It was the novel idea that humans were biologically different based on the phenotype of skin color, eventually coalescing into the pseudo-scientific concept of race. The atrocities and chaos of racial theories as manifested in the realities of human slavery and colonialism have been well

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[54] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 128–139.

[55] Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 73–74.

documented. What is often overlooked is the ongoing inequities and oppression created by the systems and beliefs of the acceptance of racial superiority from the end of the American Civil War to the present day. This literature review examines two areas that will serve as the foundation and impetus for a model for racial reconciliation and equity in ICOC multiethnic US churches. These two areas are (1) ongoing inequity in American society after the Civil War as a direct result of racial theories and (2) the presence and effects of those same inequities in the American church.

Racial Inequity

Beliefs About Racial Superiority

The color of a person's skin was a reality observed and noted in ancient times. For example, Jeremiah 13:23, asks "Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots?" Yet, it was viewed simply as one of the many differences among human beings with no special significance consistently assigned to it. The word "race" itself with the modern meaning of fixed biological differences between human groups came into general use in Northern Europe around the middle of the sixteenth century.[56] Human beings first emphasized the primary differences between groups through membership in families, tribes, clans, and castes before they slipped into civic and political categories to mark their separation.[57] In a short time, however, humankind shifted and began to see the primary differences between humans in a very different light.

The ancient Greeks categorized and noted physical differences among human groups into what they called "ethnos," but that was transcended by their commitment to

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[56] Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), 5.

[57] Hannaford, *Race*, 6.

the political ideal.[58] They believed that the right culture and civic orientation outweighed any physical characteristics, national origin, or ethnos. Some Greek thinkers put forth the idea that some humans were superior to others based on the climates they inhabited. But again, that could be overcome by cultural education and values. They believed differences in skin color came from the environment and had no developed sense of biological race. This theory of differences in climate explaining the gaps in human intelligence and capability continued in various forms including justifying the Islamic enslavement of sub-Saharan Africans and Eastern European Slavs.[59] Climate theory was largely accepted until it began to fall apart for good in the 16th century when travelers like George Best encountered the Inuit people on a trip to the Arctic.[60] For Aristotle, "the most virtuous person is not identified by color, or place, or wealth, or intellect, or culture, but by the opportunity he is given, and takes, to be a citizen of a virtuous *polis*."[61] In the time of the Greeks and Romans, there was no category of "different" that could not be overcome through education, sophistication, and culture.

By the fifth century, Christian ideas had come to the forefront, and thought leaders like Augustine emphasized religious context and spiritual lineage as the primary separator of humans. In the twelfth century, the Jewish thinker Maimonides developed theories that humans were different based on their lineage of the gods or God they

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[58] Hannaford, *Race*, 26.

[59] Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York, NY: Nation Books, 2016), 21.

[60] Kendi, *Stamped*, 25.

[61] Hannaford, *Race*, 35.

worshipped and that some groups had a purity of blood that others did not. He painted

people groups such as Turks, Indians, and Kushites as idolatrous descendants of Sabean

worshipers who were unredeemable and a threat to humanity, and he saw their

extermination as justifiable.[62] Maimonides labeled those with the gods he deemed to be

inferior as irrational human beings and not as full human beings. This was the first time

in recorded Western thought that people were labeled as being "beyond the bounds of

rationality."[63] What Maimonides could not have anticipated was that after the terrors of

the Black Death plague, his arguments would be turned on his people, who would come

to be seen as inferior. This line of exclusionary thinking was eventually extended to the

Spanish Moors, with both groups being expelled from Spain in the 15th century. But it

was the Roman Catholic Church's Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, which upheld the idea

of the Crusades as legitimate and failed to support the concept that people of different

faiths could co-exist in the same civil association, that was the death knell of the idea that

political and civic conscientiousness was the most important characteristic of a human

being. The council opened the door for people to be excluded from public society as

equals because of what they were in private.[64] Blood tests to determine who was from

good lineage would devolve into distinguishing people based on physical appearance to

tell the superior from the inferior. Some were seen as inferior regardless of what they

accomplished in life. Racial identity slowly became something much more fixed,

immutable, and identifiable.

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[62] Hannaford, *Race*, 125.

[63] Hannaford, *Race*, 112.

[64] Hannaford, *Race*, 126.

It was during this milieu of developing ideas that a Portuguese writer named Gomes Eanes de Zurara was commissioned to write, in 1453, a defense of Prince Henry and the burgeoning slave trade, particularly in Africa. In *The Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, Zurara describes all Africans with a relatively new descriptive identity: "black." He refers to Europeans as "white." But he went well beyond simply describing their skin tones. He immediately described blacks as being an inferior strand of human beings, ugly and brutish, while describing whites as beautiful and superior. Zurara coalesced ideas that had been swirling about in popular thought for centuries into the belief that people were inherently and irreversibly inferior based on one very visual physical characteristic: skin color.

In 1436 Pope Eugenius IV issued a papal bull that allowed the kingdom of Castile in modern-day Portugal the rights of domination over the Guanches people and to claim the Canary Islands as their own.[65] Less than two decades later, Pope Nicholas V ordered the Portuguese king to conquer the Saracens, pagans, and enemies of Christ and to put them in perpetual slavery.[66] This included the right to seize all their possessions and property. These decisions led to a pivotal moment in history. In 1454, Nicholas issued a papal bull that granted the King of Portugal the right "to invade, search out, capture, vanquish and subdue all Saracens (Muslims) and pagans whatsoever, and other enemies of Christ in wheresoever place… and all movable and immovable goods whatsoever held and

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[65] Joy H. Greenberg, "The Doctrine of Discovery as a Doctrine of Domination," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* 10, no. 2 (2016): 236.

[66] Greenberg, *"*Doctrine,*"* 236.

possessed by them and to *reduce their persons to perpetual* slavery (author's

emphasis)… and to convert them to his and their use and profit."[67]

This decree, known as the Doctrine of Discovery, implied the inherent inferiority of

non-European, non-Christians and justified possession of their lands and the enslavement

of these pagans in "Africa" and the "New World." It lent the weight of the Roman

Catholic Church to the idea that European Christians had the right to any land they would

encounter regardless of whether it was already occupied. If those occupants were not

European Christians, they were inferior beings, their land could be "discovered," their

civilization could be plundered, and their people could be subjugated; and this was all for

their good as they would also be converted to this mutant form of Christianity.

Buoyed by Zurara's justification and the Pope's new Doctrine of Discovery,

Prince Henry and Portugal launched headlong into the African slave trade, but not before

he offered two black boys as slaves as a gift to the church, allowing the slave trade to be

seen as "an act of worship in the diseased imagination of the European explorers engaged

in it."[68] Zurara had reservations based on his religious upbringing but overcame those

because Prince Henry had been affirmed by the Pope and given the official blessing of

the church. Zurara justified the slave trade with the assertion that the Portuguese would

save these poor inferiors and help them become Christians. He died in 1474. His belief

that enslavement would ultimately benefit this new class of people he invented by

instantly wiping out their individual tribal and regional identities and creating the

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[67] Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 15.

[68] Charles and Rah, *Unsettling Truths*, 18.

category of "black people" would prove to be naïve. But these ideas about their inferiority would endure around the world as the slave trade expanded.[69]

From the very beginning of identity by skin color, the lie that humans can be classified as inherently superior or inferior was baked into the cake. People of lighter skin complexions were considered superior and given privileges and advantages, and those that were darker skinned were treated as inferiors without the rights of their pale-complected fellow humans. For the first time in recorded human history, humans were indelibly categorized by phenotype.

With this categorization, the seeds for what would become the belief in different races of humans rooted in biology had been sown. A whole new version of this great lie was unleashed that would soon sweep through every corner of the globe like a great tsunami. Fueled largely by the motivation of justifying the treatment of people of color as inferior, scientific theory searched for corroborating evidence of this inferiority. Carolus Linnaeus was among the scientists that began to categorize human beings into sub-species.[70] Johann Blumenbach coined the term "Caucasian" to refer to people of European descent. He asserted that they were the original race, the most developed, and the most beautiful and closely representative of God's image.[71] He identified five races, determining that the other four were all degenerated from the Caucasian race. He also claimed that the races with darker skin tones were the furthest from the Caucasian ideal. Near the end of the 19th century, Charles Darwin developed evolutionary theories in his

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[69] Kendi, *Stamped*, 25.

[70] Robert Wald Sussman, *The Myth of Race: The Troubling Persistence of an Unscientific Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 15.

[71] Sussman, *Myth of Race*, 19-20.

deeply influential book *Origin of the Species*, whose subtitle included the phrase "Preservation of Favoured Races." His work would be used to further justify differences in racial groups. Theories of racial inferiority were given scientific credibility well into the 20th century, when eugenics would come to the forefront of history.[72]

Although the New Testament is mostly quiet on the topic of the skin color of human groups, the position of the Christian church from its very inception was that every nation on earth was equal as image bearers, descendants of one man (Acts 17:26), and derivative of the father (Eph. 3:14–15). In the fifth century, Augustine of Hippo rejected the idea that some tribes or nationalities were monstrous in nature, an idea of debate at the time, declaring that, "whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents in color, movement, sound, nor how peculiar he is in some power, part, or quality of his nature, no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast. We can distinguish the common human nature from that which is peculiar, and therefore wonderful."[73]

The Christian church was poised perfectly to reject any new lie of superiority, especially that of skin color and race. Sadly, rather than becoming an opponent of this new concept, it became one of its biggest proponents. Just decades after the papal bull declaring the Doctrine of Discovery, Paracelsus proposed that people of color, especially those in the New World, were not descended from the biblical Adam but from a different source, the same one that produced such strange creatures as nymphs, griffins, and

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[72] Sussman, *Myth of Race*, 43–145.

[73] Augustine, "The City of God," Book XVI, Chapter 8, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 315.

salamanders, asserting that these groups had no souls.[74] Arguments would develop in

theological circles over the subsequent centuries between proponents of this polygenetic

theory, that God had created multiple strands of the human species, and the monogenetic

theory that all humans were descended from one Adamic source.[75] Both of these theories

were utilized to justify colonialism, slavery, and the ill treatment of the BIPOC

community.

La Peyrere, a French Calvinist, theorized that the darker races descended from

miserable pre-Adamite beings who caused God to create Adam so that his descendants

could save them from themselves.[76] By the 18th century, Immanuel Kant was asserting

that races were differentiated by their degree of innate talent, with the white race being

the highest in a rational and moral order. Kant, notes Robert Sussman, pushed for

equality for all people but considered only whites to be truly human with BIPOC people

categorized on a lower level in morality and humanity.[77]

By the 19th century, the philosophical questions of the superiority of certain

strands of humanity were fully masquerading as science, and the concept of racial

differences among groups was most clearly observed by the color of skin and so was

biologically fixed into each racial group.

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[74] Sussman, *Myth of Race*, 25.

[75] Kevin Burrell, "Slavery, the Hebrew Bible and the Development of Racial Theories in the Nineteenth Century," *Religions* 3 (Jan. 1, 2021): 331–345, accessed October 26, 2022, https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/9/742.

[76] Sussman, *Myth of Race*, 26.

[77] Sussman, *Myth of Race*, 27-28.

The Church continued to look for explanations of inferior human groups and eventually gravitated to the so-called Curse of Ham, in which the descendant of Ham, Canaan, was cursed by Noah and God with dark skin for his father's sin and his descendants relegated to subservient status in the present age.

It is extremely important to understand that, although there were always dissenters that championed the equality and dignity of all humans, the majority witness of the Church perpetrated the lie of race and reveled in the superiority that it granted to those considered white.

By the 19th century, the concept of race had arguably become a foundational pillar of every aspect of society and culture. Scottish Anatomist Rober Knox exemplified this as he boldly declared,

> That race is in human affairs everything, is simply a fact, the most remarkable, the most comprehensive, which philosophy has ever announced. Race is everything: literature, science, art—in a word, civilization depends on it.[78]

Knox depicts a world that was utilizing the concept of race as the sole explanation for the functioning of society, politics, history, culture, and civilization.[79]

The impact on the American Church was profound. As early as the 17th century, influential Puritan minister Cotton Mather argued that it was pride that caused black people to desire freedom and reject their divinely ordained status as inferior. "Under the influence of Calvinism," says author John Farley, "the Protestant British regarded

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[78] Burrell, *"Slavery,"* 1.

[79] Burrell, "Slavery," 1.

conversion largely as a matter of predestination…. This generally led to the view that the British were chosen and [people of color] were not."[80]

Slowly and reluctantly, white churches shifted from believing that the American black enslaved population could not be saved, to baptizing them, largely as a means of controlling their behavior, though many did have purer motives to spread the gospel to the most marginalized. Typical 18th-century baptismal vows reflect the inferior status that was still presumed, however, forcing those baptized to declare that it was only for the good of their soul and gave them no other societal status or right to freedom.

By the end of the 19th century, most African American Christians were members of segregated churches, having been ostracized or mistreated in the white churches. Even a full century after the end of the Civil War and the official end of slavery in America (although slavery was legal for another century for those convicted of even petty crimes), the situation of racial segregation of churches that extended beyond just those deemed to be white or black would carry on well in the 20th century. This caused Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to observe that Sunday at 11 a.m. was the most segregated hour of the week in America.

The great lie of superiority had slowly developed into a new manifestation. This version went beyond class, nation, social status, political affiliation, and culture. People were now deemed to be superior or inferior based solely on the color of their skin. Rather than rejecting the great lie of race, the church, in large part, embraced it and propagated it into society at large. Today, the racial problems and divides that the Christian churches in

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[80] John Farley, *Majority-Minority Relations,* 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2005), 120.

America experience and that our society itself faces, relate directly back to the acceptance of this new version of the great lie. The Bible rejects any notion that human beings are fundamentally superior or different in worth based on any concept like race. Bolstering that position, modern science since as early as the 1940s with Ashley Montagu's 1942 publication of *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* has been debunking the entire concept of race.

Yet, mindsets and beliefs of the lie of racial superiority give foundation to the systems and structures subsequently built on it. These apparatuses may adapt and shift over time as they become acceptable and invisible; and this becomes the heart of the question for this study. If the great lie was limited solely to the institutions of slavery and colonialism, then when they ended, so would have the lie. The problem would have been solved. But if they are just two of many structures and systems founded in the lie, then are there still inequities today that can be traced back to the lie of race? And if so, has the Church, much like Corinth, been blind to their presence both in our society and to the effects on the Church?

The answers to these questions, in short, is "yes," there are many systems and inequities still in play today that can be traced directly back to Zurara's original identification of white skin as the superior form of humanity.

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The Patterns of the Great Lie

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Wherever a version of the lie of superiority is accepted, similar patterns emerge in society. Being familiar with these patterns will help identify them in American history and their effects on the Church.

The first component is the lie of superiority itself. Whether it is based on tribal identity, political enlightenment, national identity, status level, or racial biology, it shares a common inclination to identify a differentiation of some humans as part of a group or identity that is naturally or inherently superior to all others, who by default are inferior.

The second element is the mindsets and beliefs that are accepted and spread throughout a culture to justify the distinction among groups. These often rely on stereotypes, half-truths, misconceptions, and outright lies. They thrive, however, because they bolster the acceptance of the sub-humanity of others. These others are viewed as savages or being prone to violence or sexually deviant or less intelligent; the possibilities are endless. The extreme tragedy of this stage is when those labeled inferior begin to believe it or accept it to a certain degree.

The third element involves building structures and systems around the great lie that typically serve to give an advantage to the superior group. This is not necessarily a linear process where the mindsets and beliefs must be firmly established before this stage can begin. Rather, the structures might come first, they might come after the mindsets, or, most often, they are intertwined and are developed in a complex and ad hoc manner over time.

The fourth aspect is that these structures and systems of advantage eventually become invisible or acceptable to those within the society who become so accustomed to them that they often fail to see them as true inequity any longer. It just becomes normal.

The fifth element does not always happen but often does. This is when the original lie is either rejected or changed to the point that it is no longer prevalent in the mindsets and beliefs of most people in society, at least not overtly. Yet the structures and systems

remain vestigial constructs of the original lie. And because they have long since been accepted as normal and have become invisible aspects of society, they subtly reinforce the outmoded lie of superiority by continuing to give to the group originally deemed superior ongoing advantages even though the lie itself has been discarded or denounced. These vestigial structures and systems continue to empower the lie long after it has faded from memory.

The final stage to be considered can happen anywhere along the process of the previous five. It is when the lie itself, the supporting mindsets and beliefs of the lie, the structures of the lie, or its vestigial structures become entrenched in the life and doctrines of the Church.

The six elements of structural racial superiority proposed above were supported by the influential theories of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva.[81] Bonilla-Silva demonstrated that most theories of racism as a phenomenon regard it as a strictly ideological event. The basic framework of theories defined racism as a set of ideas that then led individuals to prejudice based on those ideas. This may eventually lead to various acts of discrimination against other racial groups. Bonilla-Silva enumerated the weaknesses of this approach in that it does not account for changing articulations of racism. It limits racist thinking as irrational and a leftover from historical situations. It provides no category for any racial inequity beyond overt personal action. Bonilla-Silva argued that the phenomenon of racism in these frameworks ultimately becomes circular, where racism is a belief that produces a belief, which is racism.

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[81] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation," *American Sociological Review* 62, no. 3 (1997): 465–480, accessed 10/30/2022, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2657316.

Bonilla-Silva proposed that racism is structural in nature rather than strictly ideological. The belief that one group is superior is implemented into a hierarchy in which "the race placed in the superior position tends to receive greater economic remuneration and access to better occupations and/or prospects in the labor market, occupies a primary position in the political system, is granted higher social estimation (e.g., is viewed as 'smarter' or 'better looking'), and often has the license to draw physical (segregation) as well as social (racial etiquette) boundaries between itself and other races."[82] This, he argued, is the racial structure of a given society. These structures were based on original ideas but could shift and adapt over time to changing societal situations and morph into different expressions of the same structural advantages. Bonilla-Silva noted that not all members of the superior group received the same level of reward and not all in the inferior group were at the bottom of the social order, but that did not negate the overall existence and power of the structure itself.

The primary elements of Bonilla-Silva's framework were five-fold. First, racialized structures allocated inequitable rewards in the economy, politics, and social and psychological systems along racial lines. A standard set of social relations and practices developed based on racial definitions at all societal levels. Second, racial groups were constituted and became the effect of opposition between racial groups at all levels of society. Third, a racial ideology developed based on this structure that became the guiding star that dictated standard actions within the society. Fourth, the logical outcome of the structure and ideology was racial contestation at all levels of society. Fifth, this contestation revealed different interests of the groups in the racialized system.

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[82] Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism," 469–470.

The question that was pertinent to this research revolved around whether the current literature showed vestigial structures and ongoing realities of inequity as a result of the lie of racial superiority. The subsequent question from the first is whether the vestigial structures and ongoing realities of racial inequity have impacted American Christianity.

Ongoing Effects and Vestigial Structures of the Great Lie of Race

One of the primary pushbacks against calls for racial equity in the contemporary context is that slavery and colonialism were great evils in human history, but they are both long in the past. This is combined with a complete denial of the presence or possibility of structural racism in the present-day United States. John McWhorter's book, *Woke Racism*, serves as a representative of this viewpoint. McWhorter vehemently denies systemic and structural inequities throughout his book and consistently attacks political opponents. He refutes small individual cases of claimed racism such as unequal suspension rates in one school district but makes no attempt to directly address or disprove the evidence for large-scale effects of structural inequities.[83] Another common tack here can be seen in Scott David Allen's work, *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice*. Allen asserts that "ideological social justice advocates are known for throwing the terms 'systemic' and 'structural' around in a very generalized way, rarely getting specific about which policies or rules cause the whole system or structure to be racist, sexist, etc."[84] Allen subtly switches the definition of structural racism away from the idea

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[83] John McWhorter, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America* (London, UK: Portfolio/Penguin, 2021).

[84] Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Credo House Publishers, 2020), 187.

that it is systems that have been impacted by racism in the past and continue to carry on the effects of the inequities created by those systems into the present. His definition switches to specific policies or rules that still actively reflect overt bias.

Thus, there is no need for talk of racial justice according to these lines of thinking. Racism is limited to a definition of personal enmity toward someone based on the color of their skin. With these being the assumptions, the sole solution to any racism that might still exist today is diversity.

But to take this position would be to overlook half of Paul's doctrine of sin. Yes, there is certainly individual sin that must be done away with in the life of believers. But Paul is just as adamant that the powers and authorities are constantly at work to infiltrate systems, cultures, nations, structures, groups, ideologies, and the like. This is to see sin on a structural and systemic level. It presumes that sinful individuals construct sinful societies. This is precisely where the great lie of superiority can be located. It is the work of the powers and authorities acting on cultural and structural levels to divide humanity.

In contrast to McWhorter, R.C. Jongte argues that three points must be understood when considering American racism.[85] The first is that white racism in America is founded on myths of Anglo-Saxon superiority. The second is that white racism in America is structural in nature and is much more than individual prejudice. The third is that religion played a significant role in validating and fostering notions of American white superiority.

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[85] R.C. Jongte, "Engaging Structural Injustice: The Anatomies of White Racism and the Caste System," Bangalore Theological Forum 48, no. 2 (2016): 137.

The relevant question moving forward is not whether racial superiority developed in American and other Western societies or whether those cultures exhibited the first four elements described above. The relevant question is, does contemporary literature demonstrate that there are still significant vestigial structures and ongoing effects from the life of superiority in modern America?

Housing and Land Ownership

Many people either do not consider why segregation exists to some extent in virtually every major US city or assume that it happened naturally as people of the same racial or cultural group simply prefer to live together. But as Richard Rothstein details in *The Color of Law*, this is not the case.[86] Following the Civil War, the United States government, both at federal and local levels, encouraged and often required segregation. These intentional and systemic strategies aimed at the segregation of races have resulted in devastating inequities. In 2021, homes in predominantly white zip codes are worth $193 per square foot as opposed to $115 per square foot in predominantly black zip codes.[87] The average median listing is $355,000 in neighborhoods with a black population that is less than 1%, but $167,508 in predominantly black areas.[88] The typical black family has just over $12,000 in household wealth while the average white family has over $139,000.[89]

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[86] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017).

[87] Kiplinger's, "The Racial Wealth Gap in Housing," *Kiplinger's Personal Finance,* October 2017, 21.

[88] Kiplinger's, "Racial Wealth Gap," 21.

[89] Kiplinger's, "Racial Wealth Gap," 21.

None of this was accidental. Covenants were built into white neighborhoods restricting access to people of color, and systems known as redlining were created to keep BIPOC buyers from getting home loans. Land giveaways in the 19th century and subsidies to buy homes in the 20th century were restricted almost exclusively to whites. Rothstein argues that this is significant because it happened during the greatest wealth-building period our country has ever seen, and people of color were largely excluded. The system of housing segregation "was a nationwide project of the federal government," and was not, says Rothstein, "the result of a single law that consigned African Americans to designated neighborhoods."[90] Instead, it was "scores of racially explicit laws, regulations, and government practices [that] combined to create a nationwide system of urban ghettos surrounded by white suburbs."[91] This becomes vital to ongoing racial inequity because, argues Rothstein, home ownership is the biggest avenue to creating wealth and passing it on to the next generation.

Racial segregation was not a natural inevitability following the Civil War. It was not the desire of most African Americans nor was it the natural trajectory. After emancipation, the number of African Americans owning homes went from virtually nothing to nearly 19% by 1890.[92] While Rothstein focuses on the government's role and support of segregation, others have highlighted the additional role as willing partners that

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[90] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, XII.

[91] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, XII.

[92] June N.P. Francis and Joshua Tecumseh F. Robertson, "White Spaces: How Marketing Actors (Re)produced Marketplace Inequities for Black Consumers," *Journal of Marketing Management* 37 (2021): 91.

many real estate agents played throughout the 20th century in practices of steering and blockbusting.[93]

This inequity was exacerbated by a system that intentionally tied local public education to property taxes, thus ensuring that white neighborhoods and municipalities that had full access to the economic system, housing market, and burgeoning suburbs would have wonderfully funded schools, while most communities that were populated by people of color and discouraged from full participation in the economic freedom of America were doomed to be underfunded and thus have underperforming school systems.

There is overwhelming evidence that segregation in American neighborhoods and cities was not simply the incidental result of people desiring to live surrounded by those like them. The story of Frank Stevenson is a typical one. Stevenson was an auto worker who, like so many other African Americans, found it impossible to live in the neighborhood where his factory was relocated because FHA loans for that area were restricted to white people. Combined with pressure and regulations from the local government in Richmond, this kept Stevenson in a predominantly African American neighborhood and out of prospering white areas. Like Stevenson, countless African Americans experienced similar discriminatory practices around the country which limited them to certain neighborhoods that subsequently experienced the government withdrawing most services and relegating these areas to economic blight.[94]

Chicago is a clear example of the existence and negative impact of this systemic segregation. "Today's Chicago is the product of decades of policies that have had the

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[93] Francis and Robertson, "White Spaces," 91.

[94] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 4–14.

effect of isolating communities of color," according to Prosperity Now, a nonprofit organization fighting for financial stability and prosperity for neglected Chicago neighborhoods.[95] A Brookings Institute Analysis of 51 metro areas in the US showed that Chicago was near the top of the list along with Cleveland, Detroit, New York, and Milwaukee.[96] The segregation effects in Chicago show how devastating it is across America's urban landscape. According to the Metropolitan Planning Council of Chicago, if Chicago's segregation levels were reduced to just the national median, black Chicagoans would gain $2,982 per person annually and would see a 30% decline in homicide rates.[97] A National Equity Atlas study indicated that closing income gaps could increase annual income for people of color by $14,696 per person, could increase federal tax revenues by $450 billion, and could increase consumer spending by 2.6 trillion by 2050.[98]

Rothstein demonstrated the litany of strategies intentionally employed by various arms of the US government to segregate America throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, showing clearly that it is not something that "just happened." The public housing programs of the 1930s only built segregated housing in their respective neighborhoods, targeted integrated neighborhoods and housing for demolition, and then rebuilt segregated housing in their place.[99]

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[95] Tatiana Walk-Morris, "The Price of Racial Inequity," *Planning* (Winter 2021): 50.

[96] Walk-Morris, "The Price," 50.

[97] Walk-Morris, "The Price," 51.

[98] Walk-Morris, "The Price," 51.

[99] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 17–38.

Zoning laws were one of the methods used consistently to segregate cities and neighborhoods as the government systematically kept even affluent African Americans from moving into white suburban areas.[100] Other prominent weapons included the practice of redlining, by which people of color were denied access to home loans and prevented from leaving their segregated neighborhoods and racial covenants that were the norm in the first half of the twentieth century. Racial covenants were required in many white suburban settlements and instituted bans on selling homes to people of color.[101] The accepted justification was that the presence of African Americans would devalue property in a neighborhood. These covenants prohibited new white suburban developments from selling any properties to people of color. They continued until the Supreme Court found them unconstitutional in 1948.

Housing segregation went beyond the direct realm of real estate to include the IRS. The IRS reinforced segregation throughout the 19th century and nearly two-thirds of the 20th century as it turned a blind eye to systematic and racially inequitable practices by insurance companies and banks and continued to protect tax-exempt status for segregated institutions such as churches and universities. The IRS also allowed subprime loans that involved banks targeting people of color. These predatory practices were one of the main causes of the 2008 housing collapse.[102]

The situation of segregated living spaces was not limited to the actions of the federal government or just a handful of Southern states. It was a nationwide phenomenon

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[100] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 39–57.

[101] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 59–97.

[102] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 101–114.

involving housing policy, zoning ordinances, red tape, banking, tax practices, and even highway systems routinely built to intentionally separate urban areas of predominantly BIPOC individuals from burgeoning white suburbs that were prohibited to people of color. The sheer volume of evidence available demonstrates that these were not rare or isolated incidents.

Segregation was the result of intentional state action on a wide scale. Rather than these unconstitutional actions being struck down by the Supreme Court, many of these policies were tolerated for decades, and by the time any of them were repealed the damage had been done. Although, beginning in the 1950s, the Court has brought an end to many policies that overtly contributed to segregation, they have resisted most efforts to undo the damage from government-sanctioned segregation. Chief Justice John Roberts asserted that if residential segregation "is a product not of state action but of private choice, it does not have constitutional implications."[103] This appeared reasonable, but Roberts went on to express the belief that residential segregation was a situation that arose from the private choices of individuals.

Banking and Systems of Wealth

The power in vestigial structures of superiority lay in their interconnectedness. If there were just one area that reflected an advantage for the group deemed to be superior, it would have little impact and quickly fade. But when the superior group takes privileges in many aspects of a society, it has a multiplying effect and further cements the status of that group. In that vein, segregation and advantages on the path to homeownership were just one facet of racial inequity in the American story.

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[103] Rothstein, *Color of Law*, 215.

There is much evidence that governmental policymakers systematically and intentionally excluded black Americans from the American economic and banking systems. This, along with the inequities in housing availability and segregation, continued to contribute to an economic gap that has no other plausible historical explanation. Author Mehrsa Baradaran has argued that most Americans presume an even playing field yet have become so accustomed to these inequities in wealth that they have faded into irrelevancy. Yet the numbers say otherwise. As of 2019, white families held $164,100 more in wealth than black families and $152,100 more than Latino families.[104] Exclusion from the banking and economic systems in the time following the Civil War has continued to contribute to the wealth gap between people of color, especially black Americans, and white Americans.

Following the Civil War, reparations were promised to the formerly enslaved but were extremely short–lived and thus, highly ineffective at positioning African Americans to provide for themselves as a population. Black Americans were systematically denied land, even though the government was confiscating and distributing millions of acres to railroad companies. Most whites refused to sell land to blacks, with Southern states passing laws to forbid the sale of land to them. Concerted efforts were made to deny blacks the ability to work in any vocation en masse except picking cotton as sharecroppers. By the end of Reconstruction, freed slaves were blocked from most avenues of land ownership which denied them the ability to subsistence farm, and laws prohibited employers from other arenas to offer them jobs, so they were effectively

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[104] Zawadi Rucks-Ahidiana, "Race and the Financial Toolkit: Bridging Cultural Theories to Understand Behavior and Decision Making in the Racial Wealth Gap," *Sociological Inquiry* 92, no. 2 (2021): 391, accessed October 28, 2022 https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/soin.12468.

locked into a system that guaranteed poverty for most. The Freedmen's Savings and Trust

Company was started with the paternalistic intention of teaching the newly freed the

value of thrift and saving but did not allow them credit or give them loans. It operated

under the guise of being a government agency, which it was not, and had a shared

reputation of well-known and important white leaders. It promised a system of land

ownership but never developed one. It earned the trust of African Americans and within

ten years and had expanded to over 30 locations. But it quickly devolved into scandal as

the white investors looted its capital and ran it into the ground. Eventually, all

investments and savings were lost, which scarred the trust of African Americans in

banking systems for decades. W.E.B. Dubois believed that "not even ten additional years

of slavery could have done so much to throttle the thrift of the freedmen." [105]

Following the loss of trust in government banks, most African Americans

switched to a black banking system, but Baradaran showed that this system was

constantly being undermined and weakened by forced segregation, which isolated blacks

from full participation in the economy and made black-owned banks especially

vulnerable to economic downturns and runs on banks. She also discussed at length the

rise of black insurance companies, necessitated by exclusion from the white insurance

industry. Black economic centers such as in Durham and Tulsa, known as the Black Wall

Street, developed. But that area in Tulsa was destroyed by violent white mobs, as were

other burgeoning centers of the economic boon. Tulsa was an ominous warning, and

combined with a systemic exclusion, predatory practices, and government practices that

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[105] Mehrsa Baradaran, *The Color of Money: Black Banks and the Racial Wealth Gap* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 31.

were working to democratize credit and check corporate power in favor of personal wealth, but only for whites, the black community continued to face inequity economically at all levels. Baradaran summarized it thus: "The black Southern experience at the turn of the century was one of economic exploitation backed by state-sanctioned violence."[106]

Not only was the black economic system segregated and forced into such action, but it was also constantly exploited for white gains and denied equal access. Money invested in black banks was consistently pulled into investments in white enterprises, but the flow of money never went in the other direction. When the Great Depression struck, things got worse according to Baradaran. Powerful Southern white politicians put President Roosevelt in the position of having to choose between large-scale economic reforms or equal treatment of the races. He chose the economic reform that summarily excluded blacks from almost all New Deal reforms. The economic recovery was limited to whites in America, and the black economy that had slowly developed despite hostile circumstances died a slow death.[107] Additionally, government programs like the GI Bill that enabled returning World War II veterans to attain college educations and buy homes were accessed liberally by white veterans but became virtually inaccessible for black veterans.

After a brief period of small affirmative action policies from the government following the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, American sentiment and most government policies moved into the colorblind era of not giving any group advantage that the others did not have. While this seemed fair on the surface, it ignored the reality that free land

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106 Baradaran, *Color of Money*, 68.
107 Baradaran, *Color of Money*, 101–133.

had been given away for nearly a century to white Americans, economic policies had intentionally favored whites over blacks, and blacks had been systematically excluded from full participation in the economic system, creating an ongoing legacy of wealth disparity. American policy before the Civil Rights era was very much in favor of government support for portions of the population, especially the white portions, but after that aid started to be directed toward minority populations, white Americans quickly began to champion personal liberty and responsibility, small government, and no preferential treatment of any group. This is confirmed and described in greater detail in Katznelson's work, *When Affirmative Action Was White*.[108]

The Justice System

Following the Civil War, the justice system was manipulated to subjugate black people and other people of color who were still seen by most white Americans as inferior. The system of slavery was gone, but the mindsets remained, and new structures and systems were put in place. The 13th Amendment allowed for the slavery of convicted criminals, so scores of laws were passed throughout the Southern states that allowed officials to arrest people for being unemployed, loitering, and a host of other petty "crimes." Many more were arrested on trumped-up or nonexistent charges. These laws and arrest patterns were applied exclusively against people of color and meant that many former slaves after the Civil War were arrested on bogus charges and returned to slavery on some of the same plantations that had owned slaves before the war. This slavery was even more brutal than pre-Civil War slavery because landowners were now renting these

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[108] Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Co., 2017).

individuals and cared little for their long-term health or survival. This is just one facet, said author Michelle Alexander, of the inequities of the justice system which she refers to as the new system of Jim Crow prejudice and discrimination.

The inequities of these laws and the judicial system itself were exacerbated, wrote Alexander, by consistent government approval and enactment of disenfranchisement across the country. She argued for thinking of "the criminal justice system—the entire collection of institutions and practices that comprise it—not as an independent system but rather as a *gateway* into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization." She referred to this system as mass incarceration and described it as a system that involves much more than physical bars but one that also locks people "behind virtual bars and virtual walls—walls that are invisible to the naked eye but function nearly as effectively as Jim Crow laws once did." These laws, she says, lock people of color into second-class citizenship as surely as Jim Crow did.[109]

Black Americans were kept from voting in large numbers, which rendered them powerless to address the unfair application of the legal system that they experienced regularly. The biases that were built into the legal system translated into mass incarceration at rates that greatly affected people of color more negatively. Although practices of forced labor for prisoners and many of the Jim Crow laws had been dialed back or removed thanks to Civil Rights efforts, inequities in the system were reenergized by the war on drugs that began in earnest in the 1980s. Studies have shown that blacks and whites use and sell drugs at similar rates, yet blacks are 2.7 times more likely to be

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[109] Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010), 15.

arrested and 6.5 times as likely to be incarcerated for drug-related crimes.[110] Exacerbating such statistics was the reality that the war on drugs found its primary battlefront in urban neighborhoods of BIPOC people rather than predominantly white neighborhoods or even white college campuses, where drug use is much higher than the average. This was fueled by "law and order" and "touch on crime" rhetoric that was presented as being impartial regarding race but stood behind a century of intentionally biased application of law and punishment and fueled an entirely new era of unequal treatment under the law.

The result of this structure of mass incarceration was an unprecedented criminalization of segregated neighborhoods already shackled with housing and economic inequities, which devastated these areas even more. The racial caste system created by American slavery reconstituted itself in the post-Civil War period with the help of these systematic structures put in place.[111] That didn't mean that there were not exceptional individuals who escaped this inequitable matrix, but it did result in massive gaps in wealth and incarceration rates, just to name two effects.

Most Americans remained unaware of the connections of all this to the past and the great lie of racial superiority and simply assumed that even though people of color experienced incarceration at frighteningly higher rates than whites and were given stiffer penalties for the same crimes, this was all done without prejudice and was nothing more than a fair administration of justice.

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[110] The Hamilton Project, "Rates of Drug Use and Sales, by Race; Rates of Drug Related Criminal Justice Measures, by Race," accessed October 27, 2022, https://www.hamiltonproject.org/charts/rates_of_drug_use_and_sales_by_race_rates_of_drug_related_criminal_justice.

[111] Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontent* (New York, NY: Random House, 2020), 39–53.

Many Other Areas of Inequity

Structures of racial inequity following the close of the Civil War go far beyond the three spheres of real estate and housing, economic and banking, and judicial and legal. Similar cases have been made in places like the healthcare industry and the education system. Highways and freeways were systematically built for decades to the detriment of black areas and to reinforce segregation. Toxic and undesirable areas such as landfills, chemical dumps, energy plants, dangerous power lines, and the like have systematically been placed near BIPOC communities and away from white suburban settlements. The fervor for policies that harmed the black community and kept them "in their place" or discouraged fair competition was so great that the effects of these strategies served in many cases to harm poor whites and in other cases, brought unintended harm down the road to the white population. Heather McGee noted in *The Sum of Us* the classic example of public swimming pools.[112] White communities were so eager to prohibit black community members from integrating pools that they, in many cases, simply shut down the public pool, an action that negatively impacted the whole community. McGee documents myriad ways in which whites became collateral damage in their campaign against equality, but the greater harm was still always felt by the black community.

Racial Inequity in the American Church

There has been a growing trend in the American evangelical church, particularly beginning in the second decade of the 21st century to examine the extent to which

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[112] Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (New York, NY: One World, 2021), 23–28.

American Christianity has been formed, infected, and driven by the mindsets, beliefs, and structures of racial superiority at play in the world. The Church has, at times, driven the narrative of racial superiority and protected its structures in the past and its vestigial structures up to the present day. It is necessary to survey this growing body of work to leap racial inequity from being something that has impacted American systems and structures since the Civil War to something that has impacted the discipleship of the American church in profound and transformational ways. Just as Paul called on the Corinthians to examine themselves to determine whether they had accepted injustice into the midst of the justified people by swallowing the lies of the surrounding culture, so must the contemporary church.

The Development of Racial Superiority in the American Church

Willie James Jennings focused on the 15th through 19th centuries, tracing the narratives of Gomes Eanes de Zurara and Jesuit Priest Acosta Porres, among others.[113] He outlined their impact as enabling the desire for superiority as expressed in the subjugation and enslavement of others. Through this period, Jennings argued, the normalization of whiteness as the standard for faithfulness and proper theology was accepted as the true expression of Christianity. That fidelity became centered on European identity rather than the body of Jesus. This led to an attitude toward the rest of the world that accepted and encouraged segregation as the norm of Christianity, which led to a spread of whiteness Christianity rather than biblical Christianity.[114] This created

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[113] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 15–116.

[114] Jennings, *Imagination*, 24–31.

imaginations that were not formed by Christ or Scripture alone but created imaginations that did not accept people with their space and land. Rather they saw them as inferiors who did not have a place of their own. These people then did not need to be respected and treated as equals but only viewed through the lens of capitalist subjugation that needed to be transformed in their culture through colonialism and missionary undertakings.

Jennings' overarching point was that the Western Christian imagination was tainted by the acceptance of whiteness as the core and foundational identity, which led to a distortion of self-identification, of interaction with others, and of a proper understanding of mission and faith.

Predominantly white churches, impacted by the white superiority of Western culture, have served as the dominant cultural power in America and were responsible for "constructing and sustaining a project to protect white supremacy and resist black equality."[115] This mindset has framed the American story from the beginning to the present. For hundreds of years, the seat of power in American Christianity was fundamentally white Christianity, characterized by a Jesus that was more than indifferent to racial inequity but demanded its preservation as the divine order of the faith. Struck with the conundrum that people were being treated in a less-than-human fashion, but also aware of the obvious fact that they were a human being like any other, white Christians were forced to believe and protect the idea that this was not a human, but something

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[115] Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 6.

inferior. That infected the most dominant versions of American Christianity and has continued to the present day.

Jones shared a dizzying amount of research from public opinion surveys conducted by his group, the Public Religion Research Institute, that demonstrated that the group displaying the most consistently racially inequitable views were American evangelicals. He chronicled that this was no accident or coincidence. This version of the faith was spawned when white superiority was accepted and defended by most, and that has inundated white American Christianity since. The structures and systems of the American church, he asserted, were formed by white superiority, and continued to harbor it following the Civil War and into the 21st century.

David Swanson, an evangelical pastor in Chicago, Illinois, asserted that the primary obstacle for contemporary American white and multiracial churches is a discipling issue that has its roots in the very formation of American churches.[116] Building on the theories first put forth in Emerson and Smith's work,[117] Swanson asserted that American Christians were discipled into three primary pillars, which kept them in a position of superiority and obfuscated the perspective of the black church and other groups other than the white perspective. The first was hyper-individualism, which led them to believe that the cause of any injustice or racism is personal, and that meant the solutions could not extend beyond personal responsibility and hard work. The second was relationalism. The root of the problem, according to this viewpoint, was at the relational

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[116] David Swanson, *Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 31–32.

[117] Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000) 76–80.

level. Structural injustices were rejected as a possibility because the very concept would infringe on the belief that nothing is bigger than the individual. The third was antistructuralism. This pillar builds on the other two and shifts guilt from any structure or system in a culture and rests it solely on individual choices. This left white Christians "fearing that any attempt to address injustice via *systemic* change is a threat to their *personal* faith."[118]

White and most multiracial churches that were blinded by centuries of being rooted in these pillars failed to see, according to Swanson, that good individual relationships cannot address systemic injustices and inequities such as home ownership gaps and the subsequent generational wealth. They cannot address gaps in overall wealth and net worth. They cannot address education gaps, inequities in the justice system, and many other vestigial structures of the lie of racial superiority.

Agreeing with Jones and Swanson, Jemar Tisby put forth the thesis in his book, *The Color of Compromise*, that the American church, from its inception, practiced a version of Christianity that was complicit with the lie of racial superiority rather than living courageous Christianity. [119] Despite no biblical or biological evidence that pointed to a difference between humans based on skin color, and melanin, the Church largely failed to reject the culture's embrace of racial difference and prospered from the advantages given to whites based on those beliefs. American Christianity inherited the societal belief that Western culture was more advanced and a better form of religion and demanded cultural assimilation. This was largely responsible, argued Tisby, for the lack

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[118] Swanson, *Rediscipling*, 32.

[119] Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 24.

of converts among indigenous people.[120] That eventually morphed into a belief in full

biological and hereditary superiority of the white race that informed much of the

direction of the white church, although there were always dissenters and groups of

Christians who opposed such mindsets and actions.

After demonstrating that the majority position of American Christianity relegated

African Americans and other peoples of color to inferior status in both word and deed

throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Tisby demonstrated large-scale complicity with

the mindsets and structures of racial superiority in American Christianity through the

remainder of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century. He also asserted that this

was not just a Southern problem as was often believed. He demonstrated how historic

complicity with racial superiority and injustice was just as endemic in Northern

Christianity as in the South.

Tisby conceded that there certainly was progress in fighting mindsets and beliefs

as well as structures and systems of the great lie, but the larger track record of the white

church in America propagated racial injustice rather than taking self-sacrificial and risky

stands against it. Tisby stated that "in reality, precious few Christians publicly aligned

themselves with the struggle for black freedom in the 1950s and 1960s" and noted that

those that did faced enormous backlash. "At a key moment in the life of the nation," he

continued, "one that called for moral courage, the American church responded to much of

the Civil Rights movement with passivity, indifference, or even outright opposition."[121] It

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[120] Tisby, *Compromise*, 36–38.

[121] Tisby, *Compromise*, 132.

is this legacy that continued in the Church into the 21st century that, he argued, stood in the way of true racial justice and harmony in the American church.

Anthea Butler zeroed in on the origins and impact of American evangelicalism.[122] According to Butler, the founding of the evangelical movement was an intentionally segregated and white-dominated space that pushed out African Americans and other cultural influences. She found great clarity in the admission of pastor Louie Giglio who, following the murder of George Floyd, claimed, "But we miss the blessing of slavery, that it built up the framework for the world that white people live in and lived in."[123] As churches formed that would constitute the foundation for what would become known as evangelicalism, they remained true to the social structures of their day rather than challenging racial hierarchy. They embraced the Lost Cause narrative of the post-Civil War South, a history where the suffering of black people was largely ignored and the nobility and chivalry of a South that only fought for personal freedom was emphasized. This mentality, argued Butler, preserved the most important element of slavery, that black people were inferior to whites. She conceded that as the movement grew, many white evangelicals wanted to help newly freed slaves with education and domestic training but were also deeply affected by "ideas about the superiority of white European civilization and a sense of Christian duty that at times was expressed in ways the demeaned the very people they wished to help."[124] These attitudes were at the core of

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[122] Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* (Chapel Hill, NC: Ferris & Ferris, 2021), 13–32.

[123] Butler, *Evangelical Racism*, 13.

[124] Butler, *Evangelical Racism*, 31.

evangelical belief and practice and would continue to affect how the leadership of the movement would engage with African Americans in the 20th century. They allowed, asserted Butler, white evangelical leaders to justify their decision to keep the reins of religious, social, and political power in white men's hands. The approach that developed in the 20th century was then characterized by racial exclusivity rather than racial inclusivity. This led to an evangelical movement that was created and established by white leaders, embracing white culture, influenced by white thinkers, creating space for white worshippers, and welcoming those BIPOC congregants that would assimilate into this exclusive worldview.

Daniel Hill shared his journey in evangelicalism in *White Awake*, supporting many of Butler's claims. He explored the culture of evangelicalism and discovered that what he thought was a movement that did not have a cultural framework was formed and defined by white culture and white identity.[125] This was true even of multiracial churches, which were almost exclusively spaces formed by a white culture that invited BIPOC people into that space but remained generally unwilling to explore other cultures or allow them to have a reconstructing influence in church life and ethos.

Editors Sechrest, Ramirez-Johnson, and Yong presented a collection of articles and essays in *Can "White" People Be Saved?* that examined the pervasiveness of white Western culture in the American church from the perspective of African American scholars.[126] The provocative title obscured the premise that the problem in reaching racial

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[125] Daniel Hill, *White Awake: An Honest Look at What It Means to Be White* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 31.

[126] Love Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong, *Can "White" People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 13.

equity in the American church was not white people but the mindset and structures of the created identity of whiteness. This is what established white normativity and continued to allow racial injustice and inequity to thrive in American Christianity. Until the identity and structures that protect whiteness are challenged and removed, there can be no genuine racial unity.

In their seminal work, *Divided by Faith*,[127] Emerson and Smith argued that the divides between black and white Christians and churches went back to colonial times, predating the foundation of America as a country. Racial superiority and the cultural keys of individualism, relationalism, and anti-structuralism were built into the foundations of white Christians in America to such a degree that it seemed nearly impossible to pry them loose. The mindsets and structures of racial superiority were so deep in the white evangelical culture, Emerson and Smith asserted that multiracial churches had never achieved true inclusion and multiculturalism that was anything other than harmful to black Christians. They established that multiracial churches often exacerbated the issues of race by instituting white superiority through cultural dominance and paternalism in the life of the church. The colorblind approach and unwillingness to truly examine these vestigial structures served to maintain white positions of comfort and advantage and failed to embody a truly biblical vision of true racial equality and justice. Emerson and Smith concluded with a very bleak outlook for the possibilities of racial harmony and equality in the American church in the near future.

Professor of religion, Randall Balmer argued that a new level of racial division developed along political lines that began in the 1960s coalesced in the 1970s, and

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[127] Emerson and Smith, *Divided*, 21–25.

cemented in the 1980s. The accepted narrative, said Balmer, was that following the Civil

Rights movement of the 1960s, American evangelicals were driven to conservative

politics and full-scale political engagement after the passing of pro-abortion legislation in

the form of the Supreme Court's decision in Roe v. Wade.[128] This was a rewrite of

history, according to Balmer, who documented that the motivation to move to the hard

right politically that created an ever-widening gap between white evangelicals and black

evangelicals was the efforts by the government to integrate schools across the country.[129]

Balmer chronicled the segregationist genesis of the rise of the religious right as well as

the later-created narrative that it was abortion that caused political engagement, and

demonstrated that white evangelical groups initially took rather moderate stances on

abortion but discovered that it created a better origins story for their movement.[130] This

brought in more Northern evangelicals than the anti-integrationist movement could by

itself. What Balmer established is that the roots of the religious right as a political force

were not in spirituality or morality but lay in the preservation of racial superiority.

Similarly, Michelle Oyakawa, in her article "Racial Reconciliation as a

Suppressive Framework in Evangelical Churches," examined the reconciliation model

present in most American multiethnic churches. This model championed the approach

that the goal is diversity and coming together in mutually shared spaces. She argued that

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[128] Randall Balmer, *Bad Faith: Race and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2021), 31–37.

[129] Balmer, *Bad Faith*, 38–49.

[130] Balmer, *Bad Faith*, 50–57.

this framework often functioned as a suppressive force because it was steeped in white superiority and rejection of true racial justice and equity.[131]

Summary

The existence of societal structures that were built on the foundation of racial superiority and that created clear inequities in many different aspects of life in the United States has been reasonably established. That those inequities continue to have a negative impact has also been reasonably established. In this study, only the negative impact on African Americans has been considered, without examining similar dynamics at play for indigenous and other people of color. The structures of racial superiority are not just a relic of the past. Rather, vestigial structures from the time when racial superiority was an accepted mindset continue to have an impact on the reality of the lives of BIPOC people today. And these ongoing inequities are not limited to the world outside the church. They affect disciples within the Christian church as much as they do anyone in the United States. Thus, Christians in the United States find themselves in a very similar situation to the Christians of the Apostle Paul's time when they were navigating through the challenges of status superiority.

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[131] Michelle Oyakawa, "Racial Reconciliation as a Suppressive Frame in Evangelical Multiracial Churches," *Sociology of Religion* 80, no. 4 (Winter 2019), 496–517.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

This project aimed to create a biblically based model of racial equity and justice that could be designed specifically for multiethnic churches in the United States that are part of the ICOC fellowship. While many of the churches have engaged in efforts aimed at deeper racial understanding, communication, or education, there have been limited attempts at comprehensive models utilized consistently by individual churches. There have been no comprehensive models available for all US ICOC churches to implement. The researcher approached this project with the hypothesis that the practices that have existed lacked an approach to consistently address the type of structural and systemic changes that Paul aims at in his letter to the Corinthians.

Although the project analyzed the churches of the ICOC, and the model created was designed for them, the research design, the findings of the research, and the model created would meet the needs of other churches in similar situations. This chapter will examine how the researcher approached investigating this problem and how the evidence was gathered, analyzed, and interpreted.

Method and Methodology

The researcher originally planned to utilize a strictly quantitative approach to investigate this topic rather than a mixed–methods design or a qualitative approach but

eventually transitioned to a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative methods are helpful to identify what needs to be studied or filling in missing or understudied information.[132] They also help develop new concepts or practices that have been lacking related to a phenomenon.[133] A key feature of qualitative investigation methods is their interpretive nature.[134] Quantitative methods, conversely, include designs that characterize the general nature of the observed phenomenon.[135] They tend toward observation and description of known phenomena, allowing for analysis and consideration of processes or behaviors of a group. Quantitative investigations are extremely helpful in evaluating a program or practice and describing the processes and behaviors that are in practice.[136] The researcher planned to identify the current practices within the ICOC regarding racial superiority in education, communication, and structural change and then compare that to Paul's proposed actions in the book of Corinthians as he addressed status superiority. This would then allow for a model to be created that would enable ICOC churches to embrace a model to address racial superiority that more closely adhered to Paul's biblical model.

Mixed Methods

Within the category of quantitative research, this project was a survey of a sample of ICOC churches within the United States. There are at least five types of quantitative or

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[132] Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne E. Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, *Twelfth Edition* (New York, NY: Pearson, 2019), 228.

[133] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 230.

[134] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 7.

[135] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 146.

[136] Jackson W. Carroll, "Designing and Conducting Surveys," *ATLA Summary of Proceedings* 55 (2001): 19, accessed November 8, 2022, https://serials.atla.com/proceedings/issue/view/276/221.

descriptive investigation.[137] Surveys are a common tool in social research to explore

human behavior and describe it succinctly,[138] so the researcher determined that the

quantitative approach in the form of a survey would be the most helpful tool to ascertain

current practices. This would facilitate comparing these practices to Paul's model in 1

Corinthians and create a subsequent model of best practices for modern churches.

When designing and administering a survey, the researcher must determine what

information is needed, from whom the answers will be gathered, what kinds of

information are needed, and how the data will be gathered.[139] The researcher determined

that the information needed to be centered on current values and practices within US

ICOC churches. The designed survey was intended to garner responses from between two

and four churches in each region. The goal was inclusion from each of the eleven US

regions of families of churches in the ICOC that included between two and four churches

in each region with at least one of those having an existing membership of under 500 and

one church surveyed with a membership of over 500.

After examining the data, however, a gap was exposed in two of the questions

between the intent of the researcher and the response of those surveyed. This necessitated

brief follow-up interviews to clarify the full range of practice and behavior within the

churches. These follow-up interviews shifted the method of investigation from strictly

quantitative to a mixed-method approach that involved the original survey and a brief

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[137] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 147–153.

[138] Julie Ponto, "Understanding and Evaluating Survey Research," *Journal of the Advanced Practitioner in Oncology* 6, no. 2 (Mar-Apr 2015): 168, accessed November 8, 2022, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4601897/.

[139] Carroll, "Designing," 19–20.

follow-up with a sampling of respondents to gain further insight into two questions in the survey.

Research Design Strategy

The predominant part of this study was quantitative in nature utilizing a survey of representative churches within the ICOC to better determine their values, prioritization of beliefs, and practices. The ICOC currently lists 176 US churches,[140] of which 33 were sent a survey created by the researcher. There were 28 respondents to the survey. One of the many strengths of survey research is that it describes a group's relevant characteristics and practices.[141] This study implemented a cross-sectional study examining a population or organization at one point.[142] This approach best fits the needs of this project, which sought to analyze the current practices of the ICOC churches in the US and then compare them to the model that Paul advised for the church in Corinth. A longitudinal study that would measure changes over time in the practices of a group was irrelevant and unnecessary for this, which only examined current practices.

Participants gained access to a self-administered electronic survey via the Survey Monkey website tool. Surveys were sent to the lead evangelist or elder of each church (a position equivalent to senior pastor) who was asked to respond to the survey to represent the current practices and positions of their local congregation only.

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[140] "ICOC Churches," accessed November 21, 2022, https://icocco-op.org/church-list/.

[141] Carroll, "Designing," 19–20.

[142] Carroll, "Designing," 20.

Survey of Sample Churches

The researcher elected to utilize a sample in this study rather than attempting to survey all ICOC churches in the United States. Samples are economical and often can be more accurate than sampling the entire population.[143] Churches were selected to participate based on three criteria. The first was geographical region. The ICOC churches in the United States are organized into eleven regions or families of churches. At least three churches from each were invited to participate in the survey, with the goal of at least two churches from each region completing the survey. Seven regions had two participants, two regions had three participants, and two regions had four participants.

Within each region, the researcher determined to have representative churches of various sizes participate in the survey. The goal was to include at least one church with a membership under 500 and one church with a membership over 500 for each region. There were eleven churches of over 500 members, one from each US region, that participated in the survey, and 17 with memberships under 500.

This study was stratified in that it used certain attributes of a population within the group to select the sample.[144] Churches within regions were selected not only by the size of membership but also according to the generally perceived amount of influence within a region that each church has. Preference was given in the selection by the researcher to churches that have a reputation and history of being more influential within their region of US churches.

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[143] Carroll, "Designing," 23.

[144] Carroll, "Designing," 24.

The survey was designed to quantify the beliefs and practices of participant churches in seven specific areas. The first revolved around the beliefs and teachings of the church regarding the importance of acknowledging and addressing issues of racial diversity, unity, and common understanding. The five questions in this section aimed to discover whether churches valued addressing racial issues, which could then be compared to the degree to which they implemented actions in those same areas.

The second measured the frequency with which those issues have been publicly acknowledged and addressed in the church every year. The four questions in this section determined whether churches never spoke out on racial issues in the church or if they did so every few years, one to two times a year, three to five times a year, or six or more times a year. The primary aim of these questions was to determine whether the stated beliefs of a church were put into action and to what frequency.

The third area consisted of four questions that examined the specific attitudes and beliefs of churches concerning the existence of historical racial inequities in society. This line of questioning would help to clarify whether churches simply valued racial diversity or if they also agreed that there are historical inequities due to racial superiority that must be acknowledged and addressed by churches today.

The fourth section of the survey measured the degree to which addressing issues of racial diversity, equity, and common understanding are considered a core or central part of the gospel and presented to the congregation. This section, when compared with the beliefs around racial equity, would help determine whether the beliefs and actions of churches matched racial inequities in society.

The fifth section utilized four questions to examine the importance and frequency of providing opportunities for members of the church to engage in cross-cultural and cross-racial communication with others within the congregation. This differs from whether or not the church publicly addresses such issues and examines the degree to which churches believe their members must have opportunities to dialogue with one another in areas of racial diversity and equity as well as the frequency to which those opportunities are organized within the formal events of the church.

The sixth component consisted of four questions and asked participants to assess the importance of specific education and training in racial understanding, unity, and equity, as well as the frequency with which those opportunities occur.

The seventh area consisted of four questions and examined the commitment to structural change within the life of a church. It asked participants to gauge the importance of structural change to obtain racial equity in their church in the specific areas of economic inequities, housing segregation, educational inequities, leadership opportunity inequities, and cultural influence imbalances. It also explored congregants' opportunities to express opinions and call for change in the church's approach to structural changes.

In preparation for survey distribution, the researcher field-tested the language utilized in the survey as instruments from October 24, 2022 through October 31, 2022, to determine that the wording used was clear and universally understood. After receiving IRB approval and confirmation through field testing that the language utilized in the survey was consistently understood, the researcher distributed the surveys to the church leaders selected for the survey. The researcher chose this method of investigation and data collection to obtain as much relevant and timely information as possible while

remaining mindful of cost and time resources. This method does create the inability to gain further in-depth data from participants and is open to unintentional misrepresentations from participants due to inaccurate recollection of the frequency of efforts and events. This method also creates a side effect of the participants representing their personal views rather than accurately representing the practices, beliefs, and behaviors of the congregation.

Qualitative Interviews

One area that was exposed as a potential misunderstanding was the sixth section regarding efforts from churches to undertake a structural change in response to continuing racial inequities in society that have an impact on the life of their church. Field testing revealed that respondents may indicate when responding affirmatively that their church had implemented structural changes, that those changes might be superficial and immediate remedies, whereas the researcher was seeking information on longer-term solutions that would change not just immediate results but address systemic inequities in a more lasting fashion. For example, a church may have implemented policies to seek greater diversity in ministry staff hirings, and subsequently answered that they had indeed taken steps to enact structural change in leadership diversity. While that is a positive step, that is not what the researcher categorized as structural change. Such a change in that area would entail, as one example, a church examining why there is a shortage of qualified BIPOC candidates to serve in ministry and leadership positions and developing programs that would identify, recruit, and support financially a pool of young people that could be trained to potentially serve in the ministry one day. Over time, this would address the historic imbalance and inequities in access to education and leadership positions that

often result in a field of ministry candidates that is not as representatively diverse as the population of the church or the surrounding community.

Given that information, the sixth section in the survey, regarding structural changes, was judged to inadequately gather the information needed for proper analysis and comparison to Paul's model in the Corinthian congregation. The researcher concluded that participants' answers regarding efforts to undergo structural change, especially in the areas of economic inequities, community segregation, leadership inequities, and educational inequities would reflect only efforts to address immediate issues in the present and would not address long-term efforts to make significant structural changes in the next 5 to 20 years, and that this would hamper proper analysis of the data for this study. The researcher attempted to contact all eight respondents that answered affirmatively to those questions and scheduled follow-up interviews with the five responding participants to seek further information and clarification regarding answers in this section.

The focus of the follow-up interviews was simply on Questions 31 and 32 of the survey to determine if participants that answered that they were undertaking structural changes were referring to present-focused diversity initiatives or true long-term structural change. Open-ended questions[145] were used for these semi-structured interviews so that the participants could more fully explain their approach to structural change and what they meant by that term when giving answers. This method of qualitative research was combined with the quantitative nature of the survey and the consensus of literature that

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[145] William R. Meyers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: Exploration Press, 2000), 50.

has observed a pattern of the American church's unwillingness to engage in significant structural change to address racial inequities.[146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151]

The follow-up interviews indicated that the researcher was correct in the theory that the churches that indicated they had undertaken structural changes in any of those areas were only addressing immediate needs and undertaking short-term remedies and did not have long-term initiatives that would provide more holistic solutions. This was extrapolated to represent the current practices of all participants to which the situation applied.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The researcher developed four research questions and eight hypotheses to guide the study:

RQ1: Do US ICOC Churches value racial diversity, communication between members, and education for their congregation?

H_o1: These churches do place high value in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.

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[146] Emerson and Smith, *Divided*, 153–172.

[147] Jones, *White Too Long*, 223–236.

[148] Jemar Tisby, *How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2021), 156–180.

[149] Christina Barland Edmondson and Chad Brennan, *Faithful Antiracism: Moving Past Talk to Systemic Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 192–207.

[150] Duke L. Kwon and Gregory Thompson, *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2021), 181–208.

[151] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014, accessed November 30, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/?utm_source=copy-link&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share.

H_a1: These churches do not place high value in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.

RQ2: Do US ICOC Churches engage in racial diversity, communication between members, and education for their congregations?

H_o2: These churches actively and consistently engage in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.

H_a2: These churches do not actively and consistently engage in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.

RQ3: Do US ICOC churches believe that racial inequities in society continue to have an impact on the church?

H_o3: These churches do believe that racial inequities in society have an ongoing impact on their churches.

H_a3: These churches do not believe that racial inequities in society have an ongoing impact on their churches.

RQ4: Do US ICOC churches engage in significant structural change to counteract societal racial inequities?

H_o4: These churches do actively engage in making structural changes in their churches that address societal racial inequities.

H_a4: These churches do not actively engage in making structural changes in their churches that address societal racial inequities.

Dependent and Independent Variables

A variable is any characteristic, experience, behavior, or outcome in an investigation that has two or more possible values.[152] A dependent variable is caused or influenced by something else. In other words, dependent variables are the effect. The causes of the dependent variable is an independent variable.

In this study, there are four important independent variables. The first is the belief that racial diversity is important in their church. The second is the belief that racial communication is important in their church. The third is that racial education is an important value in their church. The fourth is that structural change to address racial inequities is important and necessary in their church.

There are four corresponding dependent variables. Each dependent variable revolves around taking action in their church, which would typically be dependent on the importance and value placed on each category. The first dependent variable is engaging actively in racial diversity in their church. The second is engaging actively in racial communication in their church. The third is engaging actively in racial education in their church. The fourth is engaging actively in structural changes that address racial inequities in their church.

Each of the four independent variables had a corresponding research question that guided the investigation into the beliefs and values of each church. Those variables then correspond to the dependent variables of action. Each of the four research questions reflects the independent variables of the beliefs and values of the church. For each question, there are two possible hypotheses. One reflects positive action and the other

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[152] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 46.

represents inaction. The presumption was that there would be a direct correspondence between the presence of belief in the importance of the category and action or the absence of belief in the importance of the category and inaction. Where the responses showed something other than a direct correlation between belief and action, a moderating variable must be present. A moderating variable influences the nature and strength of the expected cause-and-effect relationship.[153]

The majority of historical literature on the systemic and structural impact of racial superiority asserts that these aspects of cultures become invisible over time. If this is correct, then this would be the moderating variable should there be a disconnect between the belief that structural change is a significant action in that area. The reason for this is that church members would be culturally unaware of vestigial inequities resulting from racial superiority and, though they might value structural change, would fail to see areas in which it was specifically needed.

Data Analysis

The survey was conducted and collected through Survey Monkey, a free online survey tool. A strict time limit of two weeks was given for survey responses to reduce survey bias. All 28 respondents either participated within 24 hours of initial receipt or within 24 hours of a reminder email to complete the survey. A single linear regression was used to analyze the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.[154] The researcher analyzed the relationship between the independent variables (belief in the importance of the topics) and the dependent variables (corresponding action or lack

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[153] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 48.

[154] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 334.

thereof). In doing so, the researcher was able to reach conclusions for the research question and hypotheses.

Summary

The results and data analysis in the following chapter were based on the methods and methodology described above. While limiting the study to US ICOC churches, the researcher attempted to make the findings accessible to a broader audience by limiting the study to broad racial topics rather than issues pertinent solely to ICOC churches. The sampling strategy of selecting churches by region, size, and general level of influence allowed for participants and churches to represent a typical cross-section of the research problem. The researcher acknowledged the limitations of the study and research design that could influence the results.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The research for this project consisted of one survey and a follow-up sample interview to clarify the responses to two questions of the survey. The survey consisted of seven sections. Section One focused on determining the level of belief and importance placed by churches on acknowledging and addressing issues of racial diversity. Section Two measured the frequency with which churches intentionally acted upon those beliefs by acknowledging and addressing those same issues. Section Three focused on the beliefs and importance that churches placed on recognizing historical racial inequities that can and do have an impact on the lives of their church members. Section Four focused on measuring the degree to which churches believed addressing issues of race and inequity is central to the gospel. Sections Five, Six, and Seven subsequently focused on the degree and frequency with which churches provided opportunities for dialogue between members on racial issues, provided education for the congregation, and undertook measures to effect structural change to address racial inequities.

The survey utilized two question types. The first type were questions that requested Likert scale responses. Likert scale questions were employed in two variations. Questions that revolved around determining the importance of belief in acknowledging or addressing specific areas requested responses of not at all important (value of one), not too important (value of two), somewhat important (value of three), very important (value of four), and extremely important (value of five). Some questions began with a statement

of belief and measured the level of agreement with that belief and requested responses of disagree strongly (value of one), disagree somewhat (value of two), no position taken on this issue (value of three), agree somewhat (value of four), agree strongly (value of five). Questions that focused on the frequency of implementing those same practices requested responses of never (value of one), seldom, defined as every few years (value of two), occasionally, defined as one to two times a year (value of three), regularly, defined as three to five times a year (value of four), and frequently, defined as six or more times a year (value of five). The second type of question was closed-ended multiple choice. These questions focused on respondents identifying the specific types of actions that were taken in specific areas.

For all questions, the results reflected that a value of four or five was rated as a positive response. Results that reflected a value of one or two were rated as a negative response. Results that reflected a value of three were rated as neutral responses.

The date surveys were administered, November 2022, was used as the anchor for pinpointing current beliefs, positions, and practices for all churches that participated in the study.

Survey of Churches

Surveys were distributed electronically to 33 congregations. Twenty-eight of the churches responded, representing a participation rate of 85%. Twenty-six respondents completed all the questions on the survey. One respondent completed 31 of the 32 questions. One respondent completed 24 of the 32 questions. That survey was included in the results as the participant indicated that the reason for the non-completion of the questions that were skipped was due to his belief that they were too complex to answer

by the scale of the survey. All questions skipped dealt with the application of beliefs in the life of the church. The researcher determined that this did not invalidate the questions that were answered in this survey and assigned no point value to the questions left blank.

Eleven regions comprise the ICOC churches in the United States. At least two churches from each region participated in the study. In all, 46% of the 43,964 members of US ICOC churches are represented by the survey participant churches in this study. Additionally, 16% of the 174 US ICOC churches are represented by the survey participant churches in this study. The following information breaks down that data by US region. The American Commonwealth Region (DE, KY, MD, OH, PA, VA, and WW) had three participant churches that represented 22% of the 4,418 members and 11 of the 26 congregations in that region.[155] The Florida Region (FL) had two participant churches that represented 45% of the 3,567 members and 14 % of the fourteen congregations in that region. The Heartland Region (AR, KS, MO, and NE) had two participant churches representing 31% of the 1,189 members and 22% of the nine congregations in that region. The Midwest (IA, IL, IN, MI, MN, SD, and WI) had four participant churches representing 57% of the 4,488 members and 19% of the 21 congregations in that region. The New England or Northwest Region (CT, MA, ME, NH, VT, and RI) had two participant churches representing 60% of the 3,057 members and 20% of the ten congregations in that region. The New York Region (NJ, NY) had two participant churches representing 85% of the 3,094 members and 29% of the seven congregations in that region. The Northwest Region (AK, ID, MT, OR, and WA) had two

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[155] All current membership numbers were taken from those reported at https://icocco-op.org/church-list/, accessed December 8, 2022.

participant churches representing 43% of the 1,351 members and 13% of the 16

congregations in that region. The Rocky Mountain Region (CO, NM, UT) had two

participant churches representing 71% of the 1,258 members and 29% of the seven

congregations in that region. The Southeast Region (AL, GA, MS, NC, SC, and TN) had

four participant churches representing 37% of the 6,282 members and 13% of the 31 total

congregations in that region. The Pacific Southwest Region (AZ, CA, HI, and NV) had

two participant churches representing 41% of the 12,670 members and 11% of the 18

congregations in that region. The Texas/Oklahoma/Louisiana Region (TX, OK, and LA)

had three participant churches representing 50% of the 2,590 members and 20% of the 15

congregations in that region.

Introductory Section: Church Information

The first three questions on the survey were considered an introduction section

and not listed as one of the seven sections of the survey itself. These questions helped

establish the region that each participating church represented and the size of the

congregation. This information ensured that each of the eleven regions was represented in

the survey and that the balance of churches under 500 and those over 500 participated in

the survey. Question 1 simply identified the name of individual churches for tracking

purposes. Question 2 (Table 1) identified the region that participating churches belong to.

The chart shows the percentage of regional participation of responding churches.

Question 3 (Figure 1) reflects church size. Churches are divided into two categories for

results analysis: Churches that are under 500 and churches greater than 500.

Table 1: (Q2) US regional participation in survey

US Regions of ICOC Churches
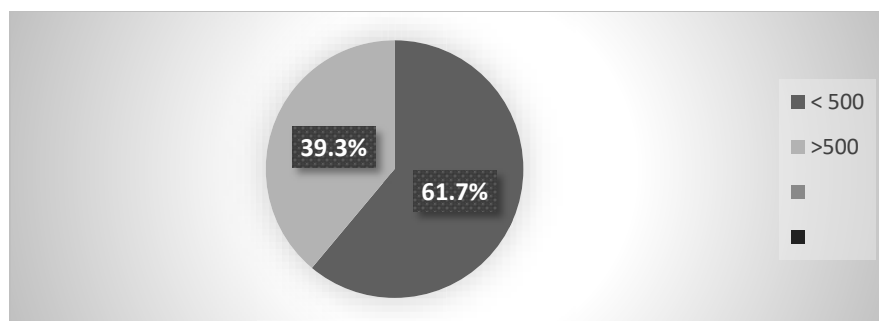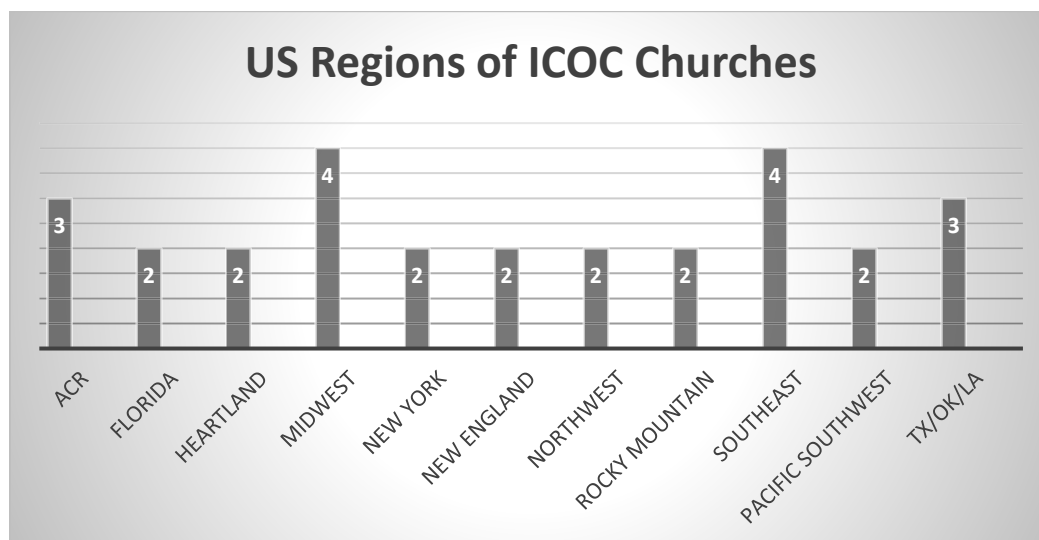
Figure 1: (Q3) Congregational membership

Section One: Church Beliefs

The data in this section was gathered to document the beliefs of individual congregations regarding the importance of racial unity, diversity, common understanding of one another, and racial equity.

Question 4 posits a question concerning whether a church believes that it is important to acknowledge and address issues of racial unity. The question asks whether the leadership of the church believes in and talks internally about these issues, as opposed to Section Two, which measures the degree to which churches publicly address such

issues from the pulpit. This was important to establish the level to which churches believe that racial unity is a proper and necessary topic within the life and teaching of the church, to determine whether the practices and actions of the church correlate to their beliefs.

Significantly, there were no negative responses with values of 1 or 2. Nearly 1 in 5 respondents (17.9%) responded with a neutral answer, while over 80% responded that they believe that it is important to them that issues of racial unity be addressed in their church.
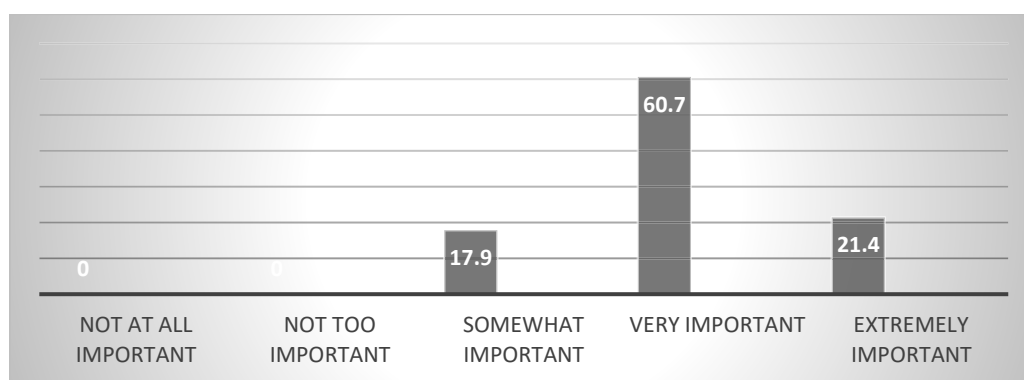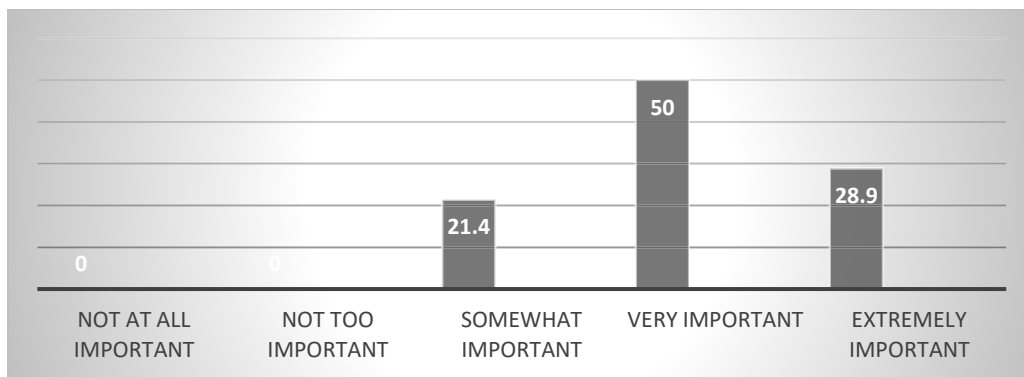

Figure 2: (Q4) Importance of belief and engagement in issues of racial unity

Question 5 queried the importance of acknowledging and addressing racial diversity. It is one thing to value racial unity, but believing in it as a core value pushes a church toward pursuing diversity rather than merely speaking about racial unity.

Question 5 yielded similar results to Question 4. Slightly more than one in five (21.4%) responded with the neutral, "somewhat important" answer, while none gave negative scoring responses. 78.6% gave answers with a value of 4 or 5. For both Questions 4 and 5, a value of 4 was significantly more popular than a value of 5 response.
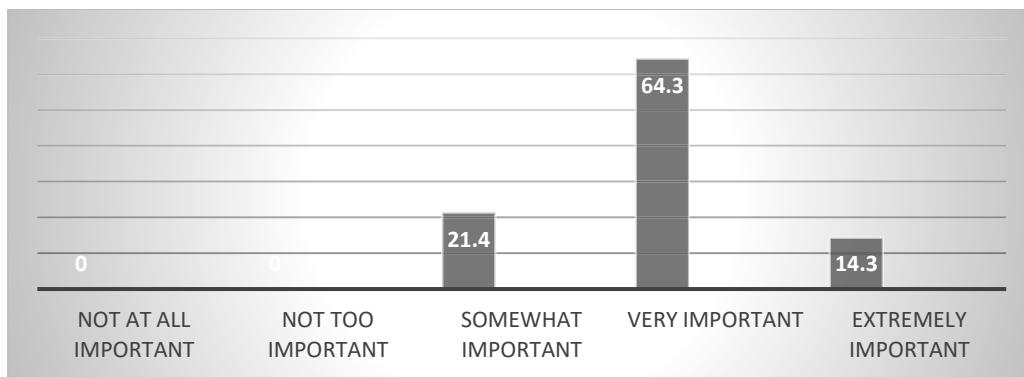
Figure 3: (Q5) Importance of belief and engagement in issues of racial diversity

Question 6 continued to examine the beliefs of churches. This time the question focused on fostering and maintaining racial understanding between different ethnic and racial groups within the church. This question is important because it moves one step further into beliefs that would seem to necessitate action and intention on behalf of the church that values racial understanding and believes it is important.

The neutral responses to this question were similar to the previous two, being in the general range of 1 in 5 (21.4%). While the total positive responses with a value of 4 or 5 reflected a similar total to the previous two questions (78.6%), there was a greater number of respondents, eight in all (28.6%), that answered that this was extremely important to them (value of 5) compared with six respondents giving that value for Question 4 and four respondents identifying that answer for Question 5.

Figure 4: (Q6) Importance of belief and engagement in issues of racial understanding

Question 7 focuses on the belief in the importance of acknowledging and addressing issues of racial equity. Racial equity has to do with recognizing that there is a need to address continuing historic imbalances created by social structures constructed around racial superiority that was accepted in society. Those imbalances are presumed in this question. This question is important because belief in the need for equity will be compared to later questions that focus on the church's belief that there are societal inequities based on racial superiority. Churches that identify belief in the need for racial equity should identify a corresponding existence of inequities and which should lead to them taking actions that deal with structural change.

Question 7 is the only question in Section One that elicited responses with negative values. Three respondents (10.7%) selected the "not too important" response (value of 2). Nearly one-third (32.1%) of the churches identified the neutral, "somewhat important" response as representative of their beliefs. A total of sixteen participants (67.2%) chose answers that rated a positive value of 4 or 5.
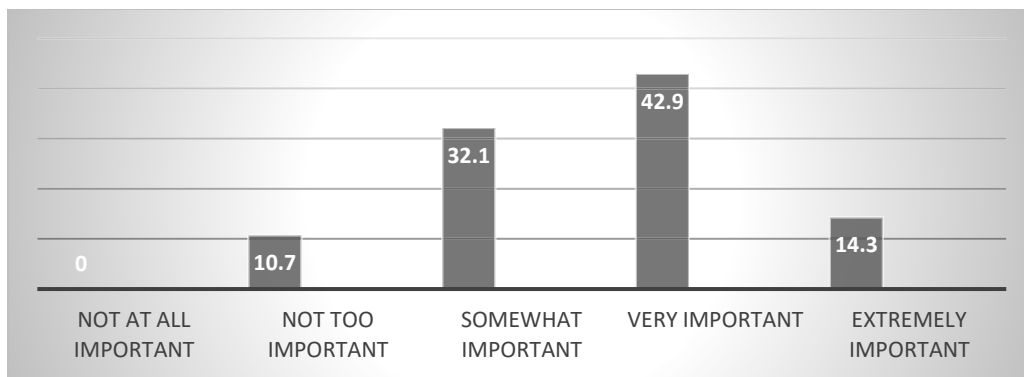
Figure 5: (Q7) Importance of belief and engagement in issues of racial equity

Section Two: Publicly Addressing Racial Issues

This section focuses on the actions of churches when it comes to taking public stances primarily in the form of publicly addressing and preaching on issues surrounding racial superiority. Question 8 was a multiple-response question where church leaders identified the means used that qualified as publicly addressing racial issues.

While there were numerous means through which churches communicated publicly with their congregations, Question 8 revealed that sermons, and public prayers were the most common methods, followed by public statements and written materials.

Question 9 queries whether churches address and preach about racial diversity and its importance.

Just one respondent (3.6%) gave a negative response indicating that they "seldom" addressed such issues publicly. A neutral response of "occasionally" was selected by 21.4 participants. A combined total of answers with a value of 4 or 5 checked in at 75% answering positive in taking action.
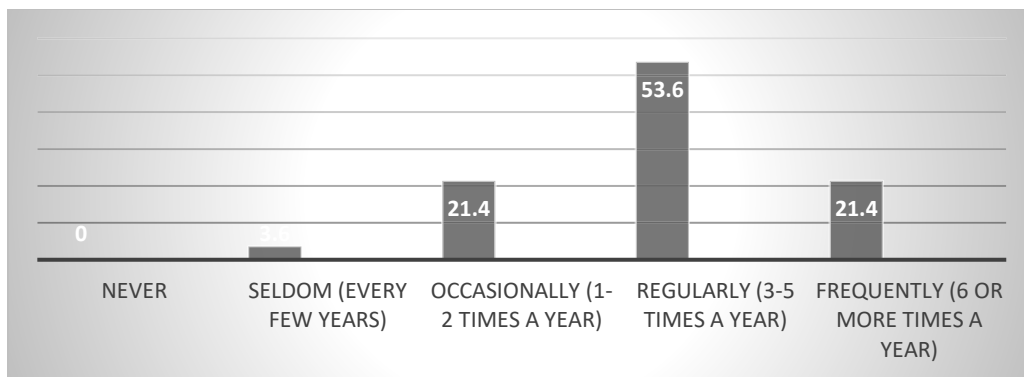
Figure 6: (Q9) Publicly addressing issues of racial diversity

Question 10 asked whether churches publicly address obstacles to being a multiracial church. This question not only examines the public stance and actions taken by churches but demonstrates whether they include dealing with issues that are challenging and less comfortable than simply speaking about positive aspects of racial diversity and unity.

Recorded responses to this question demonstrated that 18.5% of churches "never" or "seldom" addressed such issues. Just over one-fourth of respondents (25.9%) gave a neutral response. Churches selecting a positive value response were 55.5%).
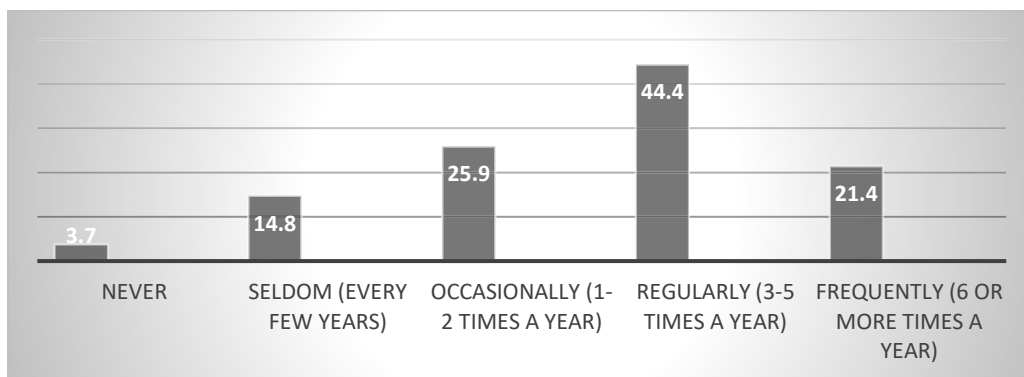
Figure 7: (Q10) Publicly addressing obstacles to being a multiracial church

Question 11 asked participants to quantify the frequency with which they publicly address, primarily through preaching and public prayers, issues that relate to

understanding the perspective of other races and cultures. This question was aimed at

measuring the degree to which churches put their stated beliefs into practice.

A notable variance between belief and enactment was demonstrated in the response to

this question. While 78.6% of churches rated their belief with a positive value of 4 or 5

and 21.4% gave a neutral answer, only 51.8 gave positive answers to addressing the same

issue. Additionally, neutral answers comprised 37% of respondents, and 11.1 answered

negatively with either a 1 or 2 value.
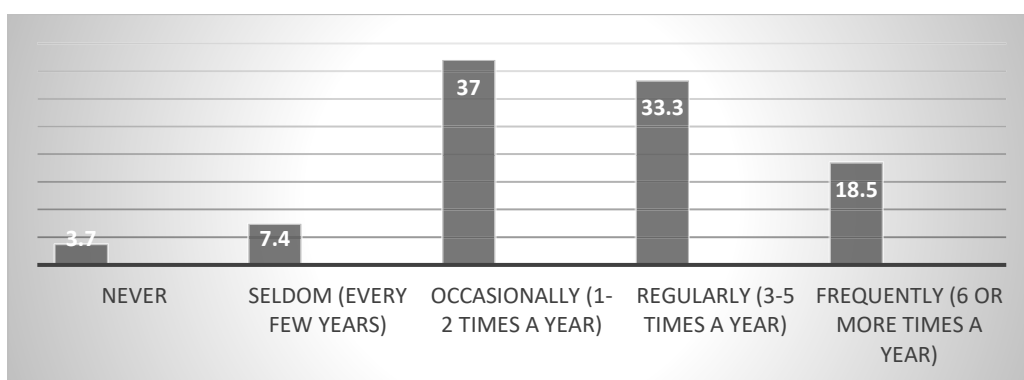
Figure 8: (Q11) Publicly addressing issues of racial understanding

Question 12 focused on public acknowledgment and examination of racial equity.

This question paired with the church's beliefs on racial equity.

Responses to this question, again, demonstrate a disconnect between belief in the

importance of an issue and the consistent action of addressing and dealing with that issue

in the public life of the church. When it came to believing that racial equity should be

addressed, the scores demonstrated a 57.2% positive score, 32.1% neutral, and 10.7%

gave it a value of 2. Conversely, the scores for actively addressing the issue with the

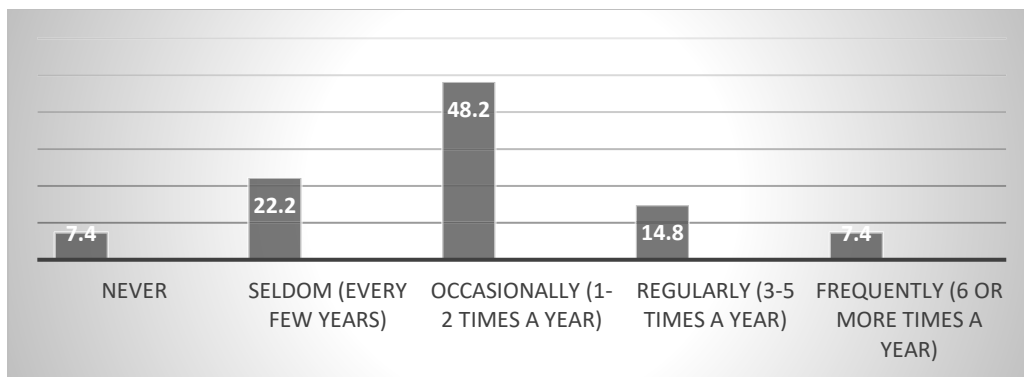church were just 22.2% positive, 48.2% neutral, and 29.6% negative.

Figure 9: (Q12) Publicly addressing issues of racial equity

Section Three: Historical Racial Inequities

Questions in Section One and Section Two asked churches to examine their belief and actions concerning racial equity. This section approaches the issue from another angle by examining the church's beliefs and actions concerning historical racial inequities that have been caused by racial superiority in the surrounding culture. Individuals and groups can proclaim a strong belief in the existence of racial equity but also deny that there have been and still are inequities due to racial superiority. Belief in racial equity alone can be theoretical and encouraging and affirming to an individual or group while belief in racial inequities can be more uncomfortable and challenge a group's preferred identity and view of the world. Questions 13 through 15 examined the church's belief surrounding racial inequities, while Question 16 confirmed that public prayers and sermons were the most common forms of publicly addressing such issues for those that did address them.

Question 13 asked whether churches believe that historically in the United States there have been attitudes and actions of racial superiority that have resulted in various inequities between racial groups. Question 14 similarly asked if the effects of those inequities continue to the present day.

The positive rated responses were high for both Question 13 (89.3%) and Question 14 (92.6%) indicating an overwhelming belief in the idea of historical racial inequities that continue to affect society at all levels today.
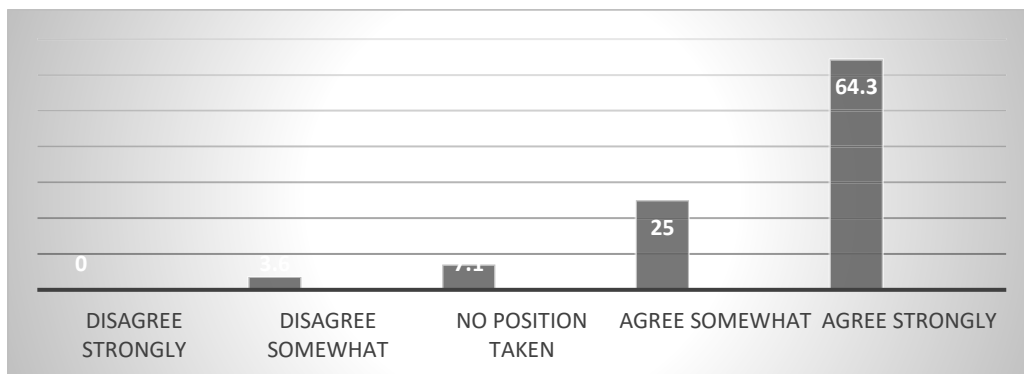

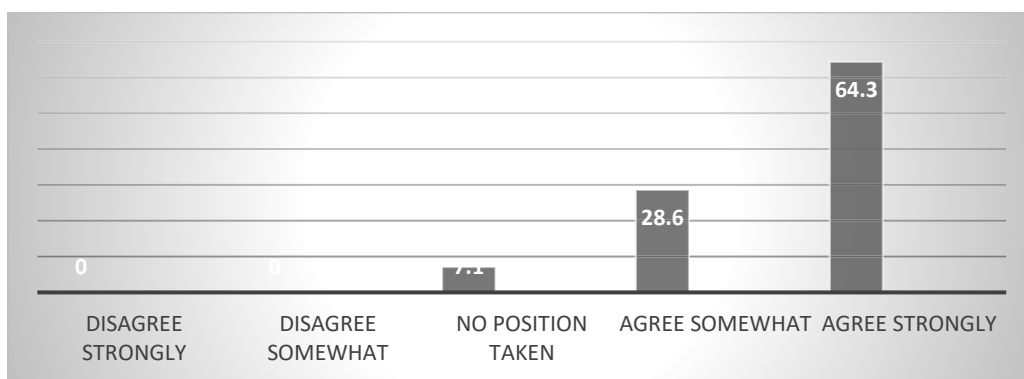Figure 10: (Q13) Belief in societal inequities created by racial superiority

Figure 11 : (Q14) Historic inequities continue to negatively impact the US

Question 15 looked at whether these churches that identified a strong belief in racial inequities believed that it is the role and place of the church to address those inequities.
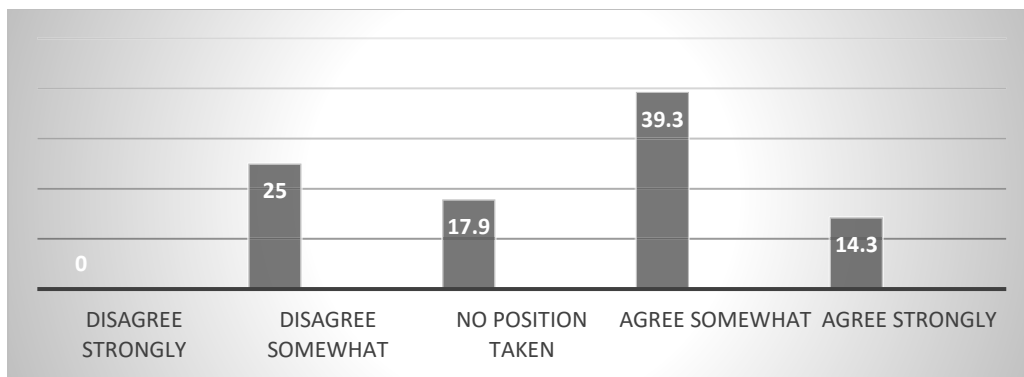
Figure 12: (Q15) It is the church's role to address and act against inequities

While approximately 90% of respondents believed that racial inequities both

existed in the past and continue to affect the present, only 53.6 responded that they

"somewhat" or "strongly" agreed that it is the place of the church to address those issues.

The neutral response was 17.9%, while the negative responses were 28.4%.

Section Four: Central to the Gospel

The idea of keeping the focus on the gospel and issues central to the gospel have

historically been an important concept in ICOC churches. The questions in this section

determined the degree to which church leaders identified beliefs on behalf of their

churches that issues of racial diversity and equity are not only important but are issues

that are central to the gospel itself. Questions 17 to 20 each identify various elements of

racial diversity and inclusion, asking whether these items are central to the gospel.

It is important in ICOC churches to establish a connection between the believed

importance of an issue and its centrality to the gospel. Issues that are not considered

central to the gospel are not seen as priorities in preaching or church-sponsored action.

This study confirms that indeed issues surrounding racial diversity and equity are

predominantly viewed as gospel issues. Positive value responses were the overwhelming

responses for Question 17 (92.5%), Question 18 (96.3%), Question 19 (92.9%), and

Question 20 (75%). A degree of plurality did begin to show in Question 20 concerning the issue of racial equity and centrality to the gospel with neutral responses marking 10.7% and negative value responses at 14.3%.
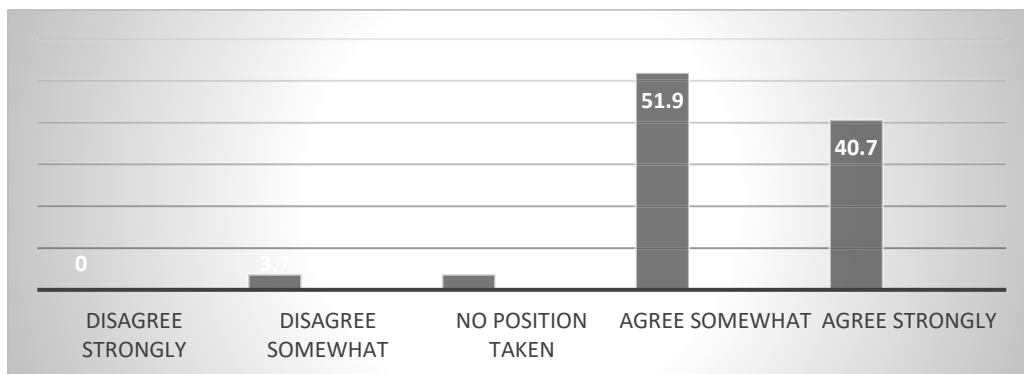

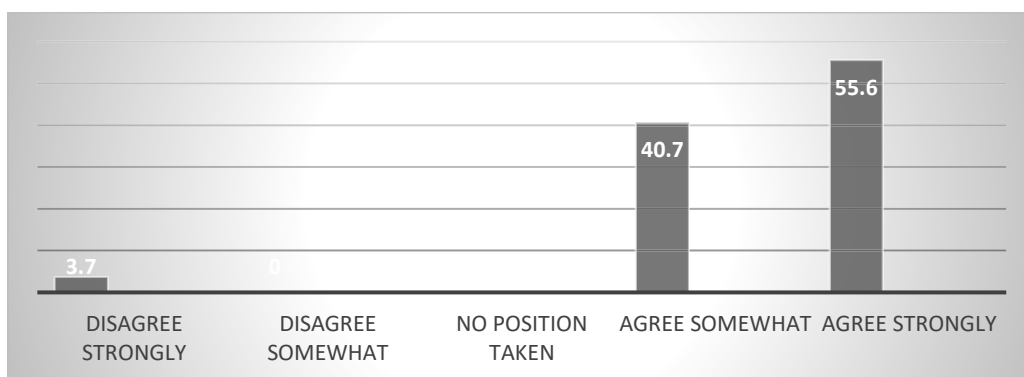Figure 13: (Q17) Preaching on racial diversity and the gospel

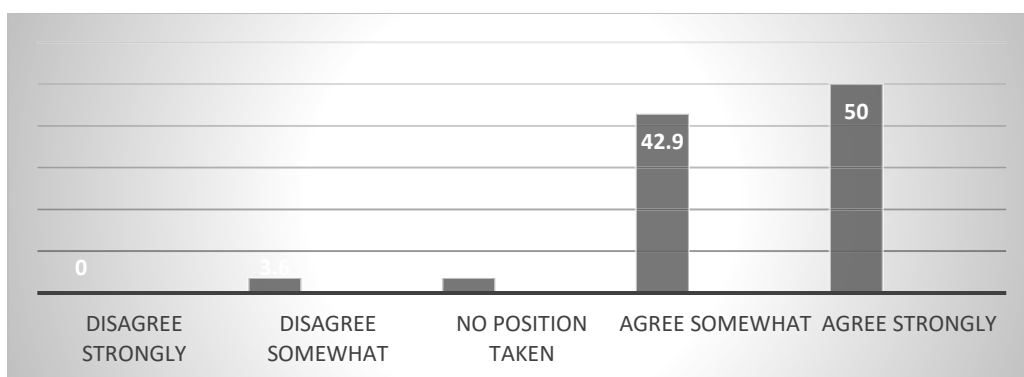Figure 14: (Q18) Preaching on racial obstacles and the gospel

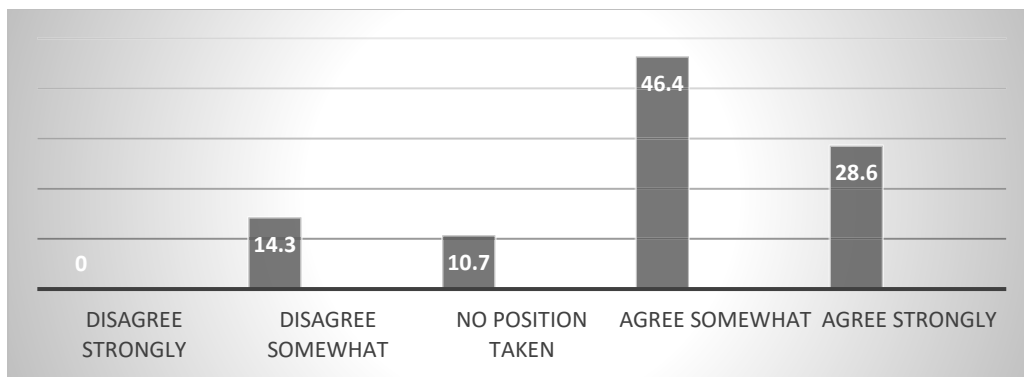Figure 15: (Q19) Preaching on racial understanding and the gospel

Figure 16: (Q20) Preaching on racial inequity is society and the gospel

Section Five: Communication and Dialogue in Action

This section returned to the topic of racial dialogue and communication within a church. Most of the churches noted believing that communication between members on racial topics was important. This section attempted to measure the degree to which churches followed through with action in that area.

Question 21 asked about the priority that churches placed in teaching members effective methods of communication and dialogue.

Responses indicated that teaching member engagement in dialoguing was important, with a value of 4, "very important," being the most common response. In all, 82.1% of responses were of positive value, 10.7% were neutral, and just 7.1% were in the negative value categories.
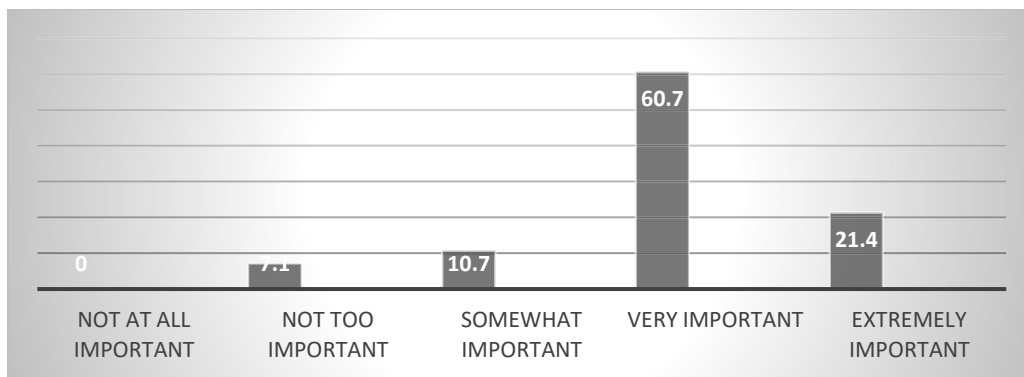
Figure 17: (Q21) Importance of teaching a church to engage in racial dialogue

Question 22 asked churches to identify whether they believed it is important to facilitate racial dialogue among members as an official church-sponsored activity. Churches may believe that dialogue is important and even instruct how to do it effectively, but not believe that it is the place of the congregation to provide time and opportunities to do so and simply leave it to the discretion of the members.

Most respondents indicated that facilitating dialogue was a positive value for them (60.7%). There was, however, a significant portion of participants that gave a neutral response (35.7%).
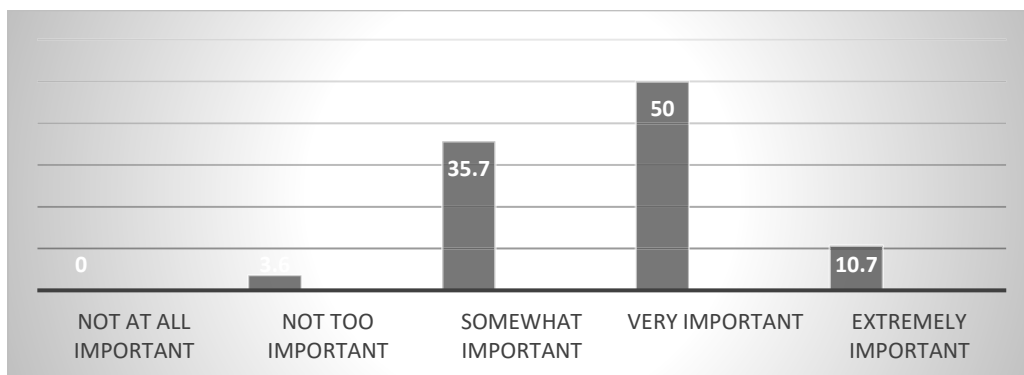

Figure 18: (Q22) Importance of a church facilitating racial dialogue

The significant neutral response to the previous question highlighted the importance of Question 23: do churches regularly provide opportunities for racial dialogue and communication?

This question revealed a slight preference toward regular and frequent opportunities, which were a combined 50% of responses. The more neutral response of "occasionally" garnered the highest single-category response with 42.3%. Question 24 revealed that special teaching days or workshops, scheduled times of sharing and openness in small groups, and directed small-group activities were the most common forms of church engagement.
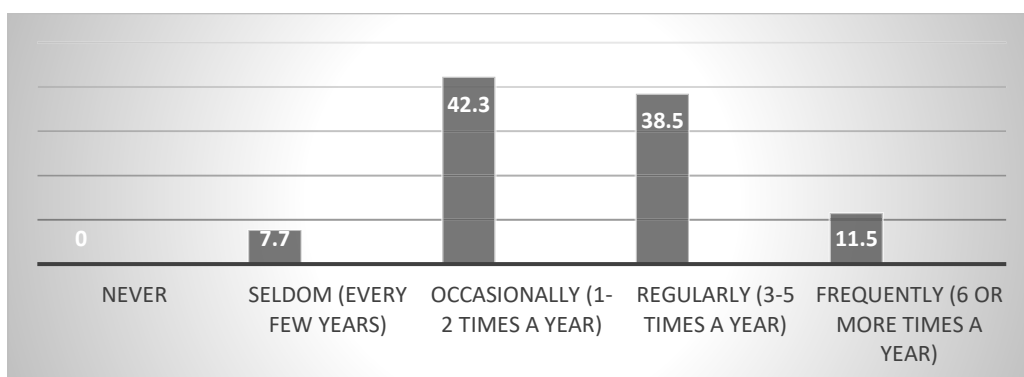

Figure 19: (Q 23) The action of facilitating racial dialogue

Section Six: Church-Wide Education

Earlier questions indicated a high level of belief that educating members on issues of racial diversity and equity was present in most ICOC churches studied. The questions in this section attempted to determine if those beliefs translated to consistent action on the part of the churches.

Question 25 examined whether churches believed it to be important for members to engage in education and training in biblical teaching surrounding race. Question 26

explored the degree to which churches felt it was their responsibility to facilitate opportunities for education and learning.

Most churches exhibited a conviction that education and training were important. Respondents indicated positive responses at 60.7%, but there was a significant level of neutral responses (28.6%) and negative responses (10.7%). Fewer churches were convinced that education and training were their responsibility. Just 51.8% of churches gave positive responses, 37% gave neutral responses, and 11.1% gave negative responses.
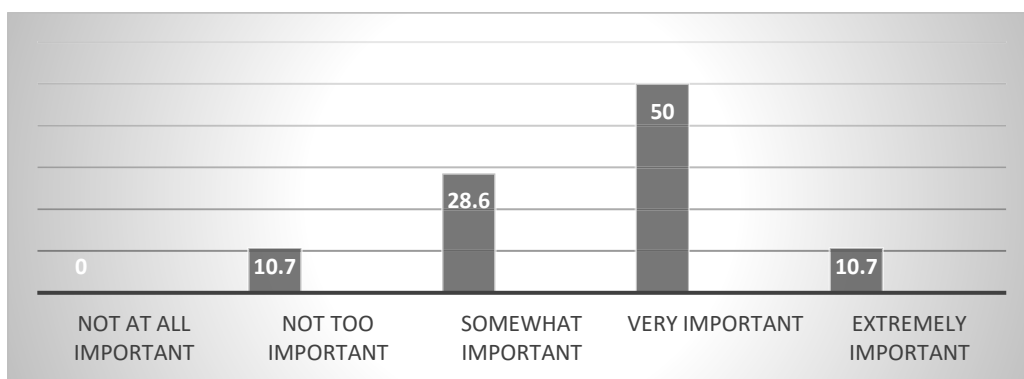
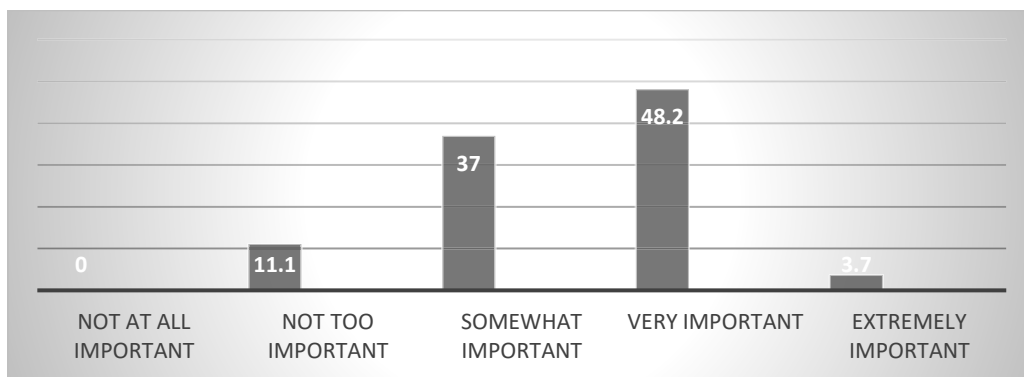Figure 20: (Q25) Importance of engaging in racial education and training

Figure 21: (Q26) Importance of a church facilitating racial education and training

Question 27 examined whether churches consistently engaged in times of teaching and education on racial issues. This question was aimed directly at determining the level of action that could be compared with belief.

The response to this question indicated a more neutral implementation of biblical teaching with "occasionally" being the most popular response at 59.3%. Just 29.6% indicated a positive response, none of which were a value of level 5 responses, and 11.1% were negative responses, although no respondents selected the 1 value response of "never." Question 28 revealed that the most popular options for church education opportunities were workshops, sermon series, and leadership training sessions.
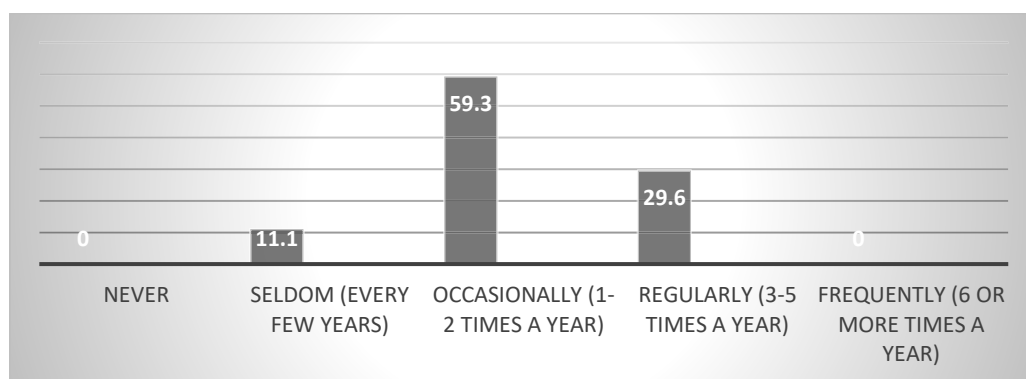
Figure 22: (Q27) This church provides racial education and training

Section Seven – Structural Change

The final section of the survey examined the attitudes and implementation of the churches in the realm of structural changes to address racial inequities. As was the case with dialogue and communication in the previous two sections, this section sought to determine the connection between belief and action.

Question 29 asked whether it was important for a church to examine itself to determine if it had mirrored any of the societal inequities caused by racial superiority in the life of the church and to subsequently make structural changes to address those

inequities. Question 30 explored the degree to which churches provided opportunities to examine inequities and enact structural change.

The responses indicated that a majority of churches felt that examination and structural change were important. The combined positive responses were 64.3%, the neutral response was 35.7%, and there were no negative responses. There was a slight unexpected anomaly in that a greater number of churches gave positive responses to the question whether the church should provide opportunities for examination and structural change (71.4%). The neutral responses regarding the responsibility of the church to create space for exploration and change were lower (21.4%) and the negative responses were higher (7.1%).
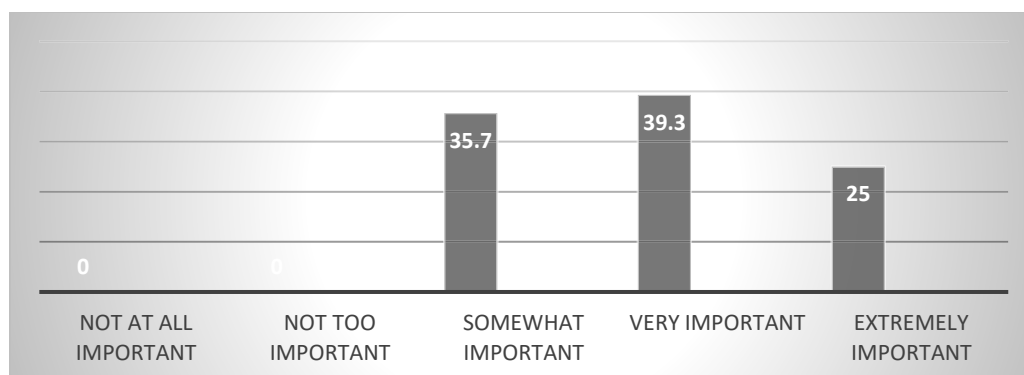
Figure 23: (Q29) Importance of self-examination of inequities and engagement in structural change
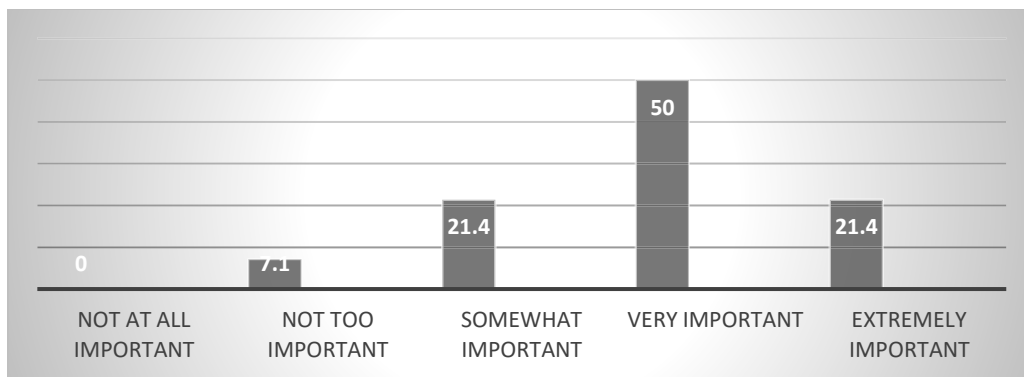
Figure 24: (Q30) Providing opportunities for self-examination of inequities and engagement in structural change

Question 31 examined the frequency with which attempts were made at self-examination and structural change. Efforts were limited as only 14.8% of respondents indicated positive level responses, while 48.2% indicated the more neutral, "occasionally" as an answer, and 37% indicated negative responses. Only 7.4% indicated that they never engaged in these matters.
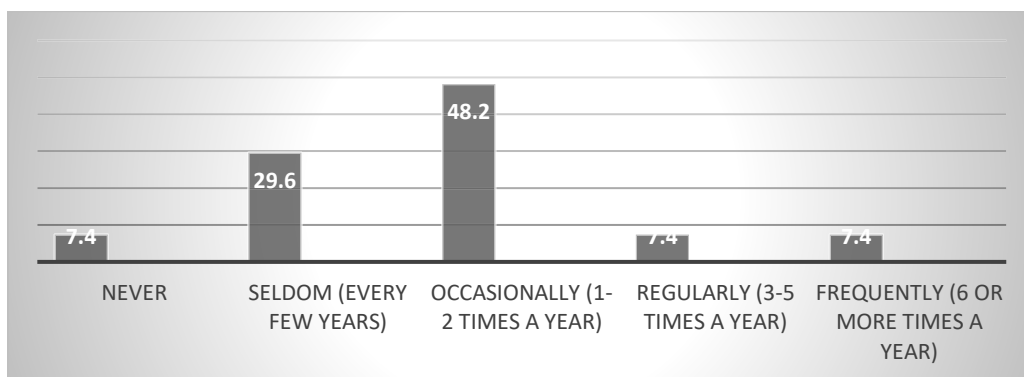
Figure 25: (Q31) Engagement in examination and structural change

Question 32 asked churches to identify the types of structural change. An examination of this question was vital to this study to determine which activities of change the churches engaged in, specifically if they dealt with difficult and bigger inequities such as economics, housing segregation, educational and leadership

opportunity, or if their efforts were focused on areas such as cultural imbalances and opportunities for members to share their concerns and opinions.

The responses to this question reveal a pattern that became even clearer in the light of sample follow-up interviews. Over a quarter of the churches have taken no action in any of these areas (25.9%). Less than 20% of churches engaged in steps to enact structural changes in the economic realities of their members (18.5%), in addressing housing and community segregation experienced by their members (11.1%), and in counteracting educational opportunities and inequities in the lives of their members (14.8%). The numbers took a dramatic turn when it came to enacting changes in leadership diversity (66.7%) and taking steps to address imbalances in cultural influence and power (59.3%). Of the six church leaders followed up with, all but one indicated that engagement in those areas confirmed that their involvement could be defined as making efforts to improve the current situation by being conscious and intentional about addressing and considering those areas. What they have not done is engage in a true structural change where long-term strategies were devised to not just work within the present system of inequity to bring about the best possible circumstances but to change the system so that it would not continue to be a problem in the future. For example, the churches interviewed all took some form of ensuring that their leadership groups and full-time staff were increasingly diverse. And they all noted that finding such candidates can be challenging because of a lack of qualified people. Yet they were not engaged in plans to increase the educational opportunities of young BIPOC people so that the shortage of qualified leaders would eventually be eliminated. Nearly 60% of the churches surveyed indicated that they took steps to provide opportunities for members to have a voice in

matters of needed structural change. What emerged is that participation by churches in significant structural change is below 20% in all categories of action. The only area of a positive level of engagement is in getting suggestions.

Research Questions and Hypotheses Testing

The researcher developed four research questions and eight hypotheses to guide the study:

RQ1: Do US ICOC Churches value racial diversity, communication between members, and education for their congregation?

H_o1: These churches do place high value in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.

H_a1: These churches do not place high value in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.

RQ2: Do US ICOC Churches engage in racial diversity, communication between members, and education for their congregations?

H_o2: These churches actively and consistently engage in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.

H_a2: These churches do not actively and consistently engage in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.

RQ3: Do US ICOC churches believe that racial inequities in society continue to have an impact on the church?

H_o3: These churches do believe that racial inequities in society have an ongoing impact on their churches.

H$_a$3: These churches do not believe that racial inequities in society have an ongoing impact on their churches.

RQ4: Do US ICOC churches engage in significant structural change to counteract societal racial inequities?

H$_o$4: These churches do actively engage in making structural changes in their churches that address societal racial inequities.

H$_a$4: These churches do not actively engage in making structural changes in their churches that address societal racial inequities.

Table 2: Hypothesis Summary

HYPOTHESIS	RESULT	SUMMARY
H$_o$1: These churches do place high value in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.	Failed to Reject	The statistics demonstrate a high level of value placed on these areas.
H$_a$1: These churches do not place high value in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.	Reject	The statistics do not demonstrate that the churches fail to value these areas.
H$_o$2: These churches actively and consistently engage in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members.	Failed to Reject	The statistics demonstrate a high level of consistent engagement in these areas.
H$_a$2: These churches do not actively and consistently	Reject	The statistics do not demonstrate that the

engage in the areas of racial diversity, communication between members, and ongoing education for members		churches fail to engage in these areas.
H_o3: These churches do believe that racial inequities in society have an ongoing impact on their churches.	Failed to Reject	The statistics demonstrate a high level of belief in this area.
H_a3: These churches do not believe that racial inequities in society have an ongoing impact on their churches.	Reject	The statistics do not demonstrate that the churches fail to believe in this area.
Ho4: These churches do actively engage in making structural changes in their churches that address societal racial inequities.	Reject	The statistics do not demonstrate a high level of engagement in this area.
Ha4: These churches do not actively engage in making structural changes in their churches that address societal racial inequities.	Failed to Reject	The statistics demonstrate that these churches do not engage in a high level of activity in this area.

Further Analysis of Hypotheses

A comparative analysis of questions that were part of the survey in this study reveals certain conclusions that can tentatively be reached regarding the beliefs of most ICOC churches where racial diversity and unity issues are concerned. Conclusions can also be tentatively reached regarding the commitment to action and engagement in those areas. Finally, tentative conclusions can be reached regarding the connection between belief and action in the various areas studied.

This study conclusively demonstrated that ICOC churches possess strong beliefs in the importance of racial unity, diversity, understanding between different racial groups

within the church, and the existence of racial inequities in society. The belief that racial

equity is important to seek in the church is not as strong as in the aforementioned areas,

but still represents a majority of the participant churches.

Table 3: Summary of racial beliefs

	Pos. Response %	Neut. Response %	Neg. Response %
Strong belief in racial unity	82.1	17.9	0
Publicly addressing obstacles to unity	55.5	25.9	18.5
Strong belief in racial diversity	78.6	21.4	0
Publicly addressing racial diversity	75	21.4	3.6
Strong belief in intergroup racial understanding	78.6	21.4	0
Publicly addressing intergroup understanding	51.8	37	11.1
Strong belief in racial equity	57.3	32.1	10.7
Publicly addressing racial equity	22.2	48.2	29.6

Strong belief in racial inequities in society	89.3	7.1	3.6
A strong belief that inequities currently impact the church	92.9	7.1	0
A strong belief that the church should act on inequities	53.6	17.9	28.6

The question then became does belief in the general areas of race in the church carry into corresponding high belief in the importance of specific areas that respond to inequities created by historic racial superiority? Beyond that, did high belief in the importance of remedies to racial imbalances and inequities lead to consistent action on the part of the churches? There was a need to examine separately the three areas highlighted in this study: congregational dialogue and communication, education, and structural change, as nuance was demanded in looking at the results of the survey.

Table 4: Congregational Dialogue Summary

	Pos. Response %	Neut. Response %	Neg. Response %
Congregational dialogue is important	82.1	10.7	7.1
The church has provided opportunities for dialogue	50	42.3	7.7

The numbers here gave an initial impression that there is a strong belief that congregational dialogue is important but that corresponding action in fostering dialogue among members is significantly lower. What needed to be considered is the percentage of respondents who indicated a neutral answer. A neutral answer here did not indicate a

complete lack of action. Rather, it indicated a frequency of action that was considered by the researcher to be generally ineffective to create the level of connection necessary to create change in this area. Infrequent conversations and dialogue on racial issues were unlikely to counteract the preconceived notions that members possessed. The researcher concluded that action in this area was taken by churches in numbers consistent with their belief but with a higher probability that it was ineffective to produce significant change or intergroup understanding.

Table 5: Congregational education summary

	Pos. Response %	Neut. Response %	Neg. Response %
Racial education is important	60.7	28.6	10.7
The church has promoted racial education	29.6	59.3	11.1

The belief of ICOC churches studied in the importance of racial education for their congregations is not as strong as that of dialogue. The positive response rate was more than 20 points lower and there was a slightly higher negative response. The corresponding numbers demonstrate that action needed to be viewed with the same nuance as the previous category. A neutral response level does indicate a commitment to action but likely at a frequency that would be ineffective.

Table 6: Congregational engagement in structural change summary

	Pos. Response %	Neut. Response %	Neg. Response %
It is important to examine needed structural changes	64.3	35.7	0

The church takes steps toward structural change	14.8	48.1	37

Stated belief in the need for structural change was high. The positive response rate for action in this area was low at 14.8%. Since structural change requires ongoing intentional action, the neutral response, which indicated engagement one or two times a year, was judged by the researcher to be primarily acts of symbolism or actions that may have been interpreted by church leaders as having to do with structural change but were not truly actions that could result in large structural changes. The effective engagement and efforts toward structural change became clearer when individual categories of change were examined.

Table 7: Church engagement in structural change summary

	Churches engaged	Churches not engaged
Economic inequities	18.5	81.5
Housing segregation	11.1	88.9
Educational inequities	14.8	85.2
Leadership diversity inequities	66.7	33.3
Cultural influence & power inequities	55.6	44.4
Member input	59.3	40.7

The data revealed that there is a very low level of engagement by ICOC churches to address inequities in the economy, housing segregation, and education. None of those categories saw greater than 20% engagement. The follow-up interviews revealed

specifically that the number of 66.7% in the area of leadership diversity and cultural influence and power was potentially misleading. The analysis of interviews with six churches that indicated engagement in both of those areas revealed that in five of the six, engagement was limited to actions that attempted to address inequities but were not long-term strategies that would fundamentally change the structures in their systems that produced such inequities. The tentative conclusion was that, despite a strong belief in inequities and a belief in the need for structural change, corresponding action by churches was relatively low in all areas except in receiving input from members. Additionally, 25.9% of churches reported no attempts at structural change.

Summary

The ICOC churches see multiracialism as one of the identifying features of their congregations in the United States. They have a strong belief in racial diversity, unity, common understanding, and equity. They frequently address the positive aspects of those topics, though are less likely to address obstacles and the more challenging aspects. They predominantly believe that racial diversity and unity are central aspects of the gospel. This culminates in having a high degree of group belief in the importance of activities that bridge gaps in racial inequities. They believe strongly in the need for structural change in important areas. Yet this study demonstrated that while they engage at varying levels in efforts at group dialogue and education, there is a dearth of meaningful activity to address needed structural changes.

CHAPTER SIX: MODEL AND EVALUATION

The research problem focused on a proposed need in the ICOC churches for a biblically based model that addresses racial inequities caused in the United States by historical systems based on beliefs in racial superiority. The ICOC churches are typically multiracial by definition and have a strong belief in and have demonstrated a strong commitment to racial unity and diversity. The project examined Paul's approach to social and status superiority in first-century Corinth. With that established, the project examined the history of racial superiority and its impact on both society and the Christian church in the United States. Paul's approach was significant because status and racial superiority are rooted in the same societal lie of superiority. The study in this project looked at the specific beliefs and practices of ICOC churches to determine the degree to which they matched Paul's principles of responding to social beliefs in superiority, systems built on those beliefs, and the inequities created and perpetuated by those systems. The goal of the research was to reveal gaps between current practices in the ICOC and Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians so that a model could be produced that would quantify Paul's approach and demonstrate how it could be applied in a modern context in ICOC churches.

Biblical and Literature Discussion

Biblical Assessment

The first subproblem in this study focused on the issues of superiority and inferiority as social systems in the context of Paul's world and ministry in the first century. The researcher reviewed Paul's first letter to the Corinthians to find principles that could be coalesced into a workable model for analyzing and addressing social and cultural systems of superiority. The research also examined Paul's letter to the Ephesians, looking at the theme of the powers and authorities to help establish an important aspect of Paul's underlying theology that is present in 1 Corinthians but more fully expressed in Ephesians. This was important because sinful structures and systems, for Paul, were evidence of the work of the powers and authorities.

Throughout the letter, Paul engaged in educating the Corinthians about these important topics, implicitly encouraging them to dialogue and communicate with one another about the influence of the surrounding culture and their response to it, and called for them to examine these things and make structural changes.

In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul called for a church that had no divisions among it, referring to the status divisions that were typical of Roman culture. This was a matter of being conformed to the wisdom of the present age or transforming to the wisdom of new creation found in Christ. This wisdom directly opposed the wisdom of the rulers and authorities of the present age (1 Cor. 2:6–8), an allusion that perfectly fit Paul's context since societal division and conflict were the result of the powers and authorities. Throughout the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul demonstrated that in creating

factions around which teacher or leader they valued and placed their identity in, they were mimicking the status games of the world.

In chapter 5 and the first half of chapter 6, Paul illuminated instances in which they were accepting social status conventions and structural injustice into the life of the church. Rather than being an alternate society that was demonstrating the life of God's future age, they were subjecting brothers and sisters of lower social status to the inequities of status superiority.

In the second half of chapter 6 through chapter 10, Paul challenged the church to be aware that their underlying mindset of privilege, opportunity, and personal rights for the elites and those of higher status was contrary to the heart of the gospel. Instead, they should be willing to lay down their rights for the benefit of others (1 Cor. 9:19–23) and live in a way that displayed the rule and glory of God in everything they did (1 Cor. 10:31).

In 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, Paul rebuked the church for a failure to thoroughly examine their practices embodied in the way they observed the Lord's Supper. The status-leveling truth of the gospel was not on display in their observance of the meal. Instead, they were demonstrating that they valued the status and divisions of superiority and inferiority that were intertwined into the systems of the surrounding culture. They should have examined themselves (1 Cor. 11:28) but had failed, and it resulted in dire spiritual consequences (1 Cor. 11:30).

Paul continued offering up his examination of Corinthian failure to reject the values of the culture and live out the gospel by insinuating that they had applied the same tendency to fight for status and prestige through the attainment of spiritual gifts and

valuing some as preferable to others (1 Cor. 12:1–11). He then launched into an explanation of how the body of Christ should function, using a familiar Roman metaphor, that of the human body (1 Cor. 12:12–21). But rather than emphasizing Roman themes of hierarchy and accepting one's role, Paul inverted the picture by depicting a body where the higher parts need the lower parts and asserted that it was, in fact, God who ordered the body exactly as it is.

Paul then zeroed in on the solution to the division that had been caused by following the culture of the present age. The reality was that it was already part of the church. Paul does not take the road toward naivete and argue that baptism somehow automatically wiped away the mindsets and structures of superiority and division. By failing to seriously examine themselves regularly, the only possible result was that they would mirror the division of the world. But what if they did examine themselves and discovered that they had subjected one another to the effects of the great lie of status superiority? Paul answered that implied question and turned their world upside down in just five verses (1 Cor. 12:22–26). The parts of the body that are without honor and status and have been denied justice and equity in the world should be treated with special modesty. His point was that inequities caused by status superiority should be dealt with intentionally and carefully. They should receive special treatment, while those that already have honor and status need no special treatment. This is not favoritism or acting unfairly. God has called those at different levels of status and privilege in society into one family so that those on the bottom can be lifted. Only when this is done will there be no division in the body (1 Cor. 12:25). If one part of the body suffers injustice and is treated as inferior in the world, then everyone in the body takes on that status. They are all

willing to associate fully with those of low position (Rom. 12:16). And when those without honor in the world are lifted to positions of equity, they all should rejoice in that (1 Cor. 12:26). This, he goes on to demonstrate in the next chapter, is what love for one another looks like.

This division that had taken hold of the church was not just a result of individual dislike for one another or individual sin. Quite the contrary. The Corinthian congregation thought they were doing well spiritually (1 Cor. 4:8). They were blind to their culture's influence and largely unaware that their actions were out of sync with the gospel. No, this was much bigger than that. Group division and structural injustice was the calling card of the powers and authorities (Eph. 6:12). When Paul called Christians to strive for unity and avoid division, he almost always alluded to the powers. Their work was at a systemic level, and that must be where it is countered. And this was of vital importance for the church because they are the living evidence (Eph. 2:11–21) and wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10) on display to the powers and authorities that they truly have been defeated by Christ (Eph. 1:18–21) and that that victory is being implemented in the life of the church.

The picture presumed by Paul in his writings to the Corinthians is that through the lie of superiority and the systems of status and privilege that had been built on that lie, the powers had woven the type of division that was present in the world into the life of the church. It was up to him to educate the church, encourage dialogue among them, and most importantly call them to structural change fueled by love for one another.

Literature Assessment

Another subproblem in this project focused on the lie of superiority that manifested in the 15th century based on the human construct of race. The important

elements of this project did not center on the existence of racial superiority; rather, the study examined the social systems and structures that were built or continued to have an impact on society after 1866, the end of the US Civil War. Because it is often accepted that racial systems largely disappeared in the US following that war, it was important to establish a pattern of vestigial structures that continue to perpetuate inequity to the present day. Once that was recognized, it was then necessary to determine whether those same vestigial structures of racial superiority continue to negatively impact US churches. This project focused on multiracial churches, but the implications could have relevance for non-multiracial churches as well.

The literature established a clear pattern of racial inequity that was a sustained and intentional effort by various aspects of the US government and society to preserve advantage for white Americans at the expense of BIPOC citizens. This was built on the foundation of racial superiority constructed between the mid-15th century and the conclusion of the American Civil War. Literature on the subject further demonstrated that these vestigial structures have not, in large part, been torn down by American Christianity but have continued to impact racial equity and race relations inside the church to the present day.

It is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment when the phenotype of skin color became another in the long line of versions of the great lie of superiority. It is equally difficult to mark the exact moment that race as a biological and fixed construct came to be tied to that phenotype and generally accepted as truth. It is doubtful that specific moments like that exist. Rather, it was a slow process. However, there are some representative and pivotal turning points that have been uncovered. One key moment in

creating a culture of racial superiority includes Zurara's defense of African slave trading by, in part, asserting that those with black skin were inferior and Europeans with white skin were superior. Another pivotal event was Pope Nicholas' 1454 papal bull, known as the Doctrine of Discovery, which gave white European explorers the right to possess and enslave any non-European, non-Christian peoples they might encounter on their journeys. Once the superiority of lighter skin color was established, centuries of enslavement, colonization, conquest, privilege, and advantage were built into the societies and cultures of virtually every corner of the globe.

Bonilla-Silva proposed that racism is primarily structural in nature rather than being a strictly ideological phenomenon.[156] It is, he argued, much more than personal action, which most theories of racism were previously limited to. Because racial superiority was so immediately built into the economic, social, and political systems, it reinforced the ideology. The structures then took on a life of their own, and adapted over time to remain in place despite changing social systems and beliefs. Thus, the structures of advantage can adapt over time but remain hidden in plain sight.

Several important explorations into the structures of racial superiority that have lived, largely invisibly to those inside the culture, beyond the timeframe of attitudes of racial superiority being socially acceptable were looked at in this study. Rothstein documented a systematic and intentional exclusion of people of color from owning homes and living in white suburban areas. This has created numerous far-reaching inequities in home ownership, generational wealth, and access to equal educational

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[156] Bonilla-Silva, "Rethinking Racism," 469-470.

systems. Consequently, the typical American black family has less than one-tenth of the household wealth of the typical American white family.[157]

Access to the banking and economic systems was just as inequitable. And it was equally intentional. The experience of black Americans from Reconstruction through the programs of the New Deal, the GI Bill after WWII, and into the 21st century was constant exclusion and inequitable treatment. What was at the turn of the 20th century a system "of economic exploitation backed by state-sanctioned violence,"[158] adapted but kept a similar impact of inequity in place. White Americans heavily favored government programs to help lift populations in need. Yet that sentiment changed as soon as programs like affirmative action were proposed and implemented to help remedy inequities faced by the BIPOC population due to the historic and vestigial structures of racial superiority.

There is also ample evidence that the penal and judicial systems were stacked against BIPOC people since the conclusion of the Civil War in ways that have had devastating effects, particularly since the 1970s when the war on drugs began. This trapped people of color "into a second-class citizenship" every bit as effectively as Jim Crow had.[159] BIPOC citizens were arrested at much higher rates and received longer sentences for drug usage and drug dealing, for example, when all the while, usage and dealing rates were virtually the same among racial groups.

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[157] Kiplinger's, "Racial Wealth" 21.

[158] Baradaran, *Color of Money*, 68.

[159] Alexander, *Jim Crow*, 15.

Although there were many other systems and structures built on racial superiority that resulted in ongoing group inequities, just the three categories above were enough to leave most major American cities segregated, to greatly restrict personal, familial, and generational wealth on average, and to allow large discrepancies in receiving equal treatment in the justice system to continue to exist.

It is not as though all this remains only in the realm outside the church and disappears once BIPOC and white people enter the body of Christ. The majority of works that have analyzed the issue have concluded that there is still a serious divide in the church caused by the mindsets and systems of historic racial superiority. The very fact that there are churches identifiable largely by their racial makeup, that is, white churches, black churches, Latino churches, and so forth, demonstrates that the American church continues to feel the effects of racial division. The impact is still felt in multiracial churches as well. Segregated cities impact multiracial churches when a church decides to split into smaller regional ministries or geographically based small groups. The inequities in economic and educational opportunities can have an ongoing impact on those that receive the education and training deemed necessary for leadership and ministry positions in the church. Differences in personal experiences with the judicial and penal systems can lead to large divides in attitudes toward law–enforcement endeavors in one's community and in viewing how or whether a church should engage in justice-seeking activities. These are just a few examples.

The roots of American Christianity were inextricably intertwined with a white Christian identity, argued Willie James Jennings, which distorted relationships with groups believed to be of a different race and even obfuscating a faithful understanding of

mission and faith. Robert Jones undertook a large-scale study and survey of American Christians, concluding that white American churches constructed and sustained an ongoing commitment to protect white superiority and discourage black equality through the means of ever-changing methods.[160]

The consensus of pastors (Swanson, Hill), researchers (Jones, Emerson, Smith, Oyakawa), scholars (Sechrest, Ramirez-Johnson, Yong), and historians (Jennings, Tisby, Butler, Balmer) is that the division and impact of racial superiority in the past are still very active in the American church today. They continue to be felt in the same societal inequities that all BIPOC Americans experience on average. And beyond that, members of multiracial congregations experience the historic inequities of those past and vestigial structures, as well as being subjected to the cultural dominance of churches that were built as intentionally exclusionary white spaces that gave privilege and preference to white culture and white presence. Groups tend to favor social and cultural homogeneity because it demands less effort to maintain and makes it easier to meet needs. Thus, congregations tend toward internal homogeneity.[161] And where their beliefs push them beyond racial or national homogeneity, they often drift toward cultural homogeneity, preferring and giving the status of "normal" to that of the dominant group. In the case of most American multiracial churches, that means that they invite BIPOC people to the life of the congregation but typically maintain the Western, white, individualistic culture in the most vital areas. All the while, this degree of inequity and division remains invisible to them.

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[160] Jones, *White Too Long*, 6.

[161] Emerson and Smith, *Divided*, 145.

There is no question that the great lie of superiority took the form of racial superiority between the 15th and 20th centuries. And while the supporting mindsets of that lie have greatly diminished in the latter half of the 20th and the 21st centuries, the impact of inequities amassed before the 20th century and the vestigial structures that continue to the present continue to create imbalances, division, and inequity that is not concordant with the gospel of image-bearing. The consensus of reputable literature today is that those same divisions and inequities continue to have a hold in churches, including multiracial churches.

Discussion of Survey of Churches

The first two subproblems established that Scripture verifies that there are systemic and structural sins and inequities created by the lie of superiority and caused by the work of the powers and authorities. The third subproblem was to conduct research that determined the current actions of ICOC churches regarding the history of racial inequity and the historic societal and church-wide divisions and inequities that it has caused. The research sought to determine the beliefs of most ICOC churches regarding issues of race and equity and whether the actions of the churches ran parallel to those held beliefs.

Finding One

The research revealed that the ICOC churches possessed a high degree of belief in the importance of racial diversity, communicating their beliefs, member dialogue on racial topics, and educating the congregation on issues. The surveys demonstrated a high level of consistent belief among these churches that there was a need to engage in these issues regularly and to publicly proclaim and preach about their importance. Scores

consistently reflected a high degree of belief, with some moderate levels of belief in the importance of these areas. There was no level of complete disagreement or nonbelief.

<div align="center">*Finding Two*</div>

Actions that corresponded to a high degree of belief in the importance of racial diversity, dialogue, and education were consistently high among the ICOC churches. Activities were consistent at high or moderate levels with very few churches ranking a negative score or taking no action. This means that when it comes to backing up their beliefs and taking action in the areas of creating and having a dialogue about racial division, unity, diversity, and other issues, the churches of the ICOC do back up those beliefs with engagement. The same is true for their action in providing training and education opportunities for the members of their church in these areas.

<div align="center">*Finding Three*</div>

The study revealed that ICOC churches have a high degree of belief that there has been significant inequity in society that was caused by attitudes and structures of racial superiority in the past. There was a moderate majority of the belief that addressing equity issues in the church and striving for them in the life of the church are also important. The conclusion can be gleaned from the statistics of the study that while it is not as strong as the belief in the importance of the issues listed above in Finding One, there is still a strong belief in the ICOC churches that there are societal inequities caused by racial superiority in the culture and that it is important for the church to address those issues.

<div align="center">*Finding Four*</div>

The statistics in this study revealed that taking intentional action to reverse long-standing societal inequities within the life of the church is not as high as the actions taken

in other areas. When it came to significant areas such as economic inequities and housing and segregation there was very little being undertaken by churches. There was a higher level of engagement in focusing on leadership imbalances, although the majority of those were efforts to improve diversity within the given circumstances rather than creating long-term plans to identify and remedy inequities. There were high levels reported of the churches providing opportunities for members to voice their opinions regarding the needed structural change. The statistics revealed that at the time the study was completed, there was still a dissonance between the level to which churches believed structural change was important and necessary and taking action to make those changes.

Theoretical Model: 1 Corinthians as a Model to Address Superiority

Nowhere in 1 Corinthians did Paul directly state a specific outline to be applied in Corinth for responding to the effects of the great lie of superiority nor is there a more general outline to be applied in all similar situations. Readers can, however, observe how Paul responded to the situation in Corinth, glean from that the principles he utilized, and distill those principles into a model that can be understood as his approach to this situation. That model can then be adapted and applied to other occurrences of the great lie in contemporary situations.

There is value in reviewing the general pattern that can be observed in societies regarding the infiltration of the lie of superiority in its many forms and subsequent impact. First, the lie is proffered that some portion of the population is superior to others. It might be status, class, nationality, gender, race, or another designation. Once the lie spawns and is accepted, mindsets and beliefs spring up that justify and defend the distinction between the groups. This is where stereotypes, misconceptions, and more lies

are perpetrated. The next stage is that structures and systems of privilege and advantage develop to give protection to the superior group. It should be noted, however, that this stage arguably often precedes or accompanies the previous stage. Eventually, the people of the culture become so accustomed to these systems and structures that they come to be deemed as normal, natural, or inherent and often become virtually invisible to those enmeshed in the culture. The final stage is when the original beliefs that supported the superiority myth become questionable or rejected in the society, but the structures and systems remain. It may be that they are still invisible to the superior group, or it is convenient for them to protect their privilege by asserting that once the previous mindset of superiority is gone, the entirety of the problem has likewise vanished. But these vestigial structures continue to cement the inequities of the superiority myth into society.

Paul's model can be broken into a simple visual chart of examination and action (Table 33) that will then be explained below:
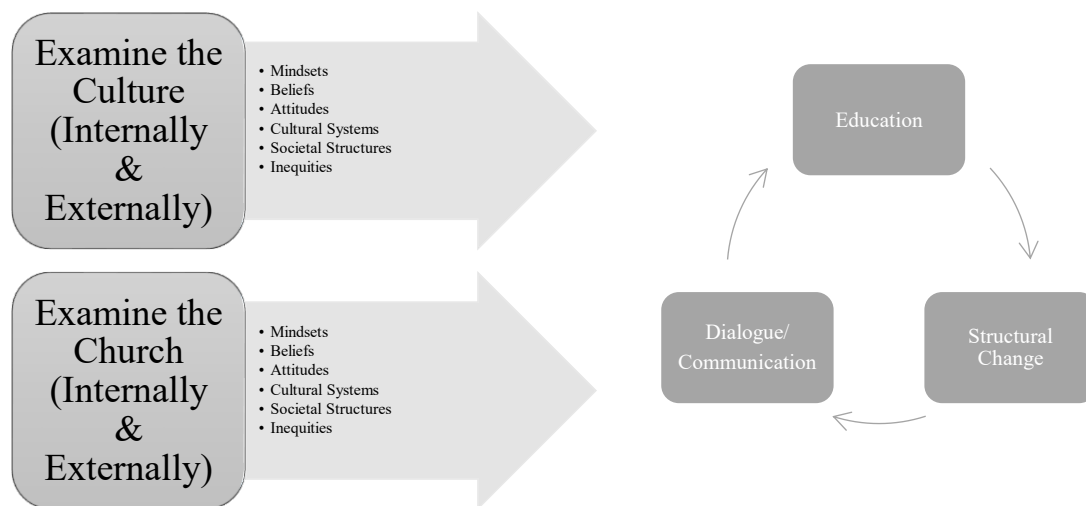
Figure 26: Model of responding to the lie of superiority

In 1 Corinthians 11:29, Paul directed the believers in Corinth to examine themselves. Providing an examination, however, is what he had been modeling for them throughout his letter, so this command did not come out of thin air. The areas to be examined should not be limited to those below (Table 34) but should certainly include them.

Table 8: Areas of examination

Area of Examination	Scriptural Example
Mindsets (about identity)	1 Cor. 2:6–7, 13; 3:1–4, 18–23; 4:8–10
Beliefs (about superiority)	1 Cor. 1:10–11; 1:26–31
Attitudes (of cultural norms)	1 Cor. 5:1–13; 1 Cor. 8:9; 9:15–23; 10:23–31
Cultural Systems	1 Cor. 6:1–9;
Social Structures	1 Cor. 6:1–11
Group Inequities	1 Cor. 11:17–34

Two streams of examination should take place simultaneously. Churches must examine both the culture in which they live and the cultural life of the church. This necessitates the ability to see past what members of a culture have typically become situated to or blind to. It is the cultural norms that are challenging for those inside the culture to be aware of. The Corinthians thought they were doing well spiritually (1 Cor. 4:8) but were unaware of all the issues that Paul brought to their attention.

A church body should constantly and thoroughly examine themselves to determine whether they have allowed the societal inequities and errors in thinking to infect their church life. But effective examination includes those outside the culture. Paul

was an effective voice, in part, because he was from outside their culture. If blindness to our cultural tendencies is such a significant danger, the Christian community must seek out the perspective of voices that are the most culturally unlike them. Thus, this two–fold examination of culture and church should have two components: internal and external. This will be radical and challenging in most situations because humans don't naturally tend to seek perspectives that run counter to their own and that will challenge their worldview. Yet, it is precisely what is necessary for effectiveness.

After examination, Paul's next element is education, although there is never a time when examination comes to a complete stop. Paul's primary activity in education in his letter to the Corinthians is teaching the church the impact of accepting a worldly culture and wisdom as the basis for their value system rather than basing it on the wisdom of God. In each instance of examination, Paul discusses what the church should have thought or done differently to be the people of new creation. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:1–11 he instructs the church that they should have not taken one another to the unjust and inequitable Roman courts but should have judged the situations internally in anticipation of a time when God's people will administer justice throughout his creation. Another example comes in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 where Paul chides the church for a communal meal that looks just like the world rather than an image-bearing community, telling them that they should not have divided and should have waited for one another and shared with one another, then he facetiously adds that if they were that hungry, they should have just eaten at home before they came.

The specific implementation of education in response to the lie of superiority is dependent on the particular version of the lie in each instance and the impact that that

version has had on society and the church. It might involve the history of the lie itself, the ways that it was woven into the foundations, structures, and systems of the culture, how it created inequities, how the vestigial structures and impact of those inequities have continued to have an impact in the Church to the present day, why we lift up those deemed inferior, why those deemed superior need no lifting up, what it means to love one another, and how to humbly embrace the perspective of others.

Along with education, inter-member communication and dialogue are important. Although there is no passage in Paul's letter where he directly challenged the church to have fruitful dialogue, it is implied in virtually every passage. He wanted them to think about these things, wrestle with them, and come to mature spiritual decisions. He wanted them to take action that would dismantle the mindsets and structures based on worldly wisdom and live by God's wisdom. This would demand healthy and productive teamwork and dialogue. Again, the specific content of the conversations would rest contingent upon the specific version of the lie of superiority and what the process of examination revealed.

Paul understood that as important as examination, education, and congregational dialogue are, they do not by themselves constitute love for one another (1 Cor. 13) without action (1 Cor. 12:22–26). A body of believers must make structural and systemic changes to church life. Failure to do so is to allow the believers, especially those that are not in the superior class, to be subjected to the ravages of the lie of superiority.

This call for change was not just a mental exercise. It was likely that most Corinthian Christians would have said that they showed no favoritism, that they were status-blind people. After all, they were part of a church that had torn down the status and

class barriers and where everyone was welcome. But upon closer examination, that was not entirely the case. The effects of the great lie had made their way into the life of the church. And they needed to do something about it.

The parts of the body that seemed to be weaker, those lower on the honor and status scale, said Paul, needed to be treated with "special honor" (1 Cor. 12:23). At the same time, those that already had status and honor in the eyes of the world needed no special treatment in the church (1 Cor. 12:24). In fact, Paul said that God had ordered the body with this diversity for the express purpose of giving "greater honor to the parts that lacked it" (v. 24). What exactly was Paul saying here? He was implying that a new order must be imagined. The church was to be a new reality at every level of existence. It was to be a place untouched by the mindsets, beliefs, structures, and systems of the great lie. A place where the dividing wall of hostility had been broken down but so had all the effects of that wall, past, present, and future.

Throughout his letter to the Corinthians, Paul called for specific change in many areas. He called for gospel transformation in how they identified themselves and organized their small groups, how they structured their social systems and opportunities, how they approached the legal system in their city, how they managed conflict and issues of justice internally, how they engaged in secular social functions, how they viewed and exercised their rights in society, how they ordered church functions and gatherings, how they took the Lord's Supper, what they valued in leadership and how they selected leaders, how they implemented leadership structure in the church, how they planned events within the life of the church, how to think through and remove status privileges and symbols, how to see the world from the perspective of another, how to treat those

that society had treated as inferior, and much more. Paul would continue this call for transformation in a later letter to the congregation, where he called for no less than full participation in economic equity (2 Cor. 8–9).

This is precisely the stage that many churches never get to, or they make minor, cosmetic changes at best. A sampling of the recent literature aiming at racial transformation in the Christian world shows that while they are all helpful, transformational, and biblical in many respects, there is a common inconsistency in most that results in solutions offered that are not as comprehensive as Paul's was. Paul was intent on the need for the church to examine their own attitudes and behaviors and change them radically to become the image-bearing community of new creation that they should be.

DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, and Kim argue that integrated multiracial congregations are preferable if they are truly integrated, but much of what is claimed as biblical unity and multiracial churches is, in reality, "an invitation to assimilate into white definitions of Christianity."[162] They advocate for change in cultural balance and power but argue for little else in the way of addressing inequities created by racial superiority. Jemar Tisby, in *How to Fight Racism*, makes a strong case for education and awareness, relationships and dialogue, and a commitment to justice. Yet, this call for justice is mostly focused on societal justice with little in the way of the type of Pauline self-examination and structural change that creates an alternate community within the church. A similar assessment could be made of Drew Hart's *Who Will Be a Witness*? David

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[162] Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 128.

Swanson, alternately, focuses much more on education and dialogue in the form of

discipling in *Rediscipling the White Church*. He makes the case that the greatest need for

Christians, especially white Christians, is in discipling that realigns the mindset and

relationships of those in the church, but he makes little reference to structural change that

addresses inequities. Similarly, Derwin Gray's *How to Heal Our Racial Divide* focuses

on education and communication through relationships that result in gospel character but

says little about Pauline examination and internal change. The approach that comes

closest to a Pauline-like three-fold attack on education, communication, and structural

change that reorders church life to address inequities and division is Christina Barland

Edmondson and Chad Brennan's *Faithful Anti-Racism*. Their biblically comprehensive

approach seeks to reorder the Church before attempting to change society and represents

well the intent of the model of this project.

Practical Applications

After compiling the data from the biblical material, literature, and field study, the

researcher proposes a model that may help guide churches through a process of

developing a healthy and effective approach to racial diversity, communication,

education, and transformation. This model is like others in that it addresses the areas of

education, dialogue, and structural change (justice and equity). Yet, many approaches

stop short of structural change, don't go beyond general calls for justice, or focus on the

Church engaging in efforts to fight injustice in the world. While the proposed model does

not preclude that from taking place in the future, it differs from most in that it follows

Paul's direction of primarily calling for intentional transformation in the life of the

church. Like Paul's vision for the Corinthians, this model aims at churches becoming islands of alternate communities in a sea of superiority lies and inequities.

The proposed model is not a step-by-step process (Table 33). The researcher believed that such an approach would not be faithful to Paul's paradigm. Churches must begin with the process of examination of the surrounding culture and the culture and systems within the church. The most effective processes of examination would include self-examination as well as input from those from outside the primary culture, church congregation, or faith tradition, or similar. A general guide to the types of areas that need to be examined has been proposed by the researcher, yet the process of examination should not be limited to just the proposed areas (Table 34). Once examination has been instituted as a robust facet of congregational life, the church can move on to the remainder of the model and consider in what areas education and dialogue are needed and what areas need structural change. Again, guidelines have been proposed above for areas that could be included, but the specifics will vary by each church community as they continue to examine the culture and their church.

Some examples of examination and action that churches could take to address internal issues include the following:

A church might examine their leadership structure and conclude that it is not representatively diverse. They might also note that there is a lack of available ministry candidates that could fulfill this need for diversity across their national fellowship. Rather than simply fighting with other churches over an inadequate pool of available people, they might develop a long-term initiative to encourage younger BIPOC students to attend seminary or ministry training programs by offering them scholarships for universities and

subsequent post-graduate work. Guarantees for ministry intern position could also be made following ministry training.

A church might examine the racial segregation in their city and determine that it affects the church deeply when they attempt to split into geographically based small groups. The church might begin a program that encourages significant numbers of people to move into neighborhoods in which they would be the minority, when they would not normally live in those areas. The church could determine avenues of financial assistance and other means to help invest in this endeavor.

After self-examination, a church might discover that they have programs to help the poor and needy in their community and around the world but do very little for their own members other than emergency benevolence funds. They might develop programs at both a congregational level and a household level to become centers of economic justice, following the principles of the gleaning laws of Deuteronomy 24:19–22. The Torah directed Israel to only harvest their fields once. Rather than squeezing all possible profits from their field, or even harvesting a second time and giving to the poor, they were to create work by intentionally leaving the fields or olive tree gardens to those in need so that they could have the dignity and agency of working and providing for themselves. Both members' households and the church as a unit could develop employment opportunities for those within the fellowship that need steady employment or extra money.

Strengths of the study

One of the strengths of this study is that it was designed as a mixed-methods study. This provided the volume of information made available by a survey but also allowed for important areas of clarification and follow-up by employing targeted interviews with a select group. This helped to verify some of the information gleaned from the survey. It also ensured that the data was interpreted appropriately in areas by narrowing and better defining terms so that greater accuracy was achieved in the results.

This study involved a sample size that represented nearly 50% of all US ICOC church members, so the patterns created in the data and interpretations taken from the data were reliable and a representative cross-section of the beliefs and action of ICOC churches. There have been few comprehensive surveys and studies done regarding the ICOC and racial diversity and equity, so new ground was broken in this study in many respects.

Another strength of this study was the analysis of regionally diverse churches. All eleven US regions of the ICOC were represented in this study, with attention given to including both smaller and larger churches. This provided greater credibility to the results and ensured that the study did not represent only one regional approach.

An additional strength of the study was that the biblical analysis did not just look to Scripture to initiate a discussion and study of the topic so as to use Scripture to justify exploring the topic. Rather, the entire focus of the study was modeled after the scriptural example itself, and the model created from this study was drawn directly from the Scriptures.

This study did not just consider literature on current beliefs and practices within evangelical Christianity regarding race-based practices, but also included a consideration of the historical development of race in the United States, the impact of racial superiority in the country, and the influence that the systems of racial superiority had in the church.

The model created in this project has strength in that it is broad enough to be adaptable to many contexts and church situations. Specificity in models can sometimes be so situation specific and narrow that these models become untenable in many circumstances and impractical for general use. The researcher attempted to follow Paul's principles so that the model would be specific enough to provide guidance but general enough to be flexible for many different contexts.

Limitations of Methodology

This study was intended as a cross-sectional study of the beliefs and practices in the areas of racial diversity and equity in US ICOC churches. The study provided a picture of these beliefs and practices in October 2022 to determine the correlation between the perceived importance of racial unity as manifested in publicly addressing issues of diversity and equity, dialogue between members on these issues, congregational education, and structural change. The researcher acknowledged that this is baseline research and that there are several limitations inherent in this study.

This study included eleven churches with a membership of over 500, one from each US region within the ICOC. It also included 17 churches with a membership of under 500. Each survey in the study is given equal value, which means there is a greater weight given to the practices of smaller churches because each church survey registers as one of w8 rather than being weighted according to the percentage of the total population.

This could potentially give smaller churches the appearance of being more normative than their actual percentage of the larger ICOC population.

The structure of the ICOC is extremely relational and based on the norm of larger churches discipling or mentoring smaller churches, so targeting the larger, more influential churches within was deemed to be an effective sampling strategy by the researcher. Selecting churches by perceived level of influence, however, could bias results toward the more powerful churches and neglect or not reflect the practices and beliefs of churches that are more independent or considered outliers.

The respondent rate for this study was relatively robust at roughly 85%, yet it may still reflect a bias in that churches that are already more attuned to and have a positive view of addressing racial issues and enacting reflective practices within the church community might be more prone to respond to the survey. Thus, the non-responders may represent a portion of the population that takes a more negative or ambivalent view of addressing and acting on such matters. This could lead to an over-representation of churches that are consistent in their beliefs and practices and tend to be more active in this arena.

This study took place in the latter half of 2022, which may be significant to the results. There was no previous data available on the ICOC to create a longitudinal study of beliefs and practices over time. This is particularly relevant in light of the events of 2020 that were sparked with the taking of the life of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers on May 25, 2020. An awakening of racial education and dialogue about needed change sparked around the globe in the aftermath of the Floyd murder. That phenomenon deeply affected churches in the United States. Churches around the country saw an

unprecedented increase in attention to matters of racial tension and inequity. Although anecdotal, this would be difficult to dispute in the ICOC churches. The lack of previous data regarding the beliefs and practices of ICOC churches before the George Floyd awakening opens this study to a particular time bias. It is quite possible that a temporary bump in interest, dialogue, and some actions aimed at addressing racial inequities have been present since May 2020. That this study took place less than two and a half years after that moment means that results might be reflective of a temporary increase and results both before 2020 and in the future could demonstrate a different level of engagement and attention. The result is that the findings of this study may be somewhat inflated in the present time bubble and do not represent the practices of the ICOC churches over time. The lack of available longitudinal studies on the ICOC hampered determining larger trends in beliefs and behaviors.

This study intended to reflect the general beliefs and practices of the US ICOC churches. The researcher selected church leaders to represent those facets of the church rather than surveying the perspectives and experiences of all members of the congregations being studied. This could result in the survey reflecting the ideals and singular perspectives of the church leadership but not representing the lived experience of the congregation's members. Leaders may think that their beliefs or positions espoused from the pulpit are reflective of the entire congregation but may not accurately represent the majority of members. Leaders may also think they are doing more and being more effective in communication and activities than members would experience or report. This could result in slight misrepresentation or exaggeration of some elements of the survey reporting.

The researcher did not consider the role of race/ethnicity in the church leaders participating in the study. There is no comprehensive study of the race/ethnicity of church leaders in the ICOC, although there is anecdotal evidence that there is an underrepresentation of BIPOC leaders compared to the general membership. Not including the race/ethnic identity of participants could result in an over-representation of the perspective of one racial/ethnic group or the under-representation of other groups.

One final potential weakness with this study is the broad nature of the model presented. The model is intentionally broad so that it can be utilized and applied under many different circumstances. While this can be a strength, it can also be a potential weakness in that some could find it too general and desire more specific guidance in implementation.

Summary

This study provides insights that can be used as a framework in other studies and as a model for churches wishing to fully engage in racial diversity and equity in a biblically directed manner. The analysis of Paul's response to social and class superiority provided a template for how to respond to other versions of the lie of superiority. A study of historical literature established that the contemporary world and church have been and continue to be affected by inequitable systems and structures created by racial superiority. And an examination of the beliefs and practices of multiracial ICOC churches in the US demonstrated a shortcoming in their general approach to these issues. Churches would benefit greatly by carefully considering Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church and applying them to the very similar circumstances that the modern church faces today. This would result in the church becoming the alternate society that

Paul envisioned, which would force the world to consider solutions to curbing and even

ending the effects of racial superiority in the modern context.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REFLECTION

Further Research

Several possibilities for future research are prompted by this study and its findings. First, this study did not explore the connection between beliefs and actions in other denominations. Because the study was limited to only multiracial churches within the ICOC, the findings only directly reflect the environment within the ICOC. There could be value to studying the connection between beliefs and actions in the various areas related to racial diversity and equity. Research into churches that are not classified as multiracial could also yield helpful insights and would be a worthy area to examine.

Second, further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of churches that do seek to implement Paul's model of structural change and addressing inequities. This study was largely theoretical. Looking at churches that have been active in engaging in the tenets of Paul's Corinthian model or churches that undertake the model in the future would be a valuable addition.

Third, another important avenue that could be studied further is considering the influence of certain identity factors of the church leader or leaders. Do the political leanings, whether they be right, left, or more kingdom focused have an impact on the results? Does the race of the church leader or the racial makeup of the church decision-making leadership group have a measurable impact on the results? These could be areas

that would be very revealing to study to determine whether there are discernible patterns that emerge.

Fourth, another area that emerged that needs future study is specifically why there was a measurable disconnect between the beliefs in societal inequities and the importance of churches addressing those inequities and subsequent intentional and sustained action to address those same inequities. This study revealed that there was a disconnect but did not delve further into the causes of the disconnect. The impact of that disconnect on the members of those churches, especially BIPOC members, is also an area that needs further examination.

Fifth, further study specific to the ICOC is needed in relation to the findings in this study. A longitudinal study of the development of ICOC beliefs on racial diversity and equity as well as ICOC engagement in addressing the impact of systems of racial superiority and inequity would be valuable to help verify or challenge the results of the research in this study.

Personal Reflection

This research project has fostered academic, professional, and personal growth in my life. The topics and material studied for this project have bolstered my work as a teaching minister in the classroom setting, in special teaching days and workshops in churches, and in sermons. The topic of study was highly relevant to one of the primary focuses of my teaching ministry, and it has been invaluable to add not just further biblical study but provide additional study and information from diverse fields and areas of research. This project called for an interdisciplinary approach, which has bolstered my biblical understanding and brought greater nuance and relevance to my grasp of the topic

and ability to teach on it. This did not come without challenges, however. For nearly two decades I have focused on history and the Bible, but I had not previously ventured into the arena of field research. Admittedly, I was not initially excited about some of those elements, as they were far outside my comfort zone and area of knowledge. After engaging in the study and learning some of the elements of field research and survey taking, I came to appreciate not only the results of such an undertaking but also the process itself. Similarly, the need to venture outside my normal streams of information and look at literature and studies beyond my typical sources has great enlightenment.

There were several other aspects of this project that stretched me academically and professionally. I tend to thrive in creating bigger ideas and concepts and letting others handle the smaller details, but this endeavor forced me to pay attention to small details like formatting and specific styles of footnoting and similar items. I found this to be quite challenging at first, but I feel that I have benefited from that by being forced to pay attention to these minute details. I also have a very familiar and comfortable writing style that I have been able to utilize throughout my professional life without having to think about it much. But this project demanded an entirely different style of writing, which once again, stretched me beyond the usual. Typically, I like to stay in my areas of knowledge and familiarity, so the constant need to adapt to the expectations and requirements of this project were simultaneously challenging or annoying and beneficial.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this project has been the education process leading up to it. Most of the classes I took were truly stimulating and helped me to grow and learn in worthwhile ways. All the professors I encountered were helpful beyond what they had to be and very accessible. They were very generous with their time and willing

to offer input and guidance even when my line of inquiry went well beyond the borders of the course topic. I consistently learned and grew academically, professionally, and personally from each one of the professors that I interacted with through this entire process.

As I engaged in the survey process of determining the beliefs and subsequent actions of my own fellowship tradition, I found that the results were more encouraging than I expected. I feared that I might uncover that the beliefs on important issues of racial diversity and equity were wildly inconsistent as were the follow-through and actions. What I found, however, was less inconsistent than I feared. Although there was an inconsistency between belief and action in the realm of creating structural change, that was fully expected and some of the impetus for undertaking this project. Overall, I find the issues that need be addressed in my own faith tradition to be reasonable and not in any disastrous or irreconcilable state.

On a personal level, there were some challenges to completing this project that were unforeseen at the beginning of the journey. Throughout the course of this program, most of which came while working on the thesis project, life changed dramatically for me. Our youngest son graduated from high school and left for college. We had several other young men that were of high school or college age living with my wife and me who also were ready to transition to new phases of life and move out. We became empty nesters seemingly overnight. This was exacerbated when my wife and I moved from Minnesota to Texas as I accepted a new role in the ministry at a much bigger church. This stretched us culturally, as we had to adapt to a new state; spiritually as we had to adapt to a new church; and professionally, as I had to transition from being the teaching minister

at a one-site church of around 300 people to a six-site church of around 1,300 members. Sending our youngest son to college and going from a joyous but ever-chaotic household in Minnesota with a ministry role that had become quite comfortable to an entirely different living situation in Texas with an exciting but demanding new ministry role in the middle of working on a thesis was a bit more challenging than I had anticipated. At one point, since our house in Texas was not completed when it was supposed to be, we had to put all our belongings in storage, along with most of my books and much of the research for this project. I initially thought that would be for a few weeks, but it turned into three months, which forced me to become much more flexible and creative with using source material than I initially anticipated.

Through all of that transition, I was determined to stay on pace with this project, although there were several times that I came close to hitting the pause button. God used this time to show me once again how important it is to remember that I cannot control everything and have everything work out just the way I like it. I had to rely deeply on God in new ways, ones that I didn't always appreciate and relish at first. In the end, I am grateful for these challenges and the lessons of trust, patience, and reliance on God that I have gathered throughout this process.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Addressing Racial Diversity and Equity in US ICOC Churches

Section 1 – Addressing Issues Publicly

1. Church Name: _____

2. US Region: _____

3. How many members are in your congregation?

   Greater than 500   100-500   Under 100

4. This church believes and teaches that it is important to acknowledge and address issues of racial unity:

Not at all important	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

5. This church believes and teaches that it is important to acknowledge and address issues of racial diversity:

Not at all important	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

6. This church believes and teaches that it is important to acknowledge and address issues of racial understanding:

Not at all important	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

7. This church believes and teaches that it is important to acknowledge and address issues of racial equity:

Not at all important	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

8. This church has addressed general issues of racial diversity, unity, understanding, and equity through (check all that apply):

☐ Written materials
☐ Public prayers
☐ Sermons
☐ Public statements from leaders
☐ Special celebration or theme-focused days
☐ None
☐ Other _____

Section 2 – Addressing Racial Inequities

9. Issues of racial diversity are typically addressed publicly in this church:

Never	Seldomly (Every few Years)	Occasionally (1-2 times a year)	Regularly (3-5 times a year)	Frequently (6 or more times a year)

10. Obstacles to being a multiracial church are typically addressed publicly in this church:

Never	Seldomly (Every few Years)	Occasionally (1-2 times a year)	Regularly (3-5 times a year)	Frequently (6 or more times a year)

11. Issues of understanding the perspective of other races and cultures are typically addressed publicly in this church:

Never	Seldomly (Every few Years)	Occasionally (1-2 times a year)	Regularly (3-5 times a year)	Frequently (6 or more times a year)

12. Issues of racial equity in society are typically addressed publicly in this church:

Never	Seldomly (Every few Years)	Occasionally (1-2 times a year)	Regularly (3-5 times a year)	Frequently (6 or more times a year)

13. This church believes that historically there were attitudes and actions in the United States regarding racial superiority that resulted in social, judicial, economic, and educational inequities between racial groups in the past.

Disagree strongly	Disagree somewhat	No position taken	Agree somewhat	Agree strongly

14. The effects of historic social, judicial, economic, and educational inequities continue to have implications and impact in the country today:

Disagree   Disagree   No position   Agree   Agree
strongly   somewhat   taken   somewhat   strongly

15. It is the role of the church to address the effects of historic social, judicial, economic, and educational inequities that may continue to have implications and impact in the country today:

Disagree   Disagree   No position   Agree   Agree
strongly   somewhat   taken   somewhat   strongly

16. This church has addressed issues of racial inequity in the country and the church through (check all that apply):

- ☐ Written materials
- ☐ Public prayers
- ☐ Sermons
- ☐ Public statements from leaders
- ☐ Special celebration or theme-focused days
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other _____

Section 3 – The Gospel and Racial Inequities

17. Addressing from the pulpit issues of racial diversity is part of the direct message and implications of the gospel:

Disagree   Disagree   No position   Agree   Agree
strongly   somewhat   taken   somewhat   strongly

18. Addressing from the pulpit issues and obstacles of being a multiracial church are part of the direct message and implications of the gospel:

Disagree   Disagree   No position   Agree   Agree
strongly   somewhat   taken   somewhat   strongly

19. Addressing from the pulpit issues of understanding the perspective of other races and cultures is part of the direct message and implications of the gospel:

Disagree   Disagree   No position   Agree   Agree
strongly   somewhat   taken   somewhat   strongly

20. Addressing from the pulpit issues of racial inequity in society is part of the direct message and implications of the gospel:

Disagree strongly	Disagree somewhat	No position taken	Agree somewhat	Agree strongly

Section 4 – Communication

21. It is important to this church to teach how to engage in racial dialogue and effective communication surrounding racial issues:

Not at all important	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

22. It is important to this church to facilitate racial dialogue and opportunities for communication:

Not at all important	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

23. This church provides opportunities for racial dialogue and communication:

Never	Seldomly (Every few Years)	Occasionally (1-2 times a year)	Regularly (3-5 times a year)	Frequently (6 or more times a year)

24. This church has engaged in communication activities focusing on race through (check all that apply):

- ☐ Open forums
- ☐ Scheduled times of sharing and openness in small groups
- ☐ Directed small group activities
- ☐ Special days or workshops that included communication between members
- ☐ Web-based discussions
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other _____

Section 5 – Education

25. It is important to this church that its members engage in education and training on biblical teachings surrounding race and unity in a multiracial church and how to apply them in the culture and church today:

Not at all important	Not too important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important

26. It is important to this church to facilitate education and training on biblical teachings surrounding race and unity in a multiracial church and how to apply them in the culture and church today:

| Not at all important | Not too important | Somewhat important | Very important | Extremely important |

27. This church provides opportunities for education and training on biblical teachings surrounding race and unity in a multiracial church and how to apply them in the culture and church today:

| Never | Seldomly (Every few Years) | Occasionally (1-2 times a year) | Regularly (3-5 times a year) | Frequently (6 or more times a year) |

28. This church has engaged in education and training activities focusing on race through (check all that apply):

- ☐ Church-wide classes
- ☐ Optional classes
- ☐ Workshops
- ☐ Sermon series
- ☐ Leadership training sessions
- ☐ Encouraging attendance at training events at other churches
- ☐ Encouraging attendance at training events planned by non-church entities
- ☐ None of the above
- ☐ Other _____

Section 6 – Structural Change

29. It is important to examine ourselves and institute necessary structural changes in the church structure and life to counteract racial inequities that have been created by the surrounding culture:

| Not at all important | Not too important | Somewhat important | Very important | Extremely important |

30. It is important to provide opportunities to examine ourselves and institute necessary structural changes in the church structure and life to counteract racial inequities that have been created by the surrounding culture:

| Not at all important | Not too important | Somewhat important | Very important | Extremely important |

31. This church has taken concrete steps to examine ourselves and institute necessary structural changes in the church structure and life to counteract racial inequities that have been created by the surrounding culture:

Never	Seldomly (Every few Years)	Occasionally (1-2 times a year)	Regularly (3-5 times a year)	Frequently (6 or more times a year)

32. This church has engaged in structural change aimed at racial equity through (check all that apply):

- ☐ Taking steps to address economic inequities in congregational life due to historic societal forces
- ☐ Taking steps to address housing and community segregation in congregational life due to historical societal forces
- ☐ Taking steps to address educational inequities in congregational life due to historical societal forces
- ☐ Taking steps to address inequities in leadership diversity at all levels of leadership in the church
- ☐ Taking steps to address imbalances in cultural influence and power in church life
- ☐ Taking steps to create systems and procedures for members to share opinions about needed structural changes surrounding racial equity in church life
- ☐ Other _____

Appendix 2

Consent Form for Survey Research

You are invited to participate in a study of the models of racial diversity and equity currently being employed in the ICOC. I hope to learn what models of engagement are being utilized by ICOC churches under 100, between 100 and 500, and over 500, and how those practices align with Paul's model for addressing social inequity within the church community.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because leaders from one small, medium, and large church in each of the eleven US families of churches in the US have been requested to participate in this research. This research is being conducted as part of my doctoral thesis for Bethel University.

If you decide to participate, I will ask you questions concerning the current practices of your church regarding engaging in programs or efforts of racial diversity and equity. The survey consists of ten questions and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The data will be recorded by church size and region only. No other specific identifying features such as the specific church will be noted. Completing this survey will help me to understand the prevalence and effectiveness of current engagement in ICOC churches in the US. It will also aid in my development of a biblical model that can be utilized by all ICOC churches, especially those that are multiethnic.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no individual will be identified, or identifiable, and only aggregate data will be presented.

Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your future relations with the ICOC in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships. If you wish not to participate, please notify me as soon as possible so that I can connect with another church to replace your participation as there is a minimum number of participants needed.

This research project has been approved by my research advisor in accordance with Bethel's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please call Michael Burns (920-470-0305) or contact Joe Brown at Joe@brown.org.

By completing and returning the survey, you are granting consent to participate in this research.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are deciding whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may print this form and sign it or digitally indicate a signature by typing in your initials and returning it. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

_____

_____

Signature   Date

_____

_____

Signature of Investigator   Date