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Addressing the topic of Race and Catholicity...

Where to begin with a topic such as this?

I'd like to begin with what is central to all of us, the most common ground... the gospel

**Romans 1:16**—for I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for all who believe, first for the Jew then for the Greek.

One of the most **prominent themes of Romans** is the unity between Jew and Greek as a result of faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ—we are united in our common unity in Adam, and now by faith in the gospel, we're united in Christ.

So, our **gospel-centrality gives us a starting point** to see that consideration of this topic and of the notion of crossing boundaries for the sake of unity with our brothers and sisters not only a worthwhile endeavor, but a **directive of living faithfully** to the gospel.

But, here I want to ask, what does the gospel *do* with regard to this question of racial reconciliation? How does the **ascension ministry of Christ** through the Holy Spirit affect our doing of reconciliation? In **Acts 1:8** Jesus tells his disciples: "But, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, to the utter ends of the earth..."

This sounds really good, especially to Americans, who are used to the idea and are on board with diversity. But, this was a scandalous directive to the Jewish Christians like Peter who resisted entering Cornelius' house, like the other disciples who balked at Jesus' interaction with the Syro-Phoenician woman.

Yet, this is what we see Jesus continuing to "do and to teach" throughout the book of Acts by his ongoing presence in his church: **the gospel compels the church to heartily pursue the work, not only of racial reconciliation, but also multi-racial and multi-cultural partnership in this work.**

So, what does the gospel compel? How are we empowered by the Holy Spirit to be Christ's witnesses to the world in this particular area?

There are 3 areas I want to propose in these few minutes:

1. The Gospel compels us to deep and ongoing reconciliation of our own narratives
2. The Gospel compels us to "be witnesses" with the whole of our lives- institutions
3. The Gospel compels us to follow Jesus' own pattern of power

## **I. The Gospel compels us to deep and ongoing reconciliation of our own narratives**

As a result of the gospel, we have the security to **reenter our sin narratives** and even do a **pathology** of what happened, how it happened, the things that built up to it, what came out of it. We reenter the actual events of sin in our lives and investigate them, interrogate them, in order to understand what was operational in our hearts at that time, to see our idolatry more clearly and to see how the gospel frees us and righteous us from these patterns of sin. This is the very thing Augustine's book, "The Confessions," is all about. He's doing a pathology of his sin in order to experience a deeper joy of freedom from sin by God's lavish grace in Christ.

**Augustine- “Confessions” Book II—** “I intend to remind myself of my past foulnesses and carnal corruptions, not because I love them but so that I may love you, my God. It is from love of your love that I make the act of recollection.”

In our theological tradition this is called **repentance**—the gospel calls for an ongoing process of repentance and faith personally and corporately. This is how we invite Jesus to continue his ministry in our lives through the **Holy Spirit serving as a counselor**. Have you ever done counseling for others, ever been to a counselor?

As counselor, the Holy Spirit is our advocate, and he is our helper, our teacher, the one who shines light into our narratives to give us greater understanding of how and in what ways we've been marred by sin and how we've marred others. This **does not merely happen once** in our lives, but becomes a process that we return to over and over again at various times and in various season as the Lord presents the issues again and again in our lives as he sees fit.

**South Africa** truth and reconciliation commission.

**Boniface Mwangi**, Kenyan photographer, 2007 Kenyan election violence

**PTSD treatment**—NY Times

**John 4**, Samaritan woman at the well, “come meet a man who told me everything I've ever done.”

**John 21**—Peter's restoration, Jesus piercing Peter more deeply, unpacking his sin, revealing his shame and covering over it with his embrace and commission.

**Paul 1 Tim 1:12-17**—“the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, ‘that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy so that in me, the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example for those who were to believe on him for eternal life.’”

**Christ's embrace of us in the gospel is an embrace of all of us in the gospel**—this includes our sin narratives, our failures, our weaknesses, our blind spots, our shame.

**Stephen Westerhom**—dikaioisune, means “justify”, but its really a verbal form of “righteous”—In his redemption he “righteousness” our narratives. **Imputation**. Christ brings us into a new narrative, the Triune God's redemptive drama, where we find a new identity to be clothed in, that of beloved, and a new vocation to focus our lives in, Christ's continuing teaching and work through us as witnesses.

**We can embrace our story. And, Mutuality of Gospel Freedom is our starting point.**

**Why is the PCA afraid of this?**

**Have we really grasped the significance of our justification and the imputation of Christ? Is our fear related to our insecurity or misunderstanding of the gospel and the ongoing work of Christ through the Holy Spirit?**

**To embrace our story, to reenter our sin narrative, we must embrace the gospel more fully**

PCA history, Overture 4,

“For a Continuing Church” Sean Lucas,

“Heal Us Emmanuel”—Doug Serven, Irwyn Ince, Mike Higgins, Scott Sauls, Sean Lucas, Duke Kwon

New City Network and others

## **II. The Gospel compels us to “be witnesses” with the whole of our lives- institutions**

**Mark 10—“Not so among you...”**

**Acts 1:8—you shall be my witnesses...** my signs... church signs... outreach events—that's us!

**Philip Acts 8**—we are the signs, we are the event that affirms and prepares the way of the gospel

“It is quite certain that the ‘preparation of the way’ is a matter of concrete interventions in the visible world, and it is certain that hunger and satisfaction of hunger are concrete visible matters; yet everything depends on this activity being a spiritual reality, precisely because ultimately it is not a question of the reform of earthly conditions, but it is a question of the coming of Christ.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Ethics”

This happens in specific ways regarding specific issues.

**Ethics is apologetics**—Deut 4, created for good works—Eph 2, Titus 2—Ethical Apologetics  
David Brooks: The Next Culture Wars

Social conservatives could be the people who help reweave the sinews of society. They already subscribe to a faith built on selfless love. They can serve as examples of commitment. They are equipped with a vocabulary to distinguish right from wrong, what dignifies and what demeans. They already, but in private, tithe to the poor and nurture the lonely.

The defining face of social conservatism could be this: Those are the people who go into underprivileged areas and form organizations to help nurture stable families. Those are the people who build community institutions in places where they are sparse. Those are the people who can help us think about how economic joblessness and spiritual poverty reinforce each other. Those are the people who converse with us about the transcendent in everyday life.

increasing polarized culture, we are historically behind the trend of the line of despair

We cannot be asleep—intentionally asleep, refusing to wake up, no matter how much shaking and yelling is directed toward our church to wake up (my boy Alex sleeping through anything), MLK challenged the church in the past on this, they were asleep. There's no excuse for us anymore. We've been shaken, and it would be a great sin of denying the power of the Holy Spirit in trying to awaken his church to all of this in THIS age: **MLK “Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution”**—

“Speaking of Rip Van Winkle... one of the great liabilities of life is that too many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change and yet they fail to develop new attitudes, the new mental responses—that the new situation demands. They end up sleeping through a revolution.”

“No individual can live alone, no nation can live alone, and anyone who feels he can live alone is sleeping through a revolution.”

“We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in the inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made, this is the way its structured.”

As a result of our mutual union with Christ through the Holy Spirit we are woven together, this means that we share in one another's narrative, we share in one another's pain, and we share

in one another's glory... this is how we begin to address the PTSD that still shakes our culture, and allows us to look at the reality of past sin

Addressing, unpacking this sin and pain, and neglect requires us to see what is **real**, what the real experience of our black brothers and sisters have been in this country

"No other ethnic group has been a slave on American soil..." And, even after slavery was abolished there was no, and has never been a process of dealing with the severity of this sin... "It's alright to tell a man to lift himself by his own bootstraps, but it is a cruel jest to say to a bootless man that he ought to lift himself by his own bootstraps..." Our majority culture has done so very little to help. We have failed in submitting ourselves to our neighbor out of reverence for Christ in order to exercise our delegated power on behalf of loving our neighbor and seeking their good

personal and institutional sin and the phenomenon of **cultural PTSD**. Healing doesn't just happen—there are webs of complexity, overlapping spheres of brokenness, we believe in Total Depravity, and so the gospel must go into all of those nooks and crannies of depravity and our victimization by it as well as our complicity in it. This is what personal sanctification and discipleship looks like, and this is the very thing that the Holy Spirit is doing with the church at large, corporately. Sanctification is not merely personal, its communal. It involves the whole church of Christ (See Eph 5). To effectively deal with PTSD we must patiently and compassionately build relationships of trust and longevity to tell and retell our narratives, and to bring the gospel in again and again and again, yet in increasingly full, all encompassing, enlightening, beautiful, personal and social, ever deepening ways.

THIS is the sign! Doing the pathology from the standpoint of the mutuality of our freedom in Christ. The affirming sign of the power of Christ healing and casting out the evil spirits that have plagued individuals and have plagued our culture

### **III. The Gospel compels us to follow Jesus' own pattern of power**

Mrk 10

**Christine-Firer Hinze**—professor of theology at Fordham U., "Comprehending Power in Christian Social Ethics"— "Power-over" (superordinate) or "Power-to" (transformative)--- needs "power from" (authoritative). How do we know how this is to operate? What this is to look like?— look at the authorizer: Jesus.

Not self-projecting, nor self-protecting, but self-subordinating/Cruciform. Employing power in authority means we are exercising power in conformity with God's design, God's own example in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through the gospel is how are we are equipped to pursue this exercise of power

"Lording Over"—power is real, 1 Peter 5, he uses the same participle: katakurieuosiv

love is costly—it requires the cross.... move from a theology of glory to a theology of the cross, this must be a vital focus for us as we deal with the question of power in engaging those from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. calling to suffer is vital in considering this topic— Jesus gives us the pattern, Paul gives us the pattern

Is power a zero sum game? When power is expended, can it be renewed? Is it a currency?

Self-projecting, Self-protecting, self-subordinating...

Caiphas and Israel's fear of losing power..." In John's gospel account, these same religious leaders refused to affirm Jesus' act of raising Lazarus from the dead, for fear of "losing our place and the nation" to the Romans (Jn 11:48). Thus, the "authorities" of Israel who possessed political, economic, and religious power over that society were led to assert power violently in order to reinforce protective boundaries. As Caiaphas goes on to summarize to the Sanhedrin, "You know nothing at all! You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people, than to have the whole nation destroyed [by the Romans]...So, from that day on they planned to put him to death," (Jn 11:49-53).

### **Oliver O'Donovan**

"There is a conflict between the ways in which earthly and heavenly kingdoms operate: the one claims precedence, the other accepts subservience patiently." Oliver O'Donovan, **"The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology"** Cambridge, 1996, 138.

"The gift of power was not a zero-sum operation. God could generate new power by doing new things in Israel's midst." (O'Donovan, 95)

"The disciples became so focused on their own identification with the authority of Jesus that in 9:38 they become protective of works of power done in Jesus' name, "...Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." This defensiveness regarding the exercise of power in the authority of Jesus was not for the sake of Jesus' character nor for his authority, this defensiveness was in self-protection of their own sense of derived authority—the use of the personal pronoun *h'min* emphasizes the fact that the disciples were jealous for their own sake, they were feeling encroached upon (France, 2002, 377).<sup>1</sup> While the disciples sought to erect walls of exclusion, Jesus' response shows his desire to extend inclusion to any who would be, "...u`per h`mwn." In making this statement, which again emphasizes the personal pronoun, "us," Jesus not only includes the outsider, but reinforces the inclusion of his disciples into the realm of his authority even after their self-protective actions.

Pattern: Servant, Sacrifice, Shalom

Majority white church not taking the first step here, its already been taken by our African-American brothers and sisters; they aren't joining us, we're joining them. They have exercised power in the authority of Christ faithfully, and they have taken the initiative with this. We must learn from them, submit to their leadership in following Jesus in his path of suffering.

MLK "The Ethical Demands for Integration": "Nonviolence in so many ways has given the Negro a sense of 'somebodyness'. The impact of the non-violent discipline has done a great deal toward creating in the mind o the Negro a new image of himself... a commitment to nonviolence demands that he respect the personhood of his opponent. Thus, nonviolence exalts the personality of the segregator as well as the segregated."--- this is POWER. This is the black church exercising power in authority as its supposed to be done. We must see this and

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<sup>1</sup> The "we" here should be considered as referring to the inner circle of the Twelve. France emphasizes John's intention of creating an exclusivity among those who have access to Jesus, thus requiring the mediation of the Twelve. This may well be the case and further assists in the perspective of the disciples' hunger for power.

learn from our brothers and sisters. Its not us calling them to join us, its Christ calling us to join *them*.

Practicals:

1. Bring our churches into our broader narrative
2. Help our churches develop vision for Christ's broader narrative- gospel to the nations... But more importantly- the gospel- frees us from shame and guilt, frees us also from fear of subordinating ourselves to Christ's authority exercised through people with different racial backgrounds
3. Seek to reflect the flesh of our place
4. Live out true koinonia/partnership in the gospel--- downer for Overture 4: language of "participating" in the PCA, not partnering with us--- welcoming disposition, invitation, but also being intentional in discipleship and pursuing qualified people to lead/help shape the culture and practice of our church-- this is the organic nature of the church
5. Reflect the flesh of our city—organically and relationally live as the one holy catholic and apostolic church—in localized bodies, city-wide, regional, global—MLK quote on integration