



# **Toward an evangelical theology of power and privilege in conversation with James Cone**

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**ABSTRACT**

James Cone has offered a salient critique of White theology in which he has repeatedly called for White theologians to see their theological and exegetical work as grounded in biases derived from White power and privilege. This critique has been largely ignored or discounted by White theologians generally and evangelical theologians specifically. White evangelical theologians have failed to engage in constructive projects that make race, power and privilege the centerpiece of theological reflection. This is due in large part to the fact that cognitive propositional evangelical theology has lacked the methodological resources to generate a theology of power and privilege capable of both maintaining the centrality of Scripture and integrating critics, like Cone, as conversation partners in the theological process. This project aims to move toward a theology of power and privilege that can be faithful to Cone's critique and still be identified as an evangelical theology. The methodology engaged follows a hermeneutical model that recognizes author bias and challenges it by taking seriously Cone's critique, using it to evaluate a reformed evangelical theological tradition inclusive of John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge and Carl Henry to ask if the tradition evidences Cone's claims of embedded racism. Further the project looks at key biblical passages and their interpretations to ask if they have been rightly understood by the evangelical theological tradition under consideration. Based on all this work an analysis is presented of evangelical doctrinal views and constructive suggestions offered toward a theology of power and privilege that also takes into consideration the ethical appropriation of this theology. The project tests the ability of evangelical theology to deal with and formulate theology that remains both recognizably evangelical and is cognizant and responsive to Cone's critique.

**Key Terms:**

James Cone, evangelical theology, reformed theology, racism, power, privilege, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, Carl Henry

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## **1.0 Introduction**

James Cone has offered a salient critique of White theology in which he has repeatedly called for White theologians to see their theological and exegetical work as grounded in biases derived from White power and privilege. This critique has been largely ignored or discounted by White theologians generally and evangelical theologians specifically. White evangelical theologians have failed to engage in constructive projects that make race, power and privilege the centerpiece of theological reflection. This is due in large part to the fact that cognitive propositional evangelical theology has lacked the methodological resources to generate a theology of power and privilege capable of both maintaining the centrality of Scripture and integrating critics, like Cone, as conversation partners in the theological process. This project aims to move toward a theology of power and privilege that can be faithful to Cone's critique and still be identified as an evangelical theology.

### **1.1 Background**

It is important from the beginning of this research project to place, not only the research, but the researcher in order to understand his methodology and theological choices. The researcher is a White, male evangelical. His educational training includes exposure to a theology and theological method best described as evangelical cognitive-propositionalism. Historically he is part of a North American evangelicalism exemplified by its theological affinity to the work of John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, and Carl F. H. Henry. During the time this project was pursued the researcher served as the Dean of a theological college in the United States that instructs primarily Black students seeking undergraduate degrees in Bible and Theology. In addition to his administrative responsibilities, he teaches a three-course systematic theology sequence that has forced his engagement with Black liberation theology through the questions and interests of his students. The current project is a natural outgrowth of research and teaching that has required a dialogical interaction between Black theology, exemplified by James Cone, and a reformed evangelical theology that has been the primary theological system embraced by the researcher.

With the passing of James Cone, the founder of Black theology, there is likely to be a reappraisal both of Cone's theological legacy and the degree to which White theologians have been willing to engage with Cone's project of dismantling White supremacy. Cone's work elucidated the effects of White racism on theological perspectives, and this was the primary focus of his theological scholarship. His work also identified the central theme of Christian theology as the liberation of the poor and oppressed (Cone, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1975, 1982, 1991, 2011). He saw in White theology a deeply embedded dependence on power and privilege that made it un-Christian and sinful. In this way he envisioned his theological project as speaking both to the Black church and the White church—the former to elevate the importance of Black experience to create a thoroughly Black theology and the latter to call the White church out of the sinfulness of White supremacy and into the work of liberation (Cone, 1969:3). He continued to maintain the position that White theology was deeply flawed. His memoir, completed in early 2018, ends with the words, “I write because writing is the way I fight. Teaching is the way I resist, doing what I can to subvert white supremacy” (Cone, 2018b:172). Cone apparently continued to believe that the White church and White theologians had failed to adequately respond to his critique.

Cone's work remains controversial in both Black and White evangelical circles. His insistence on Black particularism in theological reflection and the elevation of Black experience to an equal level of authority with Scripture has alarmed many evangelicals. Black evangelicals Anthony Bradley (2010) and Bruce Fields (2001) both affirm the need for theology to take into account the experiences of the Black church, but fault Cone for elevating Black experience to the level of authority normally reserved for Scripture. Cone himself does not deny the importance of Scripture for the work of the Black theologian, but for Cone its use rests not in its authority but in the importance of the Black church experience (Cone, 2011).

White evangelical theologians have tended to avoid interaction with Cone, insisting that his theological method is incompatible with evangelical theology. Many theologians would evaluate Cone, and other particularist theologians, as dependent upon a relativistic, postmodern hermeneutic of suspicion that sees all interpretative acts as exercises of power and that seeks to elevate marginalized interpretations to subvert majority power (Foucault, 2003). This identification with the hermeneutic of suspicion makes the use of Cone untenable for many evangelicals. The problem with this line of reasoning is that, while Cone may make



reference to ideas ascribed to continental European hermeneutics, his theology is on the whole derived from modern foundationalism in much the same way that evangelicals' cognitive-propositionalism is also dependent on foundationalist methodologies. Cone's theological method is to be viewed as a direct extension of experiential-expressivism. This does not deny an authoritative source for theological reflection but simply locates the source of authority in the individual's direct experience of the divine (Schleiermacher, 1989). While this may seem to place Cone in direct opposition to evangelical cognitive-propositionalism, it is possible to see him as more closely aligned than if he were utilizing a post-foundationalist methodology. It is worth noting that while some evangelical theologians have embraced the new hermeneutic, and even post-foundationalist methodology, they have not in turn engaged in a constructive use of Cone. In fact, Anthony Thiselton (2007) and Kevin Vanhoozer (2005), two leading evangelical theologians working within these methodological frameworks, have directly opposed particularist theology and biblical exegesis.

This supposed methodological incompatibility does not, however, negate the very real global problem of race, and Cone is not the only scholar to point out the problem of race and racism in the development of White theology. Both J. Kameron Carter (2008) and Willi Jennings (2010) point to race, and White power and privilege, as central distorting factors in White theology. They also point to the need for a constructive interaction of theology with the question of racism. Their work, however, remains primarily deconstructive in nature.

Racism and theological construction is also not just a North American issue but has a global context. Rasid Begg (2007) connects the Black theology and Black power movements in the United States with the Black consciousness and anti-apartheid movements in South Africa, showing the genetic and philosophical links between these movements. Thus, Begg's article seems to suggest that the question of White theological apathy, in regard to the questions of race and White power, is as evident in the works of Steven Biko (1978), Beyers Naudé (1986; 1995), and Allan Boesak (1977; 1982; 1984; 1987; 2008; 2012; 2014; 2015) in South Africa as it is in the works of James Cone (1969; 1970; 1972), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1986) and Malcolm X (1965) in the United States.

Cone's fight against White supremacy was still the center of his theological task at the end of his life as late as April, 2018 (Cone, 2018b). Throughout his life he highlighted the ongoing pervasiveness of racism in White theology as not just a past, but also a present

reality. Likewise, Dr. Deon Snyman (2016), a minister in the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa and Chief Operating Officer of the Restitution Foundation, holds that South Africa “remains one of the most unequal societies in the world.” Racism as a global issue remains a problem for contemporary evangelical theology as do the claims of Cone, Jennings and Carter that racism and White power have distorted White theology in ways that are detrimental to the theological enterprise. To date, neither cognitive-propositional evangelical theology nor postmodern varieties of evangelicalism have engaged in a constructive conversation with Cone around issues of White power and privilege. Nor have there been significant constructive evangelical theological proposals independent of a conversation with Cone. It seems prudent, in light of the reappraisal and appropriation of Cone that is likely to emerge following his death, for evangelical theologians to ask if it is possible to construct a theology of power and privilege that takes seriously both Cone’s critique of White theology and evangelicalism’s commitment to the authority of Scripture. This work should not be merely derivative, but provide a contemporary engagement with doctrine and a creative reframing of systematic schemas sensitive to the issues raised by Cone.

## **1.2 Problem statement and literature survey**

Theologians have not been entirely silent on Cone’s critique of White supremacy. Several attempts have been made to engage Cone’s theory of the corruption of White theology and to make constructive efforts around individual doctrines. Doctrinal work includes J. W. Perkinson’s (1997) unpublished doctoral dissertation, which is an apologetic for Cone’s assertion that the White church is only saved in its denial of White supremacy and its embrace of the marginalized. As a largely apologetic work, the bulk of Perkinson’s argument is to support Cone’s assertions. He does suggest that a constructive use of Cone’s thesis would be in order but falls short of constructive doctrinal engagement. George Yancey (2012) edited a book of essays that focuses on Christology and Whiteness. These essays are helpful as illustrations of the ways race interacts with doctrine. But they lean heavily on critical race theory for their reappraisal of Christology and for that reason they are at some distance from traditional evangelical method. Marc Cortez (2017) has released a new work on theological anthropology that contains a chapter on race and is written from an evangelical perspective. While Cortez’s chapter on race is valuable for evangelical theologians, it is only loosely

connected to his overall reassessment of the doctrine of anthropology. Cortez's work, like Perkinson's, is largely apologetic in regard to its statement on race. Shaw Kelly's (2002) work on the racializing of Jesus in biblical scholarship is enlightening in the breadth of his analysis and is certainly useful for considerations of race and biblical interpretation. Both Jennings (2010) and Carter (2008) explore how race emerged as a category historically and theologically. And while they offer valuable historical theological insights, their constructive proposals are limited in the case of Jennings and nonexistent in the case of Carter.

What is lacking in much of the engagement with Cone and Black theology by contemporary theologians is a systemic vision of the implications of White power and privilege for a "re-visioning" of both doctrinal categories and systematic schemas. The primary question is: how might using James Cone's critique of White theology alter White evangelical theology around questions of power and privilege? This project aims to test whether a serious engagement with Cone's critique of White theology, integrated with a methodological process that engages the evangelical commitment to the authoritative nature of Scripture for the work of theology, can produce a theology of power and privilege that can be said to be true to both Cone and to evangelical theology. It is hoped that this will fill the gap by extending the largely deconstructive and apologetic work produced to date.

### **1.3 Objectives and aims**

As stated above, the aim of this research project is to use James Cone's critique of White theology within the parameters of an evangelical hermeneutical method to evaluate biblical texts related to power and privilege and to use the resulting interpretation to build a constructive proposal toward an evangelical theology of power and privilege. Meeting this aim requires that the study meet at least five objectives.

First, the development of a hermeneutical approach to the question that is true to evangelical understandings of the hermeneutical process. Second, a critical analysis of James Cone's critique of White theology with an assessment of ways that it challenges the hermeneutical presuppositions of White theologians. Third, an historical assessment of the validity of Cone's critique of evangelical theology, especially his claim of the embeddedness of racism in all White theology, and an assessment of the ways that the historically informed presuppositions of White evangelical theologians are challenged by this study. Fourth, a

hermeneutically informed textual analysis of biblical texts related to power and privilege. And fifth, a constructive proposal toward an evangelical theology of power and privilege informed by the hermeneutical analysis of selected texts. All of these objectives point toward an evaluation of the central thesis of this work, which is that by utilizing the critical appraisal of White theology proposed by James Cone, within the confines of an evangelical hermeneutical method, it is possible to arrive at a constructive proposal for an evangelical theology of power and privilege that represents a reassessment of doctrinal categories and systematic schemas.

## **1.4 Methodology**

It then remains to determine the methodological approach to be pursued in meeting the first objective stated above.

### **1.4.1 Introduction**

This research project will be pursued from an evangelical perspective using Kevin Vanhoozer's definition of "catholic-evangelicalism" (Vanhoozer, 2005:xlili-xlvi), where "catholic" implies the church in all times, places and distinct ecclesial structures and "evangelicalism" references a commitment to Scripture as the source of God's self-revelation to humanity. It will also affirm the complementary view of John Sailhamer (1995:37) that the evangelical view of Scripture is by nature a pre-critical view. Sailhamer references Hans Frei's definition of precritical realistic reading of Scripture (Frei, 1974:2-4). Frei identifies three components to this view, which include, first, a belief that the Bible is referential and describes actual historical events; second, that if the biblical world that is referenced in the Bible is a single world by extension it must also include a single identifiable story; and third, that the one biblical story includes the contemporary world as well. Thus, evangelicalism at its core subscribes to a view that God's self-revelation is found in the text of Scripture which includes a realistic reading that makes the text referential, canonical, and sufficient for contemporary application. The idea of a *catholic* evangelicalism insists that the text thus viewed becomes part of an interpretive tradition that takes into consideration the various interpretations of the text across time, culture, and ecclesial distinctives.

It should be noted that because this study aims at an evangelical theology of power and privilege the definition of pre-critical realistic reading outlined above will be taken as presuppositional. There will be little effort spent on defending this view even though both modern and postmodern biblical criticism would take issue with it. This research will assume that the task of theological reassessment and restatement must proceed from a strict definition of biblical realism/reference to be acceptable as appropriate to evangelicals. Unless the text directs the doctrine, the task of “re-visioning” evangelical doctrine and systematic schemas will be called into question.

This does not imply that a biblicist approach will be taken in the interpretation of the texts. What is intended is a preference for a literary analysis of the text in contrast to the socio-cultural and historical analysis, the recognition of the final form of the text as authoritative, and the understanding that Scripture can be communicated in ways that speak to the contemporary condition.

This text-based approach also implies that theology is defined as the act of making the revelation of God in Scripture intelligible to the contemporary situation. What this means is that theology and theological method are ultimately hermeneutical. Dan Stiver (2003:178) has this in mind when he asserts that hermeneutics and theology have an “unusual affinity.” Both Kevin Vanhoozer (1994; 2005) and Anthony Thiselton (2007) build systematic theology and doctrine out of interaction with a hermeneutical process that relates Scripture to contemporary contexts in ways that both lead to doctrinal formulation and preserve the authority of the text. Thus, it is possible to envision a theological method that follows a primarily hermeneutical method, which could conceivably give both a crucial role to Cone and a governing role to evangelical concerns for the primacy and authority of Scripture.

This is possible because hermeneutical method assumes Hans-Georg Gadamer’s notion of the separation between the horizon of the interpreter and the horizon of the text (Gadamer, 2004:268-371). Before interpretation of a text can begin the interpreter must first understand and delineate the presuppositions they bring to the text. This research will test whether bringing Cone’s critique into conversation with the horizon of a White evangelical theologian at various stages of a text-based interpretive process can produce an evangelical theology of power and privilege that is in any way substantively different from current evangelical systematics. This requires a hermeneutical process that brings together critical

reflection on evangelical presuppositions with the textual analysis of Scripture. What is envisioned is a process consisting of five movements and a total of eighteen steps.

#### **1.4.2 Hermeneutical/methodological movements**

Movement One insists that the starting point of theological method should consist of bringing to light and challenging the presuppositions of the theologian (Gadamer, 2000:268-371; Thiselton, 2007:183-185). This movement consists of two steps. First, the researcher engages an alternative tradition in an empathetic analytical reading. The attempt here is to understand the rational arguments made by others who oppose the researcher's own position in a way that allows the researcher to identify errors in his argument, cohering ideas that he may not have thought about, or unwanted influences that correlate with his own ideas. Secondly, the theologian, using insights for Step One, engages in a critical analytical reading of his own historical theological tradition to understand the presuppositions he brings to the biblical text and further theological formulation through the influence of this historical tradition (Osborne, 1991:404-405).

Movement Two takes the researcher's knowledge of these presuppositions to the interpretation of the text. This movement consists of four steps. First, it is important to recognize that text selection has its own hermeneutical issues. The researcher must clearly define the reasons for the selection of particular texts over others. The second step involves a critical textual analysis. Following John Sailhamer (1995:36-187) the text will be analyzed with attention to its final form, literary context, relation to the canon, genre and with an interest in "what it meant." Additionally, attention will be given to semantic fields as understood by Barr (1961). Any intertextual relationships will be explored. It is important to note that this project will take, contra G. K. Beale (2008:27-36), a minimalist approach to intertextuality. Where there is a clear connection between biblical texts, through a direct quote or incontrovertible allusion or echo, an analysis will be done on the differences or similarities in meaning between the two texts and how this might affect the interpretation of the text under consideration. The researcher will avoid the use of New Testament texts in the interpretation of Old Testament texts. Once the textual analysis is complete a preliminary interpretation will be made. Following Osborne (1991:12-14) Step Three of Movement Two will consist of challenging the researcher's preliminary findings with alternative

interpretations of the text; Osborne describes this as the deductive stage of biblical interpretation. The final step of this movement consists of delineating secondary findings based on interaction with alternative interpretations.

Movement Three attempts to move from textual interpretation to an understanding of the theological meaning of the text and its broader significance for biblical theological categories. This movement includes four steps. First, the researcher must identify the primary theological foci of the text based on the theological position of the author or the specific book in which the text appears (Osborne, 1991:261-285). Step Two is to place the text in question in dialogue with other texts in the canon that seem to oppose or alter the meaning of the text taken on its own (Vanhoozer, 2005:270-278; 1994:106-110). The third step involves considering alternative assessments of the theology that is derived from the text, including the uses of the text in theological reflection and the interpretation and place of the text in comprehensive biblical theologies. Combining Steps One through Three, the final step of Movement Three is to make an attempt at delineating the theological meaning of the text in its biblical context.

Moving from an understanding of the biblical theology of selected texts to the constructive work of systematic theology is what constitutes Movement Four (Vanhoozer, 1994:96-124; Osborne, 1991:286-317; Thiselton, 2007:3-109). Movement Four consists of two parts comprising a total of seven steps. Part One involves placing standard doctrinal categories in conversation with contemporary issues. First, the researcher must determine which dogmatic categories speak most directly to the contemporary issue under consideration and delineate which of several traditional approaches to the doctrine will be placed in dialogue with alternative voices. Secondly, the doctrines and traditional views selected will be placed in dialogue with alternative views that illuminate the contemporary issue under consideration. Step Three in Part One involves placing the understanding of individual doctrines derived from Steps One and Two above in conversation with the biblical study derived from the work of Movements Two and Three and allowing the Scripture to play a “norming” role in the way the doctrine is expressed. The final step of Part One is to give an account of the individual doctrines deriving from all the work up until this point. Part Two of Movement Four is to take the individual doctrines as delineated above and to determine their place in a systematic scheme. The first step of this part is to look at the ways each of the doctrines under consideration are traditionally incorporated as categories of systematic

theology and to determine the weight normally given and the reasons for their role and place in the traditional scheme under consideration. Next, the doctrines are considered in light of alternative means of systemization either in terms of the approximate weight that alternative voices give to particular doctrines or in terms of the place of the doctrine in the overall schema. Finally, using the work completed above it should be possible to suggest a constructive proposal for a systematic schema that relates the doctrines as envisioned in ways that speak to the contemporary questions and contexts.

Movement Five is the final step in the process and involves an analysis of the way in which the doctrines and schemas envisioned above can meet the requirements of appropriation. This section takes into account the final phase of Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Arch (Ricoeur, 1976:80-88), David Clark's (2003:87-88) and Kevin Vanhoozer's (2005:307-362) discussion of the importance of *sapientia* in systematic theology, as well as Anthony Thiselton's use of the concept of "questions from life" (Thiselton, 2007:3-109). All of these are derived in some way from Gadamer (2004:341-355), particularly his notion of the concept of experience. The primary work of this movement is to evaluate the degree to which the doctrines and schemas reached have the ability to be appropriated into the community to which they are addressed and the ways their appropriation would suggest their validity and sufficiency in regard to the contemporary context. This methodology might be represented graphically as in Figure 1.1 below.



| Movements                                                                          | Steps                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Current Project                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| <b>Movement One:</b><br>Challenging Presuppositions                                | <b>Step One:</b> Engage an alternative tradition in an empathetic analytical reading.<br><b>Step Two:</b> Engage in a critical analytical reading of the interpreter's presuppositions through personal identification and historical analysis.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Step One:</b> Engage in an empathetic analytical reading of James Cone.<br><b>Step Two:</b> Engage the historical tradition of the researcher using historical case studies of John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, and Carl Henry.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Movement Two:</b> Take enlarged horizon to the text                             | <b>Step One :</b> Text Selection<br><b>Step Two:</b> Critical Textual Analysis<br><b>Step Three:</b> Challenge preliminary findings with alternative interpretations<br><b>Step Four:</b> Initial textual interpretation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Step One:</b> Texts selected based on relevance to the question of power and privilege: Luke 4:16-30<br><b>Step Two:</b> Critical textual analysis of verses above<br><b>Step Three:</b> Look at the alternative interpretations of these passages including Cone and Black theologians and biblical exegetes.<br><b>Step Four:</b> Reach preliminary conclusions on the meaning of the texts under consideration                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Movement Three:</b> From textual interpretation to biblical theological meaning | <b>Step One:</b> Identify the primary foci/significance of the text.<br><b>Step Two:</b> Place text in dialogue with other texts that indicate different theological perspectives or alternative suggestions for interpretation.<br><b>Step Three:</b> Consider theological interpretations in light of the assessment of alternative biblical theologies.<br><b>Step Four:</b> Reach an understanding on the theological importance/lack thereof for each text and its overall significance for a canonical biblical theology. | <b>Step One:</b> Determine for Luke 4:16-30 what the theological significance/meaning, if any, might be within the context of Lukan theology.<br><b>Step Two:</b> Create a dialogue between the verses selected and challenging texts. Household Codes: Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Colossians 3:18 – 4:1 and Romans 13.<br><b>Step Three:</b> Examine traditional biblical theologies to determine how they utilize the selected verses and the importance they place on the verses for their conclusions. This will include the uses of the verses by Cone and other Black theologians/biblical Scholars. |

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|                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p><b>Step Four:</b> Give initial assessment of how the biblical theological perspective that derives from this work might speak to a Biblical understanding of race, power and privilege.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <p><b>Movement Four:</b> From biblical meaning to theological contextualization and systematic construction</p> | <p><b>Part One:</b> Contextual interaction with doctrinal formulations</p> <p><b>Step One:</b> Selection of doctrines that relate to the contemporary question being asked and a delineation of doctrines from the standpoint of the researcher's tradition.</p> <p><b>Step Two:</b> Place the traditional understanding of each doctrine delineated by the researcher above in dialogue with alternative views and formulations of each doctrine.</p> <p><b>Step Three:</b> Bring understanding built on the dialogue above in conversation with the biblical work in Movements Two and Three above allowing the biblical understanding to "norm" and mediate the understanding derived from steps 11 and 12.</p> <p><b>Step Four:</b> Based on conclusions from steps 11-13 above articulate an understanding of the doctrine.</p> <p><b>Part Two:</b> Contextual interactions with systematic schemas.</p> <p><b>Step One:</b> Evaluate the place and weight of the doctrines considered in Part One in traditional systematic schema.</p> <p><b>Step Two:</b> Evaluate the place and weight of each of these doctrines in alternative systematic schema</p> | <p><b>Part One:</b> Contextual interactions with doctrinal formulations</p> <p><b>Step One:</b> The doctrine of God will be examined in light of the evangelical tradition running from Calvin to Edwards to Hodge and Henry.</p> <p><b>Step Two:</b> The doctrinal formulations outlined above will be placed in dialogue with the formulations of James Cone.</p> <p><b>Step Three:</b> The understanding derived from the dialogue above with Cone and will be evaluated in light of the textual and theological understanding derived from the analysis of Luke 4:16-30 considered in Movements Two and Three above.</p> <p><b>Step Four:</b> The doctrinal understanding from the process outlined in steps 11-13 will be applied to evaluate these doctrines in light of the question of white power and privilege.</p> <p><b>Part Two:</b> Contextual interactions with systemic schemas.</p> <p><b>Step One:</b> Evaluate the place and weight of the doctrine of God in the systematic theologies of Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry.</p> <p><b>Step Two:</b> Evaluate the place and weight of the doctrine of</p> |

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|                                        | <b>Step Three:</b> Based on the work of Parts One and Two reach a conclusion on an appropriate systematic scheme to address the contemporary question at hand.                                                                                                 | God in the theology of James Cone.<br><b>Step Three:</b> In light of step 15 and 16 reach a conclusion on an appropriate systematic scheme that lends itself to an evangelical theology of power and privilege.                                         |
| <b>Movement Five:</b><br>Appropriation | <b>Step One:</b> Delineate in what way the emerging theology is able to be appropriated into the life and work of the church, how it can move beyond theory to praxis, and how the implementation of the theology will bear witness to its own internal truth. | <b>Step One:</b> Delineate how the resulting theology of power and privilege can be implemented in an evangelical church context, how it moves logically from theory to praxis, and how its implementation will bear witness to its own internal truth. |

Figure 1.1 Methodological Chart

It is understood that this methodology is extensive and the selection of categories of verses, historical case studies, and doctrines cannot be fully comprehensive. The use of the word “toward” in the research title is intentional. What is aimed for is an intense interaction with a smaller set of scriptural, historical, theological, and philosophical data to demonstrate the way in which these interpretative choices might generate new ways of doctrinally and systematically constructing a theology of power and privilege. It is hoped that the methodology, interpretative choices, conversation partners, and their correspondence to the resulting doctrinal and systematic choices would be so clear that other evangelical theologians will be able to enter into a dialogue that adds to, clarifies, refutes and hopefully elucidates evangelical theology’s response to the global issue of White supremacy. With that in mind it is possible to turn to the work of the first movement, an emphatic-analytical reading of James Cone.

## **2.0 James Cone and the Presuppositions of White Evangelical Theology (Movement One, Step One)**

The first movement toward an evangelical theology of power and privilege is challenging the bias of evangelical theology through an empathetic-analytical reading of James Cone. It is essential to delineate just how that task will be accomplished. Toward that end, a few preliminary remarks are necessary to frame the work of this movement.

Much in Cone's writing is antithetical to orthodox evangelical theology. His view of revelation, Christology, and soteriology may seem at direct odds with evangelical conceptions of the same. Given these and other differences, it would be tempting to launch into a critical debate with Cone that only served the apologetic purpose of defending White evangelical theology against the attacks of Cone's Black Theology. Bias is not challenged when evangelical theology immediately moves to a defensive posture. A credible approach to this project must attempt to understand Cone's position vis-à-vis Cone, his influences, and his conversation partners. Doing so does not require a complete acquiescence to Cone's views but does require that those views are understood first, for the potential they hold in challenging the a priori views of evangelicalism that may get in the way of an accurate interpretation of Scripture and a nuanced statement of evangelical doctrine. At this stage the use of Cone to challenge bias demands that a critical assessment of Cone's theology must wait until a later point in this project. That is why the approach is described as an "empathetic" instead of a "critical" analysis.

Because Cone frequently challenges White academics it is important to clarify both what is understood by the term "White" and the way in which this project engages Cone. Clarity on the use of the term "White" is in order for two reasons. First, critical race theology has developed a complete literature dealing with the constructed nature of "whiteness" and while this "constructedness" is recognized the current project will follow Cone in the expansive use of the term to avoid the ability of those who should be otherwise included from opting out of the critique. Second, "White" may take on different meanings depending on global context. North American and European Whites need intersectional differentiation from those of European descent in the Global South. The term here as applied to society, the church, theology and theologians is used primarily to address North Americans and

Europeans of European descent, which is the way it was primarily used by Cone. It will only be used in the current research globally when indigenous individuals, either of non-European or of European descent choose to apply the term to their context. Many of the concerns expressed here may potentially be extrapolated to contexts in the Global South but the work of doing so is left to those who are indigenous to those contexts. For an example of a non-Western categorization of “whiteness” see Simon Maimela (1987:25-40).

It should also be noted that Cone chastises White scholars for both their critical analysis of his work and their efforts to “do” Black Theology. This project attempts to turn Cone’s critique inward toward an assessment of White evangelical theology, not toward an assessment of Black Liberation Theology per se. The work intends to be what Cone himself might term an “anti-racist” White evangelical theology (Cone, 2004:151). Therefore, it pretends to be neither a work of Black Theology nor a critical apologetic in opposition to it. While critical assessments of the compatibility of Cone’s theology with White evangelical dogmatics will need to occur at later stages of this research, these assessments are intended to be a reflection on the inner dynamics and definitions of White evangelical theology and not a direct attack on, or acquiescence to, the validity of Black Theology. Ultimately the success or failure of this project rests on the degree to which Cone is allowed to function as a foil to evangelical bias as opposed to being the source of an all-encompassing system into which evangelical theology is absorbed. With this in mind, it is now possible to move toward an empathetic-analytical assessment of Cone and his work.

## **2.1 James Cone and Black Theology**

Before analyzing Cone’s views on doctrine, he must be understood in light of his broader agenda and his very prominent rhetorical persona. These features of Cone drive both the way he is perceived and the way he envisions his theological work. This analysis will help to challenge initial evangelical bias toward Cone.

Likewise, Cone’s theology cannot be understood apart from his interactions with his critics and conversation partners. This is true in two senses. First, Cone’s work often arises in response to the work of others. It can only, therefore, be understood in light of these broader conversations. Secondly, as the initial founder of academic Black Liberation Theology, Cone deals with broad outlines and seldom gets distracted by details. This means

that he leaves others the task of filling out his critique and moving it in constructive directions. Thus, research of the type envisioned here will need to engage with writers whose work is adjacent to Cone's, including the writing of other Black, Womanist, and Liberation theologians, as well as the work of non-Western theologians. For example, Willie Jennings (2010) takes up and expands Cone's understanding of the embeddedness of racism in theology, Simon Maimela (1987 and 1990) globalizes discussions of Black liberation theology while starting with similar assumptions, and James Evens Jr. (2012) clearly is true to the spirit of Cone's Black liberation theology but at the same time broadens some of Cone's perceptions and grounds his discussion in clearer systematic categories. The later constructive work of this project will engage with categories and critiques suggested by Cone but may need to look to scholars like Jennings, Maimela and Evens to provide the necessary detail or language for dialogical engagement between Cone and evangelical theology.

In addition to understanding Cone's agenda, persona, and conversation partners, it will also be important to understand the various genres that Cone uses to build his theological corpus. Cone's deep commitment to the idea that form equals content requires that the various forms of his work be examined with a view to how the form affects the reading and understanding of its content and its subsequent use.

### **2.1.2 Cone's agenda**

Many scholars have misinterpreted the directness and clarity of Cone's agenda as evidence that his work is not theological but ideological. Cone, for example, is accused by Eric Lincoln, Herbert Edwards, Frederick Herzog, Paul Lehmann, and Helmut Gollwitzer at a symposium on Cone's "Black Theology on Revolution, Violence, and Reconciliation" (1975:6-14) of being susceptible to ideological as opposed to theological argument (Cone, 1975:71-85). While an answer to this critique is forthcoming at a later point in this study, one must recognize that Cone presents his agenda so adamantly, because he is committed to the proposition that the theologian's experience in the world implicitly and explicitly governs her theology. For Cone, it is a matter of intellectual integrity to identify these influences clearly from the beginning of a theologian's work (Cone, 197b: xix). Cone's intellectual agenda informs and directs all of his theological writing. Cone may restate, reengage, and re-envision certain aspects of his theology, but throughout his theological corpus he remains

faithful to two parallel commitments. The first is his fight to end White supremacy, which includes its manifestations in White society, the White Church, and White theology. The second is his efforts to create an apologetic for a uniquely Black theology. Cone works this out as an answer to Black nationalism, historians of Black religion, the prevailing myth of a universal theology, and the development of an outline for a uniquely “Black” theology. Cone maintains both his fight against White supremacy and his apologetic for a Black theology beginning with his publication in 1969 of *Black Theology and Black Power* and culminating in the posthumous publication of *Said I Wasn’t Gonna Tell Nobody: The Making of a Black Theologian* in 2018. Because of their enduring nature both of these agenda items require further consideration.

#### 2.1.2.1 The fight against White supremacy

It is easy to assume that Cone has nothing to say to White society. He is, after all, the founder of Black Theology. Cone’s critics often set up an image of Cone as a Black Nationalist who has no time for or intention of addressing White society (Greeley, 1971). There are two reasons that this image of Cone should be dismissed. First, Black theologians who have critiqued Cone’s work see a definite attempt on Cone’s part to reach back and address White audiences. They are critical of Cone’s use of White theologians (Wilmore, 1998; Cecil Cone, 1975), his use of White systematic schemas and neo-orthodox methodology (Cone, 1986, xxiii), and, per Black historians of religion and Black Nationalists, his too adamant defense of Christianity as a Black religion.

Secondly, Cone himself affirms that he is attempting to address White society. In the introduction to *Black Theology and Black Power* Cone states, “This is a word to the oppressor, a word to Whitey, not in hopes he will listen (after King’s death who can hope?) but in the expectation that my own experience can be clarified” (Cone, 1997a: 3)

Both the recognition on the part of Cone’s critics that he continues to speak to White audiences and Cone’s affirmation, in much of his early work, that he is addressing White society, affirms that Cone was not doing work limited solely to the Black community, but that he had hopes of transforming White society as well. He, however, remained skeptical about having any positive effect in this regard. Regardless, Cone continued to call White society to see the detrimental effects of White supremacy on both the White supremacist and

the oppressed Black community. What is critical here is to recognize that Cone did have something to say to White society and therefore cannot be ignored by White society on the grounds that he only has relevance to Black Americans.

Not only did Cone address his attack on White supremacy to White society at large, but he also challenged White supremacy within the White Church. Cone identifies the White Church as the “antichrist” (Cone, 1997:73). He proves his point by pointing to deficiencies within the White Church in the areas of ecclesiological, ethical, and historical praxis. Before moving to Cone’s broader argument it is important, because of how consistently the concept is misunderstood (see Cone, 2018a:51-53; 2011:60-61), to define how Cone views the designation “antichrist”.

Cone defines antichrist as any institution that “is the enemy of Christ” and equates it loosely with the biblical concept of “the principalities and powers” (Cone, 1997:73). Cone’s use of the term is not too distinct from its use by the early reformers such as Calvin, Luther and the Anabaptists. Martin Luther, for example, often referred to the Pope and the Catholic church as the “antichrist” while Anabaptists tended to reference individuals and institutions as “guilty by association” with Satan who was the “antichrist.” In both instances the “antichrist” is a real current evil and one of the principalities and powers of this world that is at odds with contemporary church eschatology, which uses identifications of the “antichrist” as signs of the end times (see Luther, 1959:80 and Williams, ed., 1959:42). What is of note is that “antichrist” has a distinctly non-eschatological meaning for Cone.

He further defines what justifies one as an “enemy of Christ.” Cone works to equate Christ’s position as a suffering Jew as hermeneutically equivalent to the oppression of Black people. By way of this distinction, Cone is then able to identify the Church of Christ as ontologically Black. If Christ is Black and his church is Black then the White Church’s racism identifies it as an “enemy of Christ.” This justifies, at least within Cone’s logical framework, applying the label “antichrist” to the White Church (Cone, 1997b: 69).

Once his application of the term “antichrist” is understood it is then easier to understand how Cone can argue that the White Church has an errant ecclesiology, ethics, and history. All three of these categories serve to further Cone’s critique of White supremacy in the White Church.



Cone defines the Church as “. . . the people of God, whose primary task is that of being Christ to the world by proclaiming the message of the gospel (*kerygma*), by rendering services of liberation (*diakonia*), and by being itself a manifestation of the nature of the new society (*koinonia*)” (Cone, 1997b: 71). In subsequent discussions, Cone identifies the way in which the White Church violates each of the functional criteria of his definition.

First, the White Church fails in its efforts to proclaim the true message of the gospel. Cone understands the *kerygma* of the Church to be the preaching of the message of Christus Victor<sup>1</sup>—Christ victorious over the old evil powers that oppressed the world through his death on the cross. Thus, he sees a requirement on the part of the Church to preach “freedom” to the oppressed and to proclaim that “the old powers of white racism are writhing in final agony” (Cone, 1997b: 67). Further, “Preaching in its truest sense tells the world about Christ’s victory and thus invites people to act as if God has won the battle over racism” (Cone, 1997b: 67). Cone sees the failure of the White Church as resulting both from its periodic preaching that supports White supremacy and its continued silence on the question of racism (Cone, 1997b: 71-74). Preaching for Cone must require that its hearers “take a side;” there can be no room for equivocation on issues of justice if the message is truly kerygmatic (Cone, 1997b: 67).

Second, the White Church fails in its service. *Diakonia*, as defined by Cone, consists in the Church “joining Christ in his work of liberation” (Cone, 1997b: 67). Cone leans heavily here on his understanding of atonement. Christ as victorious over evil in his death on the cross is significant as an act of liberation for those who suffer from the evil of oppression. If Jesus focuses his work on liberation, then the Church’s necessary service must mirror Christ’s in its act of liberating the oppressed from the old evil powers. The Church’s contemporary context must assume that the central evil power at work is racism arising from White supremacy. Thus, the *diakonia* that the Church must render to the world is service that attacks racism at its source and places the Church in solidarity with the oppressed Black community. This service is made all the more important by the fact that, though Christ’s defeat of evil is decisive, the war against evil continues to rage (Cone, 1997b: 67). Cone

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<sup>1</sup> Later we will need to address how Cone’s acceptance of Christus Victor as an appropriate theory of the atonement equates with Simon Maimela’s (1987:87-100) view that it is not of use to Black Liberation Theologies. The primary question being, does Maimela make a case that harms Cone’s view at the point where it is dependent on this theory and do either Cone or Maimela challenge White evangelical theology to a more constructive understanding of atonement within an anti-racist theology of power and privilege?

points to the “Death of God” movement’s declaration that the White Church is irrelevant on issues of social justice, the lack of involvement in ministries directly to the poor, and the Church’s overemphasis on resolutions and talk instead of action, as crucial indicators of its failure to render proper service (Cone, 1997b: 71).

Finally, the White Church fails in its fellowship. Cone envisions *koinonia* as the Church projecting in its fellowship what it proclaims to do, and “what it hopes to accomplish” in the world. For Cone, “. . . the Church’s preaching and service are meaningful only insofar as the Church itself is a manifestation of the preached Word” (Cone, 1997b: 70). Therefore, for a church to be an expression of the true Church, it must ensure the holiness of all its members. His definition of “holy” is “a community that has accepted Christ’s acceptance of us” (Cone, 1997b: 70). By this Cone implies a church that can accept all people. This is evident from his previous identification of the Church as “not bounded by standards of race, class, or occupation. . . . Rather the Church is God’s suffering people” (Cone, 1997b: 65). For the Church to be the Church, it must contain in its fellowship the oppressed and those who have found solidarity with the oppressed. The need to maintain the holiness of this fellowship requires the church to ask, “Who in the community does not live according to the Spirit of Christ?” (Cone, 1997b: 70). It is at this point that Cone identifies the failure of the White Church. In its application of church discipline, the White Church has too quickly defined unholy acts in terms of culturally bound views of individual morality but seldom ever defines them in terms of racism. For Cone, the continued existence of racists in White congregations means that the White Church is tainted by the un-holiness of racist members and its own refusal to deal with them (Cone, 1997b: 71). Thus, Cone finds the White Church in violation of all three functions required for identification as a true Church. Cone also furthers his argument by asserting that the White Church is also lacking at the point of ethical and historical praxis.

Ethically the White Church has “enshrined immorality” in both its defense of racism and its silence about racism. Cone places a heavy emphasis on both ethical praxis and latent racism in his assessment that the White Church has failed to exercise “moral leadership and moral example” beyond the passing of a few resolutions. The White Church also has such a long history of racism that immoral practices have become latent within its ecclesial structures. Thus, Cone concurs with and quotes Kyle Haselden, “We must ask whether our

morality is itself immoral, whether our codes of righteousness are, when applied to the Negro, a violation and distortion of the Christian ethic” (Cone, 1997b: 72).

The latent nature of racism and ethical immorality within the contemporary White Church are a direct result of a pattern of White supremacy throughout the history of the White Church. It is here that Cone mounts his fullest assault. He points out that White churchmen wrote books in defense of slavery, and that even the activity of abolitionist churches in the North opposing slavery did not mean that the Church accepted Blacks as equal with Whites either socially or under the law. He also points to the fact that many of the Church’s early preachers and missionaries owned slaves. The Church during the civil rights era was little better, preferring gradualism and status quo arguments in support of Martin Luther King Jr. early in the fight for civil rights. Those who did join the movement did so belatedly. While many White churches eventually came around to King they did so only after the emergence of the Black Power Movement. At the time that Cone was writing *Black Theology and Black Power* the White Church continued its opposition to Black freedom in its condemnation of the violence of rioters in Detroit and LA without any sustained criticism of the violence Whites had perpetrated against Blacks during slavery, Jim Crow, the long reign of lynching laws in the South, and the abject poverty and ghetto culture that housing discrimination and city policies imposed on Blacks in the North. Cone contends that this continued pattern of support for the rule of law, calls for gradualism, or direct participation in racist acts has become so ingrained in the DNA of the White Church that it fails to recognize it for what it is—a form of anti-Christ-like behavior (Cone, 1997b:74-80).

By way of this analysis of the White Church’s deficiencies in ecclesiology, ethics and historical practice, Cone can conclude that the White Church “. . . is a chaplaincy to sick middle-class egos. It stands (or sits) condemned by its very whiteness” (Cone, 1997b: 80). Cone, therefore, has built a case that maintains that not only is society racist but the very essence of the contemporary White church is racist. But he does not stop there. Cone, as an academic theologian, takes his fight against White supremacy beyond the confines of civil law and church practice, to find racism rooted at the core of White theology and its doctrinal formulations.

Cone’s first reason for believing that White theology reflects White supremacy is that White theologians remain silent in their writing on issues of race. This silence is a result of

at least four realities. First, White theologians can practice their profession without having to deal with race either in their work or their lives. Second, dealing with race often stirs up uncomfortable feelings of guilt in White theologians. Cone also believes that many White theologians will not engage race because they are uncomfortable dealing with “Black Rage.” Finally, most White theologians are not ready for the radical “redistribution of wealth and power” that an honest theological engagement with racism would demand (Cone, 2004:144-150). Ultimately for Cone, the issue of silence on the question of race is the most egregious error found in White theological discourse. (On Tillich’s silence see Cone, 2018b: 74) If faithful theology speaks to the Church regarding the practices of the Church in contemporary society, then White theology cannot be described as faithful theology when it is silent on the question of race (Cone, 1997a: 89).

White theology’s close identity with the structures of society is another reason offered by Cone for the embedded nature of White supremacy in White theology. It is important to note that Cone is not the only scholar to make this claim. Nathan Hatch in his book *the Democratization of American Christianity* (Hatch, 1989), Mark A. Noll’s *God and Race in American Politics* (Knoll, 2008), Simon Maimela’s “Theology and Politics in South Africa: A Black Critique” in *Proclaim Freedom to My People* (Maimela, 1987:1-24) and Walter Brueggemann’s “Relinquishing White Supremacism” in *Tenacious Solidarity: Biblical Provocations on Race, Religion, Climate, and the Economy* (Brueggemann, 2018:109-117), all make similar claims. Cone cites both the correlation of religious morality with political law and order and the compartmentalization of American theology as key features for a commitment to the social status quo. in regard to the former, Cone asserts that “in a culture which rewards ‘patriots’ and punishes ‘dissenters,’ it is difficult to be prophetic and easy to perform one’s duties in the light of the objectives of the nation as a whole” (Cone, 1997a: 82). As regards the latter, he argues that the primary reason that White theologians compartmentalize and avoid contemporary political issues is their anxiety about appearing to be dissenters. If they can find a way to justify focusing on the latest philosophical-theological “trend” from Europe they can justify “race” as unrelated to contemporary theological pursuits (Cone, 1997a: 82, 83).

Cone also engages in a lengthy comparison between Karl Barth and contemporary American theologians. His analysis will be taken up later in a section on Cone and Barth. For now, it is important to understand that Cone sees Barth as working to bring his transcendent

theology to bear in his attack on natural theology. Barth links natural theology to an attempt to give oppressive political structures God-like powers. Cone questions whether the assessment of American theologians that Barth's attack on natural theology was a mistake is directly tied to their embrace of an oppressive political structure. While his internal logic is sound, it will be important later to assess whether he is correct in his assumptions about the political motivations of Barth (Cone, 1997a: 86-89).

Another reason for claiming that White theologians are perpetuating racist systems is the inconsistency of those White theologians who do, on occasion, deal with race. This is particularly true of those theologians whose work included a call for gradualism (Cone, 1997a: 89). One might note Cone's attack on Reinhold Niebuhr's gradualism as a case in point (Cone, 2011:30-4). As a group, theologians who address the question of race tend toward compromised solutions or paternalistic pity. Cone lists James Herzog as "a prominent exception" to the rule, but in general his critique of White theologians at this point hardened over time.<sup>2</sup>

Cone is also clear that White theology remains beholden to White supremacy because it has failed to engage with Black theologians, the Black church, and Black culture as a whole in the writing of theology. Cone despairs that, "There are almost no references to Black scholars or other people of color in any of the writings of major White theologians" and as a case in point he points to Reinhold Niebuhr, who "did occasionally talk about race" but who does not cite Black intellectuals in his discussion. Cone does not ask White theologians to always agree with Black scholars, but he does insist on a consideration of Black intellectuals in the discussion. Doing so, he seems to suggest, would cause a greater empathy for both the arguments of Black intellectuals and the suffering of the Black poor (Cone, 2004:151).

Focus is another key area that has caused White theologians to continue to resist the urge to critique and overcome the embeddedness of racism in its theological structures. White theologians who have an interest in the oppressed have pointed their critique at questions of class and economics and away from race. They have tended to prefer conversations with Latin American Liberation theologians to an engagement with Black theology. As a result,

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<sup>2</sup> On Herzog see Cone, 2004:143; as an example of this hardening line on White theologians and race compare his early works with his assessment on the question throughout *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* (Cone, 2018b). See for example his shift in his positive assessment of Lester Sheerer, a longtime friend and informal editor of most of Cone's works, in all other mentions of Sheerer and his negative assessment of Sheerer in *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*.

they often miss the racist elements of their theological traditions because they are focused on other issues that may intersect but do not fully uncover this failing in White theology (Cone, 2004:143).

There is a definite undertone in most of Cone's work against the tendency of White theology to lean toward philosophical abstraction and away from concrete contemporary issues. He mentions as a prime example the obsession of White theology with questions of "the Death of God" in the 1960s and 1970s and its almost total disregard for the question of race during the same period. He also disparages White theology's insistence on splitting the disciplines of theology and ethics in a way that would indicate that ethical discourse is not theology, thus subscribing theology to abstraction and ethics to a lower level of intellectual respectability (Cone, 2004:143).

Finally, Cone sees a lack of praxis-focused theology, or a misdirected praxis-focused theology, as central to the problem of racism in White theology. In regard to the former Cone asserts that a new White theology must "come out of an antiracist political struggle" (Cone, 2004:151). He envisions theology moving toward a praxis that engages the theologian in the world of the oppressed for whom, and with whom, they are "doing" theology. Cone sees White theology's insistence on universal theology and objections to a particular theology of oppressed Black people as symptomatic of the racist afflictions of contemporary White theologians. As regards universal theology, Cone critiques the many times White theology has abandoned its historic commitment to objectivity in order to use theological and doctrinal rhetoric in defense of racist acts in society. These acts stand to condemn the location of White theology on the side of the oppressor, the hypocrisy of White theology's claims to objectivity, and its opposition to theology derived from a politically focused praxis.

This points to two critical failures on the part of White theology. First, it has failed to realize and rid itself of the embedded racism that has emerged from both its past silence and its past explicit defense of racist practices within the Church and society. Secondly, it has failed to generate an "anti-racist" theology that stands as a sharp corrective of its past errors. On this last point, Cone asserts, "The development of a hard-hitting antiracist theology by White religion scholars is long overdue" (Cone, 2004:151). In this way, Cone both fights White supremacy in White theology and calls on White theologians to engage with his work toward the development of this "anti-racist" theology. Cone's critique suggests that

evangelical theology should examine the extent to which it has been silent on race, has acquiesced to the use of evangelical doctrine in defense of racism, and the degree to which evangelical doctrine might be subverted in this way. Should this analysis determine that Cone's critique is in fact true of evangelicalism, then evangelical theologians should ask to what degree an anti-racist agenda informs the broader Evangelical theological enterprise.

The latter point is crucial for insisting on a reexamination of evangelical doctrine in light of questions of power, privilege and White supremacy and to at least reexamine doctrinal formulas in accordance with their past misuse for racist purposes and the ways they have produced churches that do not personify an "antiracist" theology or praxis. While it may not be common to think of doctrinal integrity as in some ways proven by its practical applications, there are evangelical scholars who have suggested this connection. Kevin Vanhoozer (2005:308) says of theology:

[It] is more than an exegetical *techné*, just as it is more than a theoretical *episteme*. Each of these species of reason has its moment in a biblically oriented theology, but the greatest of these is *phronesis*: practical reason. *Phronesis* is reason oriented to action and is thus an appropriate help to a sapiential theology that seeks to live out the knowledge of God.

Likewise, Anthony Thiselton (2007:38-39) asserts:

Only in those less characteristic or later instances when faith begins to address "freestanding problems" rather than "questions that arise" does doctrine risk losing its contingent, temporal, narrative, life-related, dispositional character. In some respects it then begins to move toward a more abstract system.

Thiselton's primary thesis is that doctrine, to be functional, must be considered from the standpoint of "questions that arise" and is therefore primarily a hermeneutical task. If Vanhoozer and Thiselton are correct in stressing the importance of the connections between doctrine and its applications "in life" then it might be suggested that doctrinal statements that are able to be directed toward racist ends might either lack a proper language flowing out of particular "questions that arise" or may in fact not have the proper articulation, internal focus, or necessary systematic distinctions that would generate an "antiracist theology." If this is the case, it would seem that a further exploration of both Cone's assumptions about the connections between White evangelical theology and racism and of the ways evangelical doctrine might be better articulated, systematized, and applied to point toward a practice that clearly excludes racist and White supremacist praxis, is not only helpful but necessary.

By way of conclusion, it should be clear from the proceeding analysis that Cone opposes White supremacy in White society, in the White church, and in White theology. Thus, the fight against White supremacy is part of the overall agenda of Cone's total body of theological work. It should also be evident that this critique has potential value in a reexamination of evangelical doctrine. However, it is not the only thing he is attempting to accomplish. A second component of Cone's work is his effort to create an apologetic for a truly Black Christianity.

#### 2.1.2.2 An apologetic for a truly Black Christianity

What White theologians often miss is Cone's attempt to preserve Black Christianity for a new generation of Black Americans. The Black Power Movement, along with other counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, launched a direct attack on Christianity and the Church. The Black Church during this time faced a similar problem to its White counterparts. Both struggled with how to avoid the loss of a new generation that was gravitating increasingly toward either atheism or other forms of religious expression. Some elements of the White church engaged the 60s drug culture and participated in the emergence of the Jesus People Movement, which was embodied in the founding of Calvary Chapel and led to the emergence of the contemporary megachurch movement within North American evangelicalism (Pederson, 1971; Palms, 1971). Cone, following the lead of the National Conference of Colored Churchmen (Cone, 1984:11-18), launched an apologetic theological project that asserted a truly Black Christianity against the Black Power Movement's insistence that Christianity was "the white man's religion." He did so in conversation with Black Nationalists, historians of Black religion, and in opposition to Black self-hate.

#### 2.1.2.3 In answer to Black nationalism

As Cone began his work to affirm the Christian nature of Black Power, he was immediately confronted with the vehement opposition of Black Nationalists to Christianity. Those within the Black Power Movement saw leaving Christianity behind as a prerequisite to the revolution. The early antecedents to the movement like Franz Fanon and Malcolm X and its later popularizers like Stokely Carmichael, the Black Panther Party, and the Black Arts Movement were unanimous in their opposition to Christianity. Malcolm X followed this



belief into the Nation of Islam while Fanon and many of the Black Panthers embraced socialist Marxism. Those in the Black Arts Movement often preferred a recovery of African religions and moved ultimately toward Pan-Africanism. By the time Cone wrote *Black Theology and Black Power* in 1969, the Black Power Movement was eclipsing the mostly Christian church-based Civil Rights Movement as the new strategy for Black liberation, and it was doing so while rejecting both the Civil Rights Movement and its connections to organized Christianity.

The sentiments of the Black Power Movement are captured succinctly by Don Lee in a work of Black literary criticism. Lee's *Dynamite Voices: Black Poets of the 1960s* (1971) showcases the work of emerging Black poets and illustrates their connection to the contemporary concerns of young Blacks who saw themselves as part of a revolutionary struggle for Black liberation. Quoting Lee at length will give a clear sense of just what Cone had to work against to commend Christianity to the next generation of disillusioned young Blacks. Addressing the work of Norman Jordan, Lee states that "No Hiding Place" reflects the poet's thought on the castration of the Black man which took place while he prayed to an alien God:

I Kneeled  
to pray  
and split  
the seam  
in the rear  
of my pants  
Letting God see  
The blood stain  
In the crotch  
Of my  
God-Damn shorts.

And, again, "Sinner" says something about the puritanical, protestant ethic fostered by Whites and accepted and adhered to by Blacks:

I started  
talking to  
the Bible  
and it kept  
telling me

to die (Lee, 1971:45, 46)

Lee sums up the common opinion of the Black Power Movement:

Traditionally, Blacks have looked to the “living Word” for hope and consolation, while the man used it as proof that “whatever is, is right.” Blacks have been admonished to absolve themselves of all evil—*What* evil? *Whose* evil? We all know what adherence to this philosophy led to: Christianization, then enslavement and death (Lee, 1971:46).

While it might be tempting to argue that this is just poetic hyperbole, it is not only poets who expressed discontent with Christianity. Franz Fanon, an early anti-colonialist writer, read by many of the leaders of the Black Power Movement, describes the process whereby the colonizer subdues the colonized subject:

The colonized subject also manages to lose sight of the colonist through religion. Fatalism relieves the oppressor of all responsibility since the cause of wrong-doing, poverty, and the inevitable can be attributed to God. The individual thus accepts the devastation decreed by God, grovels in front of the colonist, bows to the hand of fate, and mentally readjusts to acquire the serenity of stone (Fanon, 2004:18).

It was this emerging anti-Christian element in Black Nationalism that led Cone to develop an apologetic defending the role of Christianity in the Black struggle for freedom. His approach was to accept without argument all of the social strategies and nationalistic philosophies of the Black Power Movement while arguing that the liberation of Black people is central to a uniquely Black Christianity and that this Black Christianity has a uniquely Black theology. He bases his argument on the historical development of Black Christianity, the identification of a theology “from below,” and an insistence on the particularity of theology.

Cone’s historiography sees the unique context of slavery and Jim Crow segregation as critical in understanding the distinction between Black and White forms of Christianity. Cone’s primary assertion is that, as Blacks encountered the Gospel, they interpreted it in a way that was unique to their circumstances. Oppressed Black slaves rightly understood the Gospel as a gospel of liberation. White Christians, situated as they were in the role of oppressor, missed this essential element in Christianity. Black Christianity is in this way distinct from White Christianity. Therefore, Christianity, as understood by the Black church, cannot be viewed as the “white man’s religion” and is consistent with the Black Power Movement (Cone, 1997a).

Cone further argues that, as a methodology, the recovery of theology as a theology “from below” is essential to the task of the theologian. It is of note that Cone’s concept of a theology “from below” is similar to that utilized by Baptist, Evangelical, Pietist, Anabaptist and other Free Church traditions who have looked to sermons, confessional statements, hymnody, and other popular religious material to ascertain their group’s theological distinctives. The argument of a theology “from below” was a critical move in defeating the idea that Black Christianity was an outgrowth of White American and European professional “theologies of power.” The Black Church was thought by many to lack a theology and either to be purely a folk religion (Washington, 1964) or to have adopted White European theology without question or variation. Cone argues that theology is often embedded in the ecclesial practices of communities of faith and thus a unique theology can be recovered from the music, poetry, art, sermons, and speeches of the Black Church; such a theology is independent of and distinguishable from White theology. By way of this move, Cone then posits a truly Black theology that is not dependent on White theology and thus subverts the argument that the Black church is enslaved to an oppressive White theological system (Cone, 1970:1084-1088; 1972:54-69).

As a final assault on the idea of a borrowed theology within Black Christianity, Cone pushes against the commonly held notion of a universal theology. He directly attacks the myth of theological universalism in favor of an unavoidable particularity. Cone argues that what has been called “theology” and assumed to apply to all of Christianity, regardless of race or culture, is, in fact, the particular theology of White Americans and Europeans. The implication is to deny White theology any privileged status as “the” universal, objective expression of Christianity that must, therefore, be “the” theology of both the Black and White Church. Therefore, both Black and White theologies are indebted to the particularity of their racial and cultural backgrounds and form distinct theologies. Far from insisting that this makes both true relative to their context, Cone contends that Black theology is closer to the truth of the gospel than White theology because the Bible itself records the life of an oppressed people delivered by an oppressed Savior. Thus, true theology must come from oppressed communities. Cone in this way counters the arguments of Black Nationalists by asserting that the particular theology of the Black Church is distinct from “universal theology” because of the particular location and interpretation of the oppressed Black

community. Black theology is real, distinct and true and therefore capable of moving forward the Black Power Movement and the liberation of Black people (Cone, 1997b: 36-56)

This apologetic was not merely an intellectual exercise for Cone, but was worked out in actual dialogue with Black nationalists within the Black Power Movement. He met with members of the Black Panther Party and, at the request of LeRoi Jones (Amari Baraka), led a workshop on religion at the Congress of African Peoples (Cone, 2018b:77, 103, 104). While Cone was vigilant in presenting his apologetic for a uniquely Black Christianity, most Black Nationalists remained unconvinced.

#### 2.1.2.4 In answer to the historians of Black religion

If Black Nationalists remained unconvinced, so did Black historians of religion, who were part of the Society for the Study of Black Religion, including the society's preeminent founder, Charles H. Long. Cone summarizes Long's criticism: "Theology is a Western concept, created by Europeans to dominate and denigrate non-Western peoples, and is completely alien to the black religious experience" (Cone, 2018b: 85-87). Cone sees this position as shared by other members of the Society, including J. Deotis Roberts and Gayraud Wilmore.

Cone's main rebuttal to Long and others in the Society is that Black theology differs from White theology in its methodology. He affirms that "Black theology is a language about God that comes out of Black experience, and its meaning is found in its style. This marks the difference from white methodology" (Cone, 2018b: 90). In this way, Cone can argue that Black theology is unique in privileging Black experience and Black forms of speech and in its use of a style of writing that is unique to Black culture. Out of the latter Cone develops the idea that form equals content (Cone, 1975:144-150). Thus, both in its style and content Black theology is methodologically distinct and owes nothing to European theology. Additionally, Cone criticizes Black historians of religion for focusing too intently on esoteric definitions of theology and religions and forgetting the subjects of their study, the oppressed Black community (Cone, 2018b: 92)

#### 2.1.2.5 As an answer to Black self-hate

Cone's apologetic is also broader than the advocates of the Black Power Movement or scholars of religion; it also extends to the whole of the Black community. Cone suggests that he developed Black Theology to attack self-hate within the Black community. "I wasn't writing for rational reasons based on library research." He says, "I was writing out of my experience, speaking for the dignity of black people in a white supremacist world. I was on a mission to transform self-loathing Negro Christians into black-loving revolutionary disciples of the Black Christ" (Cone, 2018b: 92).

Cone's attack on Black "self-loathing" begins by assuring Blacks that they do not need to aspire to be White in order to be genuinely Christian (Cone, 1997b: 134-138). He also affirms that God privileges the oppressed Black community over that of White oppressors and therefore loves Black people because of, not despite, their blackness (Cone, 2018a: 87-120).

Further, not only does God love Black people but has intentionally, through the suffering of Jesus, identified with the suffering of Black people and in this way Jesus and God have become ontologically Black. This is a complex argument that the reader is asked to avoid prejudging until later in this chapter. It is only being mentioned at this point to highlight Cone's use of a Black Christ to thwart the understanding of some Blacks that God is primarily a White God and must love Whites more than Blacks. Cone attempts to break the prevailing imagery of a White God who must privilege Whiteness over Blackness, and to give the Black community a way of seeing God that fully affirms who they are in their Blackness.

#### 2.1.2.6 Conclusion

These apologetic elements of Cone's theology can easily be missed by White theologians if they fail to understand that at least some of what they are opposing in Cone's theology was necessary to preserve Christianity for a future generation of young Black leaders and to help Blacks take pride in both their Blackness and their Christianity. As such, Cone's efforts are similar to evangelical efforts to defend evangelical beliefs against both secular humanism and liberal Christianity, as well as their attempts to build an argument for a distinct evangelical worldview to encourage evangelicals to continue in their faith against the attacks

of outside groups. Seen in this way, evangelicals should at least be sympathetic with Cone's apologetic agenda if not the actual content of that apologetic.

If it is true that Cone's apologetic was necessary, this might then suggest that White evangelical theology should reflect on the ways that evangelical theology has encouraged at least the perceived connections between Christianity and White oppression. Cone's critique raises serious questions about the causes of Black discontent with Christianity as a whole and suggests that White evangelical theology must analyze the nature of this discontent and its role, if any, in it.

Having identified Cone's primary theological agenda as directed at fighting White supremacy and creating an apologetic for a uniquely Black Christianity, there is one further matter of style that is critical to an empathetic analysis of Cone. Cone's readers must understand that Cone intentionally employs a rhetorical persona in the execution of his theological project.

### **2.1.3 Cone's rhetorical persona**

Andre Johnson (2010) is the only scholar to directly take up the question of Cone's rhetorical persona. A rhetorician by discipline, Johnson identifies Cone's rhetoric as being directly connected to a prophetic rhetorical style within the Black prophetic tradition. Thus, for Johnson, Cone takes on the persona of a prophet. Johnson's definition of prophetic rhetoric is worth considering. He states, "What I mean by prophetic rhetoric is discourse grounded in the sacred, rooted in a community experience that offers a critique of existing communities and traditions by charging and challenging society to live up to the ideals they espoused, while offering celebration, encouragement and hope for a brighter future" (Johnson, 2010).

Johnson's assessment of Cone does, however, fall short in two very important ways. First, if prophetic rhetoric is directed at critiquing an "existing community" then this definition would only be half true of Cone's work. Cone is, no doubt, launching an attack on the White community and White supremacists and perhaps his work in that way is prophetic. But the White community is not his only audience. It would be hard to see in what way Cone's work could be said to be prophetic for the Black community. There is no sustained critique of the Black community in Cone's work and therefore his prophetic persona would only emerge if his work is read as primarily directed at the White community. Cone's persona

must be found, if it exists at all, in a character that can both critique White society and liberate the Black community.

Secondly, Johnson deals with rhetorical patterns but does not give a clear definition of what is meant by persona. There is no clear distinction in Johnson's argument between patterns of argumentation and Cone's attempt to portray himself in a particular role or persona. There are parts of Cone's arguments that fit Johnson's prophetic style but they lack a cohesive pattern that suggests that Cone is trying to project himself into the persona of a prophet. While it is difficult to argue that Cone does not fit at least some of Johnson's prophetic criteria, it is also hard to demonstrate that these few touchpoints translate into a clearly prophetic persona. For Johnson's work to hold up it would need to include a formal framework for determining the use of persona, but it does not.

While not dealing with Cone at all in their work, B. L. Ware and William A. Linkdugel (1982) do give a formalistic definition of what constitutes a rhetorical persona and are able to use it successfully to demonstrate that Marcus Garvey utilized the persona of Moses to advance his Black Nationalist campaign. It will be argued that their categories, when applied to Cone, will suggest not a prophetic persona but a revolutionary persona.

Ware and Linkdugel define rhetorical persona as consisting of two main forms, the immanent and the transcendent, from which the persona arises. The immanent forms are ways in which the person or their actions can be said to "be like something else" by way of normal comparison. It fits in a particular category shared by the persona it portrays. The transcendent form is the way in which the persona attempts to bring to mind or identify itself with a particular archetypal image. Beyond the comparative nature of the forms are the "particulars" of speech and argumentation that are part of the way the persona is accessed. These may be phrases, words, idioms, or actions that relate the actor to the character and allow the actor to be subsumed and the character to be animated. Finally, "participation" is the way in which the actor uses the forms and the particulars to bring the character to life and to enact it in the body of their rhetorical work. Using this understanding it is possible to suggest ways that Cone uses a "revolutionary" persona to advance his rhetorical style.

If the immanent form requires first that the "actor", in this case Cone, be identifiable as in some concrete way "like" the thing they wish to personify, then it might initially seem that an academic theologian is as far away from a "revolutionary" as anyone could get. But

this assumption would fail to understand the various ways in which individuals participated in the Black revolution at the time Cone began to merge his theology with the politics of the Black Power Movement.

Peniel E. Joseph's (2009) article, "The Black Power Movement: State of the Field", assesses the current state of research into the Black Power Movement and Black revolutionary nationalism in the late 1960s and 1970s. Joseph recognizes a growing consensus that Black revolutionary nationalism was a far more diverse movement than previously understood and that there were various ways of identifying and being identified with the movement. The most prominent distinctions were among activist/political revolutionary movements like the Black Panthers and cultural revolutionary groups like the Black Arts Movement. The former created programs and took offensive actions that asserted Black power and Black self-determination. The Panthers' breakfast programs, Black consciousness educational classes and political actions, including the carrying of guns into the California State Assembly, were examples of this type of Black revolutionary.

Black cultural revolutionaries, on the other hand, attempted to create specific Black spaces within various cultural disciplines to reclaim those spaces. James T. Stewart (2007:10), in an essay entitled "Black Revolutionary Artists," makes the case for the revolutionary nature of Black cultural nationalism. Stewart writes:

The point of the whole thing is that we must emancipate our minds from Western values and standards. We must rid our minds of these values. . . . We must try to shape the thinking of our people. We must goad our people by every means, remembering as Ossie Davis stated: that the task of the Negro (sic, black) writer is revolutionary by definition. He must view his role vis-à-vis white Western civilization, and from this starting point in his estrangement begin to make new definitions founded on his own culture—on definite black values.

Don Lee (1971:13) also affirms the Black Arts Movement's attempt to carve out a separatist space for Black Americans. Lee asserts:

The Black man who writes is a new definition. We've always had writers who happened to be Black, but the Sixties brought a new and universal definition of the Black man who chooses words as part of his lifestyle. Lifestyle is essentially what the new writers are about, a quest to legitimize and define their own place and space.

Both Lee and Stewart highlight the degree to which Black cultural nationalism was both separatist and revolutionary. The artists who were apart of the Black Arts Movement saw themselves as revolutionaries who were very much a part of the Black Power revolution.



If one understands the revolutionary nature of cultural Black Nationalism, it is possible then to see that Cone's efforts to create a Black Theology might be viewed as like the efforts of Black artists to create revolutionary Black poetry, theater, music and literature. Cone is contemporaneous with a cultural movement that viewed its participants as revolutionaries. If it is allowed that theology, philosophy, and other liberal arts form a part of the culture, then Cone's efforts in theology are like LeRoi Jones' and Don Lee's efforts in poetry. It is also the case that Black revolutionary artists like LeRoi Jones and Don Lee figure directly in Cone's theological work, and he quotes Don Lee's *Dynamite Voices* (1971) and authors from Jones' edited anthology *Black Fire* (2007). In this way it can be said that Cone meets the criteria of participant in the immanent form of a Black "revolutionary."

If it can be said that Cone fits the definition of the immanent persona, does he then connect with the transcendent/archetypal notion of a revolutionary? Cone engages the transcendent image of the revolutionary through his connections with two sources that could be said to define the archetype of the rebel in Cone's day. These include Franz Fanon's anti-colonial revolutionary, and Camus' *The Rebel*. Cone quotes both Fanon (Cone, 1997a:7n9, 8, 18n35, 23, 24n45-46, 25n49; 2018a:76-78; 1997b:139, 199) and Camus (Cone, 1997a:6-7, 11-14, 71, 124; 2018a:18, 60, 61, 67, 84, 89-90, 105; 1997b:162). Fanon ties Cone into a literature of rebellion that was central to both the political and cultural arms of the Black Power movement. Pan-Africanism, African movements of liberation and Fanon's writing formed the central image of what rebellion could be in America as well as in Africa. Cone's use of Fanon in his writing had the effect of tying Cone directly to the image of Pan-African revolution in the same way that visions of Fanon tied the Black Panthers, Malcolm X, and other Black revolutionaries to an actual revolution. In summoning Fanon into their cultural canon American Black revolutionaries including Cone are able to participate in the revolutionary archetype of the Black African freedom fighter.

Camus (1956) on the other hand provides the very definition of a rebel in his work by the same name. It must be noted that the influence of Camus and French existentialism on Cone's work is minor, which only fortifies his use of Camus as a way of creating a persona rather than building a fully engaged theological dialogue with Camus' philosophy of absurdity. The definition of a rebel Cone quotes is early in Camus' work and doesn't reflect Camus' focus in the rest of the work or Camus' conclusion on revolution. Cone's other use of Camus is to obtain Cone's quotes from Dostoevsky. He only mentions the philosophy of

absurdity once and then only negatively as lacking any real answers to the human predicament. Cone's existentialism is very evident, but it is inherited by way of Tillich's theological existentialism, not French existentialist philosophy. Cone, for example, mentions Sartre but does not deal with his philosophy at all. As with other theologians, Camus' ideas serve as prooftexts for Cone.

That said, Cone's use of Camus' definition of the rebel, in his assertion that the Black man must rebel and that Black theology must support this rebellion, places himself squarely in a list of intellectual rebels that appear throughout Camus' lengthy literary treatise on revolt. Cone's use of Camus, like his use of Fanon, places himself in the archetypal role not of the prophet but of the rebel who in Camus' (1956: 9) words "experiences a feeling of revulsion at the infringement of his rights and a complete and spontaneous loyalty to certain aspects of himself. Thus, he implicitly brings into play a standard of values so far from being gratuitous that he is prepared to support it no matter what the risks." Camus' words could easily be appropriated for Cone, and to the extent that it can be shown that Cone lives into the archetypal image of the rebel, Cone can be said to be embracing the persona of a revolutionary. This brings us to the question of how Cone's persona can be said to fit the particulars of a revolutionary, albeit the cultural revolutionary type identified above. It must be recognized that in contexts where "revolutionary" has a purely political and militarized connotation it may be difficult to follow any discussion of Cone as a revolutionary. The political nature of revolution is apparent in Cone's work. He makes no distinction between the political and the theological and he in fact views the writing and teaching of Black theology as a liberative political act even in its purest academic form. See, for example, Cone's article "Christian Faith and Political Praxis" (1982b:129-141).

To suggest that Cone exhibits both immanent and transcendent forms of the revolutionary persona is only partially helpful; it is also required that he exhibit particular forms that identify him with the persona. Camus' definition, along with some assistance from Fanon, will help identify the basic categories that make up the revolutionary persona. Camus' suggests three essential elements that create a rebel. First, they are indignant at the violation of their rights. Secondly, they achieve a self-awareness that overcomes a false image of self that has previously allowed their oppression. Finally, the rebel forms an alternative image of life beyond their oppressed state that allows for the use of all necessary means to achieve this new vision. Thus, the categories that typify the rebel archetype for Camus are righteous

indignation, self-consciousness, and a violent break from the present system toward self-determination.

The latter category is better understood for Cone's time and audience through the work of Franz Fanon. While the fight against the indignities of racism in the United States was part of a long history of Black resistance, and while the fight for a Black self-consciousness in America is best located in the work of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, the form of Black revolutionary nationalism is better understood in the context of Fanon's work and its subsequent popularization in Pan-African liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s. Fanon's vision was passed on genetically through the reading and appropriation of his work by the Black Power Movement in the US. It is his vision therefore that shapes in specific ways Camus' general rule that the revolutionary envisions a future that is different from the present. For Cone's generation the revolutionary vision is Fanon's. That vision is encapsulated in the conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*. "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man," Fanon (2004:239) implores and then further suggests that the task is nothing short of "...starting over a new history of man" (Fanon 2004:238). For Cone's audience the revolutionary was that person who completely rejected the status quo and offered instead a new "history of man," a "new way of thinking." The revolutionary was also willing to achieve this new way "by any means necessary."

How then might Cone be said to fit the particulars of the revolutionary archetype? First, the vast majority of Cone's work identifies his anger and revulsion at white supremacy and racism. It is the defining and unifying theme of his entire intellectual corpus. Secondly, Cone's work engages with both the awakening of his own Black consciousness and the need to build the self-consciousness of the entire Black community. Finally, Cone's demarcation of a Black theology that is wholly independent of either a shared history or a shared theological vision with White European theology is consistent with Fanon's call to create completely new systems of thinking. However, it must be conceded that Fanon would not have approved of Cone's insistence on maintaining Christianity within his theological system. Fanon in fact called for the abandonment of all religion in the interest of his new humanity. But that does not, therefore, mean that Cone is not in fact using a revolutionary persona. It could be argued that Cone's insistence on the uniqueness of Black Theology, in spite of the many White and Black scholars who objected to his logic at this point, is further

evidence of his attempt to hold on at all costs to the persona of a Black revolutionary. It must, however, be admitted that it might perhaps be more accurate to state that Cone wielded the persona of a revolutionary, albeit at times with a forced logic that made his participation in the persona suspect by others within the Black revolutionary movement.

If these particulars are accepted it is then possible to think about how Cone participates in each of them. What are the indicators of clear intentionality or actual argumentation that leads one to believe that Cone is in fact cognizant of playing this particular role? While it is possible to go through each of Cone's writings to identify his participation in these categories, the space constraints of this project will not allow it. It is proposed instead that Cone's assessment of his own theological legacy in *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* creates a window into Cone's thoughts on this matter.

Historians have shed considerable light on the suspect nature of autobiography. The argument here does not intend to pass judgement on the accuracy of Cone's historical memory but to suggest that his rhetorical reconstruction—the way he remembers, packages those memories, and presents them—gives insight into Cone's ultimate objectives and his conceptions of his own persona. This is true whether his historical accounts or assessments rest on any factual basis.

Cone is clear about his participation in the first two categories that shape the revolutionary persona. The righteous indignation/revulsion is recounted early in his autobiography. Cone (2018b:7) recalls, "... then Detroit exploded and so did I. My explosion shook me at the core of my racial identity, killing the 'Negro' in me and resurrecting my black self. I felt a *black fire* burning inside me, so hot I couldn't control it any longer." Cone's reference to "black fire" and his use of italics seems intended to point to, and associate himself with, *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (2007) edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal. Cone knew Baraka personally, and quoted from this work. *Black Fire* is an extensive collection of the writings of Black Power cultural and political revolutionaries. Cone's allusion to this work seems to suggest that at the earliest part of his career he was not only assessing the Black Power movement but identifying with it. He also clearly articulates the outgrowth of this explosive energy using language that elicits Black revolution and his particular role in the revolution:

I knew that Black Power advocates, like Stokely Carmichael, and militant black ministers, like Albert Cleage, had no interest in debating white religious scholars or well-schooled white ministers. But I did! It was time for me to join my black brothers and sisters in the fight for justice using what I'd learned in graduate school. It was time to turn white man's theology against him and make it speak for the liberation of black people. Militant Negro ministers needed a theology that could liberate their minds from any dependence on white theology (Cone, 2018b:9).

Cone seems to mimic Camus' understanding of what makes a rebel. His sense of being "fed up," his anger, his sense that he had to "join my black brothers and sisters" in the revolution all fit Camus' definition of what it takes to create a rebel.

Cone's whole first chapter also displays a keen understanding of Camus' second category, self-consciousness and the pursuit of others' self-consciousness. The chapter is entitled "Removing My Mask," a likely reference to Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (2008). In it Cone references his emergence from someone who was playing the role expected of him by the White academic world, to someone who was motivated by the riots of Detroit and the writings of Malcom X and Stokely Carmichael to take pride in his blackness. He also recognized his responsibility for instilling Black consciousness in the Black community as a whole. "Now with Black Power," he writes, "everything was at stake—the affirmation of black humanity in a white supremacist world. I was ready to die for black dignity" (Cone, 2018b:8). Camus' definition of the fully self-conscious and self-affirming rebel is clearly a part of Cone's rhetorical repertoire.

The final category, a complete remaking of the system that oppressed the rebel, Cone engages as well. "I was not interested in making an academic point about theology; rather, I was issuing a manifesto *against* whiteness and *for* blackness in an effort to liberate Christians from white supremacy" (Cone, 2018b:61). Cone's primary interest in Black theology was to create a theological space, adrift from White European theology, that would recast the Gospel in the image of the Black Church and create a mirror for White Christians to see the embedded nature of White supremacy within the White Church. Cone used the language of "antichrist", claimed a salvation that only came through the oppressed, envisioned a Black Christ, and condemned White theologians for racism even while using their arguments to his advantage. Whether critics accept that Black theology represents a uniquely separatist space within theological discourse is inconsequential because it is clearly Cone's intent to portray it as such. Cone's Black Theology holds a similar strategic place to that of the Black Arts

Movement in its ability to carve out space for Black thought to dominate and White supremacy to be suppressed. In this way Cone embodies the final movement of a rebel. He is creating a new world, “a new humanity” and a “new way of thinking” that reverses the power structures at play in academic theology and creates a place where White theologians cannot dominate either the discourse or the methods. If this is true, Cone’s Black Theology might be seen as one of the most effective and enduring strategies within the pantheon of Black cultural revolutionary action. Outlasting by several decades the Black Arts Movement, at least as an intentionally separatist space, and giving birth to several other intellectual movements dedicated to theological assessments of power, including womanist theology, Queer theology, and other particularist theological pursuits.

If these categories are still in doubt perhaps Cone’s own words add to the argument: “. . . it is incumbent upon us as black people to become ‘revolutionaries for blackness,’ rebelling against all who enslave us. With Marcus Garvey, we say: ‘any sane man, race or nation that desires freedom must first of all think in terms of blood’” (Cone, 2018a:123). It is unlikely that Cone would self-identify as a prophet. But his work completely reiterates both his support of and his place in the Black Cultural Revolution. Using Ware and Linkdugel’s formalistic approach to persona it seems that Cone is readily identified as a revolutionary in both imminent and transcendent forms, and in the particulars of the rebel archetype as articulated in Camus and Fanon, as well as in his direct participation in these particulars in his theological writing.

The question then remains: how is Cone’s revolutionary persona important to White evangelical theologians? It is critically important for White evangelical theologians to understand that Cone’s language and participation in revolutionary rhetoric and movements was part of a nuanced perspective that is often missed. It served both an apologetic and a practical purpose. Its apologetic purpose was to salvage the Christian faith within the emerging Black Power culture. The practical purpose was to isolate White supremacy within the White Church and to hold up an alternative model within the Black Church. It also intended in a very real way to speak to the lies of Black inferiority within the Black community.

These perspectives challenge White evangelical theology in several directions. Beyond the obvious call to recognize how White supremacy has operated in White

theological systems, it also suggests that White evangelicals should consider whether their theological systems fail to express themselves in directions that have real meaning in the Black community. The very fact that Christianity was identified negatively with White oppression by the Black Power Movement requires that some thought be given to Cone's argument that this objection is more substantive than rhetorical. The further assumption that White Christianity is intertwined with oppressive power structures calls for a critical assessment by White evangelical theologians of the intersections of power and theology and the implications of such a theology for ecclesial praxis.

Additionally, the discomfort with Black Theology's separatist/particularist bent on the part of White evangelical theologians might suggest its own unique power dynamic. Could it be that White evangelicals are reluctant to accept Cone's positioning of Gospel truth within the Black church tradition, and to the exclusion of the White church tradition, because White theologians would have to surrender their own dominance of theological discourse to persons of color and oppressed groups and assume the role of student instead of teacher?

The "new way of thinking" implied in revolutionary thought is also a critical stumbling block for many North American evangelicals who see the task of theology as more about the preservation of ancient truth than the advancement of a current cause. While this is a critical question that cannot be easily passed over; it does seem that perhaps Cone's revolutionary agenda might be seen as more in line with the Reformation's cry of "reformed and always reforming" or the Radical Reformation's focus on "the further light of God" than might be immediately evident. Cone's revolutionary ideals might have the capacity to shed further light on fatal flaws in evangelical systematics that are obscured by layers of dogmatic, abstract debate.

Cone's persona also has the potential to be an obstacle to evangelicals who might have a tendency to view it in ways that obstruct his larger theological arguments. Evangelical theologians might ask what it would mean to consider as secondary those aspects of Cone's work that are most closely identified with his apologetic agenda and his rhetorical style, and to set them aside in the interest of hearing Cone's substantive critique.

### 2.1.4 Cone's development in relation to other intellectuals and movements

Cone's work is shaped by his agenda and his rhetorical persona, but it is also shaped in conversation with other intellectuals and intellectual movements. Among these are his "intellectual trinity," the Black Arts Movement, other Black theologians, global theological engagement, and Marxism. A brief interaction with each will help place Cone's theological work in context.

#### 2.1.4.1 Cone's intellectual trinity: Malcolm, Martin and Baldwin

Cone (2013:223) uses the term "intellectual trinity" to summarize the influence of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and James Baldwin in shaping his view of Black Theology. Cone (2018b:ix) summarizes the central importance of Malcolm and Martin:

I had no choice but to write *Malcolm & Martin & America* when I did. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X were like two hot flames burning inside me that would not go out. They were burning when I sat down to write my first book . . . in the wake of the fires burning in Newark and Detroit during July 1967. Malcolm represented the flame of blackness in black theology and Martin the flame of faith in its Christian theological expression.

While Cone's use of dialectic will be dealt with later in this chapter, it is important to point out that for Cone, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. represent a central dialectic whose synthesis is to be found in Black Theology. Malcolm's view of Blackness and Black self-consciousness coupled with King's justice-seeking Christianity forms the primary foundation upon which Black Theology is built. The influence of Malcolm and Martin on Cone cannot be underestimated. Nor should it be misappropriated. Evangelical scholars who see Malcolm X as suspect because of his participation in the Nation of Islam must keep in view how Malcolm is helpful to Cone's theology. Cone chooses to ignore the theological underpinnings in Malcolm's views on race and instead replaces them with King's Christian theology. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to pursue, it must be acknowledged that an exploration of the theologies that underpin Black Power's view of race are lacking both in Cone and the scholarly literature in general. The ways in which the Nation of Islam shaped Malcolm X, Marxism shaped Stokely Carmichael, and African religions and Pan-Africanism shaped the Black Arts Movement are central to understanding the way Black Power's view of race manifests in each. Cone assumes, given a dialectic approach, that Malcolm's views



on blackness can be severed from their theological basis in the Nation of Islam and replaced by King's theology. The degree to which this is true is ultimately dependent on an analysis of the interconnections between Malcolm's theology and his political views on race.

Baldwin is the third person of Cone's "intellectual trinity." Cone's explanation for including Baldwin is that he is the inspiration for the way Cone writes. But Baldwin also factors into Cone's work directly. While in all of Cone's major theological writings Baldwin only receives nine mentions, five of the nine are in Cone's later work. Cone seems to have developed over time a more dialogical interaction with Baldwin. Cone, in fact, devotes an entire chapter of his final autobiography to a theological engagement on suffering in conversation with Baldwin. (Cone, 2018b:144-169). Cone's editor at Orbis confirmed that prior to his death Cone was planning a book on Baldwin but it became apparent that he would not be able to complete it so he made the choice to include some of his reflections on Baldwin as the final chapter of *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* (email confirmation with author). This chapter reads more like a theological essay, albeit an unfinished one, than an autobiographical account. It seems that Baldwin may have shaped Cone in ways that went beyond the purely literary, and that perhaps Baldwin represented for Cone a theological model that combined both Black consciousness and Christian thought. Cone (2018b:159) suggests this: "Baldwin joined my intellectual trinity along with Martin King and Malcolm X. They told the truth about black people, and that's why we still remember them. Baldwin shared Martin King's incredible love of humanity. And he shared his *rage*, defined by love of *blackness* with Malcolm X."

Cone's "intellectual trinity" forms the basis of his theological work. Both Malcolm X and James Baldwin are problematic for evangelicals as theological conversation partners. It is, therefore, necessary for evangelical theologians to read carefully the ways in which these individuals shape Cone's work and the way King's Christianity often stands in for the more problematic theology of both Malcolm and Baldwin.

#### 2.1.4.2 The Black Arts Movement

It has already been stated that Cone's revolutionary persona connected him directly to the cultural revolutionary arm of the Black Power Movement. His location in this movement also placed him adjacent to the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It could be argued

that Cone saw himself in relation to this movement. He, in fact, says clearly that he believes “that all aspiring black intellectuals share the task that LeRoi Jones has described for the black artist in America: ‘to aid in the destruction of America as we know it’” (Cone, 1997:3). He sees this task in light of Jones’ further explanation:

His (the black artist’s) role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society, that other men will be moved by the exactness of his rendering, and if they are black men, grow strong through this moving, having seen their own strength, and weakness, and if they are white men, tremble, curse, and go mad, because they will be drenched with the filth of their evil (Cone, 1997a:3).

Cone views his role as Black theologian as synonymous with the role of the Black artist/cultural revolutionary. Cone found in the Black Arts Movement both a calling and a language that directed his theological agenda and informed the style of his theological speech. Cone connected the movement to the content of his work by quoting and interacting with LeRoi Jones, who was a personal friend, Don Lee and the various authors of the *Black Fire Anthology*. He also drew extensively from antecedents to the movement, including Richard Wright and Baldwin. It is in Cone’s participation in the broader cultural Black Power revolution, including the Black Arts Movement, that he is able to conceive of the necessity for a separate Black theological space and to insist on a uniquely Black theology.

Evangelicals must consider the ways Black Arts hyperbole plays out in Cone’s writing. Jones’ words “destroy America as we know it” carry poetic weight beyond their literal application. The America known by Blacks in the 1960s and 1970s needed tearing down. The destruction of America in Cone’s context has more to do with the dismantling of White supremacy than the armed overthrow of an entire nation.

It should also be noted that hyperbolic language is itself a methodology. It has the ability to clarify that which it is deployed against. The image of America destroyed by Black men and women brings into relief the pain and anger created by racism. The poetic and revolutionary create clarity in ways normal theological discourse does not.

#### 2.1.4.3 Black theologians and historians of religion

Cone was very involved in conversations and debate with other Black theologians and scholars, particularly the group that formed the Society for the Study of Black Religion. Among these were outright detractors such as Charles H. Long, William Jones and Major

Jones and those who sympathized but pushed Cone to reconsider particular directions in his work, including Cecil Cone and J. Deotis Roberts. Later, Black Womanist scholars, including Delores Williams, challenged Cone on gender issues.

Among the group of detractors, Cone's longest running debate was with Charles Long. Cone (2018b:86-89) is challenged by Long's insistence that theology is a European discipline and cannot, therefore, have anything to say about Black religion or Black experience. The essence of Black religion and its most decisively Black signs, symbols and images lay in African not Christian religion (Long, 1995:187-198). While Cone does not deny the legitimacy of Long's argument, he also ignores the argument in his own work. His source material remains largely dependent on African American Christian culture. He shows little interest in African religions either as a direct source of theological discourse or as a means of uncovering a distinctly non-European theology within Black American Christianity.

Cone's interaction with William Jones and Major Jones are likewise contentious. Cone (1997b:245, 247) in lengthy footnotes accuses William Jones of misreading Cone's theology by excluding his Christocentric perspective and he also accuses Major Jones of intentionally misquoting him. Cone does concede their point that theodicy is central to Black Theology but Cone insists that the question is ultimately unanswerable.

Cone (2018b:90) seems more accepting of J. Deotis Roberts' criticism. Roberts (2005:4-5) opposed Cone's use of Black Power to the exclusion of reconciliation and also believed that Cone's view was "too limiting." Cone recognizes that reconciliation is not clearly evident in his work but wants to reserve conversation about reconciliation until liberation is an actual reality.

Both Roberts and Cecil Cone critiqued James Cone's continued use of White theologians and White methodologies as antithetical to his own argument. This resulted in the writing of Cone's first work focused on "doing" as opposed to "defending" Black Theology. *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972a) is a direct result of this critique.

Cone admits in the prefaces of subsequent releases of *Black Theology and Black Power*, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, and *God of the Oppressed* that "the most glaring limitation ... was my failure to be receptive to the problem of sexism in the black community and society as a whole" (Cone, 2018a:xx). He also outlines the challenges he faced from

womanist theologians such as Delores Williams, who correctly critiqued his work. He was particularly challenged by Williams' view of the cross and atonement. In the end, however, Cone demurs, "I didn't have the experience or knowledge to really hear what I needed to hear" (Cone, 2018a:120). In spite of Cone's realization that his work was deficient in answering the critiques of feminist and womanist theologians he makes no effort to correct it apart from the use of gender inclusive language in subsequent publications. It is of note that Cone recognized that gender, class and race all held unique relationships to oppression but he seemed to lack a sophisticated understanding of shifting power dynamics that are the hallmark of contemporary theologies that employ intersectionality as a tool for mapping power relationships.

What this analysis should make clear to evangelical theologians is that Cone's work does not embrace either Long's Africanisms or Williams' womanist perspective. As regards the latter, Cone's words mentioned above highlight his lack of gender specific theology in his work. As regards Long's argument, Cone admits, "I acknowledged the need to pay careful attention to the African in Black religion, but not to the extent that the God of Jesus would be rendered marginal in Black theological discourse." (Cone, 1997b:x)

#### 2.1.4.4 Global theological engagement

Cone was engaged in an ongoing global dialogue both within and outside of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians that ranged from Africa to Latin America and Asia. What is striking in the papers that Cone produced in relation to these meetings is both his familiarity with third world theologies and his unwillingness to incorporate any of this knowledge into his own theological reflection. Cone is very good at understanding the distinctions among the various groups, as regards Black Liberation Theology. He summarizes differences with Africans as stemming from an African focus on indigenization to the exclusion of liberation. Cone does, however, recognize that South African theology is more similar to Black Theology in its embrace of liberation. His assessment of the work of African theologians such as John Mbiti is largely dismissive and simply elaborates the need to embrace Liberation to the same degree as Black Liberation Theology and South African Theology, while consolidating their views of indigenization and selfhood into universal notions of liberation (Cone 1993:393-401; Maimela, 1989:97-107).

As regards Latin American theologies Cone recognizes the legitimate critique by Latin American theologians that Black Theology ignores class. However, Cone quickly asserts the deficiency in Latin American theology's neglect of race (Cone 1993:388-398). Cone indicates more compatibility with Asian theologians and leaves Asian theology unassailed.

While Cone recognizes the legitimacy of global critiques of North American Black Theology, most of his work is intended to urge others toward his own view on the universality of liberation. As with womanist theology Cone seems incapable of integrating even those ideas he recognizes as legitimate into his own theological reflections. His work in regard to the Global South at times sounds paternalistic and his claims to have listened to global voices hollow.

#### 2.1.4.5 Marxism

Marxist or socialist may seem at first glance to be adequate descriptions of Cone. He has a familiarity with Marxist theory and uses Marxist analysis to his advantage in his early work, particularly in *God of the Oppressed* (Cone, 1997:36-41), but Marxism holds several challenges for Cone. As a Barthian he is familiar with Barth's defense of theology against the formidable attacks of Feuerbach and Marx on religion. Cone (2018a:134-135) holds up Black Liberation Theology as a positive defense against Marx's view that religion is "the opiate of the people."

Cone, while acknowledging the need for class analysis, is reluctant to incorporate it into his work. For Cone the use of class seems to undermine the centrality of race as the primary driver of Black poverty in America. Classism becomes an easy excuse or replacement for racism in America. So Marxist insistence on class as the sole driver of social issues is problematic for Cone's racial arguments.

Cone (1981:166) does, however, discuss a socialist alternative to "monopoly capitalism" in an article for the *Christian Century*. Cone comes close to accepting the socialist model, asserting that "we must therefore form a social arrangement that is democratic, both economically and politically. No one should control for profit those goods and services needed for human survival." But ultimately, he rejects the model out of hand: "the absence of a historical model that embodies fully my political and theological

imagination makes it difficult to speak meaningfully and concretely about the socialist alternative.” Cone proposes instead that political models need to be focused toward an eschatological vision where everyone has all that is needed for human flourishing and no one uses economic means to exploit those who lack economic capital and power.

It would be difficult to connect Cone with either Marxism or socialism. His critique of capitalism seems more intended to reform the system than to completely tear it down. His defense of Christianity and his economic aspirations for Blacks in America pull him away from outright defense of Marxism. Cone seems more inclined toward a distributed capitalist system where wealth and resources are used for the good of all, not manipulated by a racist system. Cone seems to suggest an altruistic, antiracist form of democratic capitalism. This is an important point for evangelicals who might mistake Cone’s discussion of Marx and his insistence on dismantling the discriminatory aspects of capitalism as an affirmation of some form of Marxism, when in fact the opposite is true.

#### 2.1.4.6 Conclusion

The important point in the previous discussion of Cone’s influences is that his admission of the validity of a critique, whether it be Pan-African, womanist, or Marxist does not equal adoption of those views into his own theology. The opposite is the case. Evangelicals have to be cautious when labeling Cone. Often these labels can distort Cone’s theology. Acceptance does not equal acquiescence in Cone’s case.

Having identified Cone’s influences and his reaction to each, it seems appropriate to examine the types of theological writings that compose his theological corpus and the significance of each type for understanding Cone’s theology. Understanding the importance of each type will clear the way for discussion of Cone’s methodology and his theological positions.

#### 2.1.5 Cone’s theological corpus

Cone’s writing falls into three primary categories. The first includes writings directed primarily at White academic theologians. In these works, Cone’s intent is to build a case for Black Theology as both a separate academic space and as a springboard for attacking White

supremacy within the White church and the academy. These works include *Black Theology and Black Power* (1997a), *A Black Theology of Liberation* (2018b), *God of the Oppressed* (1997b), and several journal articles written to defend or further elaborate on these works. These works are the most accessible for White evangelical readers, both in the sense that they are addressed to them and in the sense that Cone's earlier work is inclined toward the use of biblical texts. While evangelicals may struggle with some of Cone's conclusions, these works do, at least include, a biblical starting point for theological discourse.

A second category of writings include texts oriented toward "doing" Black Theology. These texts are exercises in theological reflection on the Black experience. They include *The Spirituals and the Blues* (1972a), *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011), and *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (2012). There are also three articles that are noteworthy as key examples of Cone's Black theology. They include: "God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, Man Our Brother: A Theological Interpretation of the AME Church" (*The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center*, 1976:25-33), "Sanctification, Liberation, and Black Worship" (*Theology Today*, 1978:139-152) and "Whose Earth is it Anyway" (*CrossCurrents*, 2000:36-46).

This particular subset of writings is meant to connect theological truth to the lived experiences of persons of color, and as such, are the most difficult for White theologians to access. That does not mean they can be overlooked. Cone argues that White theologians should not ignore the theological and intellectual output of Black Americans and while he would disagree with White theologians engaging these works, from the standpoint of critique it seems likely he would embrace the use of them in interrogating White theological positions and biases. Regardless, Cone is understood best when he is "doing" Black Theology. To ignore this body of work would be to ignore Cone's most articulate theological discourses.

Cone also engaged, at various points in his career, in the writing of autobiography. His three autobiographies have different foci, but the material is often repetitive. *For My People* (1984) recounts the emergence of Black Theology in a way that dislocates Cone from the center of its story of origin, placing credit for its emergence in the Black church not in the academy. This is intended to demonstrate Cone's thesis that there is a unique Black theology whose source is the Black church. *My Soul Looks Back* (1986) serves as a kind of midcourse correction for Black Liberation Theology. This work addresses both the necessity

of Black Theology but also its shortcomings. It is both autobiographical and reflective and simultaneously backward and forward looking. *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* (2018b) was written by Cone just before his death, while he was suffering from a terminal illness. It is Cone's attempt to both secure his legacy and to "bare his soul." It is more adamant in many ways than his other writings and is more expressive in recounting his emotional states. All three books contain many of the same details, but a careful student of Cone will detect particular ways in which these narratives differ and will be able to distinguish in these differences varying theological arguments. It has to be remembered that Cone believed that form equaled content. Far from merely autobiographical accounts, these works served both to express theology and to provide a window into the ways that Cone's own "questions in life" propelled his theological discourse and agenda. White theologians who wish to understand Cone will find these writings particularly helpful.

Understanding these three subcategories of theological writings aids in the work of this project. As a matter of course, the first category will be used to determine specific connecting points between White theology and Cone's Black theology. It will also serve as the primary starting point for understanding the ways in which Cone intersects with traditional theological categories and schemas. These doctrinal statements will be further nuanced through the use of the second category of writings. The autobiographies will be used to understand the particular questions and experiences driving Cone's conclusions. With this in mind it is now possible to discuss Cone's theology and theological methods, but not without first addressing a few common misunderstandings about Cone's theological views.

### **2.1.6 Myths about Cone's theological position**

There are three critiques of Cone's work that require close examination because they have the potential to forestall theological discourse with evangelical audiences. Some critics of Cone see him as reflecting a tendency toward postmodern cultural relativism, an exclusionary particularity, and an exclusivist salvation. All three of these constitute prevailing myths about Cone's work.

#### **2.1.6.1 Postmodern cultural relativism**



Cone's insistence on theology's grounding in the particularity of the theologian and his separatist positioning of Black Theology has caused some critics to categorize his work as in line with postmodern cultural relativism. Cone is in fact better placed as a modernist liberal foundationalist.

Cone (1982:117-128) bases his theological work alternately on three foundational sources or authorities. At varying points in his career Cone views Scripture, Christ, and the Black experience as determinate foundations for theological conclusion. Scripture serves as a foundational authority early in Cone's work, but wanes after the publication of *God of the Oppressed*. The most consistent authoritative category for Cone's work is the revelation of God in the person of Christ. This view does, however, shift over time. Initially Cone weds God's revelation in Christ to the account of Jesus in the Gospels, but as his focus on the authority of Scripture diminishes, he begins to find this revelation as dwelling in the person of Christ as experienced by the Black community. Thus Cone (1997b:106-121) is able to talk about Jesus as being "who he was," "who he is," and "who he will be" and subsequently to state that the Jesus "who is" and "who will be" is revelatory of the Jesus "who was" as spoken of in the Gospels. But Cone's theology is always built on a modernist foundationalist view in the revelatory authority of Christ.

This is even true when Cone is most adamantly defending the authority of the Black experience of God as the foundation for his theological reflection. It would be easy to assume that, in those moments when Cone is holding up Black experience, he is also affirming cultural relativism. But to do so would be to misunderstand Cone's central point. The Black experience of God for Cone is in fact a revelatory event where God reveals himself in the lives of oppressed Black people (Cone, 1978:139-152). Cone does not view "experience" per se as holding authority. Nor does he see truth as rooted uncritically in various cultural expressions without some means of distinguishing truth from untruth. Truth for Cone is not relative to our cultural expressions but truth is relative to the way God reveals himself and his solidarity with a particular culture or cultural experience. Thus, Cone would affirm that God reveals himself in the particularity of Black experience and the experiences of the oppressed, but that God is not revealed in the particularity of the oppressor. Truth is relative only to the presence and absence of God in particular experiences; where and only where God reveals himself does truth rest, but it rests within the particularity of the experience of

the oppressed. But where God is absent, i.e., in the experience of the oppressor, there is no truth.

Thus, cultural experience/particularity operates differently in Cone than it does in postmodern understandings of relativism. Cone (1982a:123) is clear on this point: “If there is no distinction between truth and error, the gospel and heresy, then there is no way to say what Christian theology is. We must be able to say when language is not Christian, if not always at least sometimes.”

#### 2.1.6.2 Exclusionary particularity

Even if one accepts that Cone is in fact a modern foundationalist it is still possible to assume that his obsessive insistence on the particularity of the Black experience is naturally a denial of the notion of a universal Christian truth—that his insistence on Black and White particularity does not make room for universality and in fact insists on an exclusionary particularity.

Cone, in fact, affirms universality but insists that universals are only accessible through the particularities of those who seek to understand them. So, for Cone, particularity becomes the starting point on a journey toward a universal theology. Inversely, theology that proposes to seek universals without consideration of the particularities from which the theologian is beginning ends up never moving past the particularities. Thus, White theology always remains “White” theology and never achieves the universality it proclaims. Cone (1979:54) sees the possibility of universality only in a specific process. A process that begins with the particularities of the theologian’s circumstances incorporates the experiences of the oppressed, and then reflects on the way God is revealing God’s self through the experiences of the oppressed. White theology is not universal because it has excluded the experiences of the oppressed and of persons of color. White theology, in its claim to objectivity, is really the only truly non-universal theology.

It must be noted that Cone’s point could be used against him. One might reason that Black theology, in excluding White experience, lacks a true universality as well. Cone would argue, however, that though White theology has to be inclusive of the experience of the oppressed because of its distance from the true revelation of God found in the oppressed community, the oppressed community’s more direct access to the revelation of God does not

require them to include the heretical experiences of the oppressor toward a universal theology.

Cone's argument regarding why the oppressed Black community is closer to the universal truth of God is never fully articulated in a single work but can be pieced together. First, Cone (1982b:122) grounds the universality of the oppressed experience in the incarnation of Christ. Cone argues:

God has chosen to disclose divine righteousness in the liberation of the poor. Therefore, to be outside this community is to be in a place where one is excluded from the possibility of hearing and obeying God's Word of Liberation. By becoming poor and entrusting divine revelation to the carpenter from Nazareth, God makes clear where one has to be in order to hear the divine Word and experience divine presence.

Cone believes that because Christ's incarnation was not general but specific, i.e., he was incarnated as a poor Jew living under an oppressive Roman government, this means that the poor and oppressed are by fact of birth closer to the reality of Christ's incarnation and God's revelation in Christ.

A second, but connected, point is that not only is there a positional similarity between the oppressed and the incarnate Christ, but God's choice in the incarnation shows God's solidarity with, and preference for, the poor. God has privileged the poor by dwelling in solidarity with them in the incarnation (Cone, 1982b:132).

Finally, the universality of the oppressed community is evident in the community's identification with the suffering of Christ on the cross. This is the central thesis of Cone's *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011). The experience of lynching in the Black community gives that community a more intimate way to identify with the suffering of Christ on the cross than is present to White communities. This closeness to the cross of Christ implies a closeness to the universal truth of Christ's suffering. It is interesting to note that in Cone's reflection on suffering in the final chapter of *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, Cone (2018b:166) identifies suffering as the one true universal and suggests that through a shared understanding of suffering worked out in conversation with the suffering oppressed community it might be possible to begin the work of true racial justice and reconciliation.

Thus, Cone is able to both embrace a particularity rooted in the experiences of the oppressed Black community and affirm that this particularity is itself the root of a unique universality. Universality is rooted in the revelation of God, and the revelation of God is

rooted in the oppressed community, and therefore only the oppressed community reveals the universal truths of God. In this way he avoids the criticism of an exclusionary particularity that does not make room for a universal theology and a universal truth. While he avoids the accusation of denying universal truth, does his unique formulation of it in fact exclude the possibility of White participation in this truth? Does he in fact deny White access to God and ultimately access to salvation?

#### 2.1.6.3 The exclusivity of salvation

Cone is often accused of suggesting that salvation and God's truth is only available to oppressed Blacks. But Cone's view of the exclusivity of salvation must be understood in light of his use of "blackness" as an ontological symbol and his understanding of the nearness of the oppressed community to salvation in Christ. Cone's use of "Black" as an ontological symbol opens up salvation and the truth of God to anyone who is either oppressed or to anyone, including Whites, who are willing to find solidarity with and truth in the oppressed community (Cone, 2018a:8). In this way Cone both maintains the oppressed community as the center of Christ's salvific act and opens up Christ's salvific act to those who come through the understanding of Him in the experiences of the oppressed community. Cone does at times seem to open himself up to the accusation that he sees oppression itself as the only vehicle for salvation—that the oppressed are saved merely by virtue of their oppression. Schubert Ogden (1979:35) implies this when he states that "The liberation theologies typically tend to confuse—or do not adequately distinguish—two essentially different, though closely related, forms of liberation." But this also would be a misunderstanding of Cone's point. He does not view everyone who is oppressed as spiritually "saved." He affirms, instead, that because the oppressed are closer to the truth of God they are also closer to the salvation of God.

#### 2.1.6.4 Conclusions

Evangelical theologians must approach any assessment of Cone's theology and theological method with a proper understanding of cultural relativism, universality, and exclusivist soteriology. Cone is misunderstood on all three points. His foundationalist view, though rooted in modern liberalism, at least affords the opportunity for evangelicals to engage with his belief of a foundational truth that rests either in Scripture or the person of Christ as

revealed in Scripture. This places Cone, if not directly in agreement with evangelical theology, at least closer to it in its foundationalist roots. Cone's belief in the universality of God's revelation as grounded in the particularity of the oppressed community presents for evangelical theologians a challenge around which to interrogate their own biases. Is Cone in fact elevating a biblical principle of God's favor for the poor and the oppressed that might have been overlooked or under-emphasized in evangelical theology? If in fact Cone is right about either the solidarity of God with the poor and/or the closeness of the truth of God to the poor, what might this mean for where evangelical theologians begin their discussions about God and the conclusions they make about theology? How might Cone's assessment imply a hermeneutical distance that is impossible for White evangelical theologians to bridge apart from an interaction with oppressed communities? All of these questions will inform subsequent discussion in the chapters that follow.

## **2.2 Cone's theology and theological method**

Understanding Cone's theology and his theological method requires differentiating what Cone borrows from traditional White theology from his unique contributions to theological discourse. More importantly it also requires understanding of how the two coalesce in Cone's Black Theology. Understanding the role of White theology in Cone's work also means specifically understanding his use of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Jürgen Moltmann, Reinhold Niebuhr and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Understanding Cone's uniqueness requires an examination of his method and his doctrinal statements with a view toward delineating Cone's theology from that of his White influencers. The final result will be a composite picture of Cone's theology and method that can then be accessed in light of White evangelical theology.

### **2.2.1 White European/North American influences**

Scholars disagree on the extent to which Cone is influenced by White Euro-American theology. Keith Bolton (1986:290), for example, asserts that, "Cone has merely appropriated aspects of European existentialism to gain 'white' approval for his 'Black' theological stance." Raymond Carr (2011:38) is more generous in his assessment: "Black theology is both a critical appropriation of European theology and a reconceptualization of American theology at its best." Black and White scholars point out Cone's seeming dependence on

White theology. Cone does not deny this, but does at times move between acceptance and denial as regards the function of Euro-American theologies in his work.

Cone, for example, self-identifies as a Barthian and even claims to be misunderstood by non-Barthians because of his use of Barth. Cone claims, in other places, that he merely uses European and White American theologians either to point out the contradictions in their views or their usefulness to his argument, even if they are not necessary. What is lacking in the analysis of non-Black influences is a clear delineation of how each individual theologian is operative in Cone's method and theology.

The two theologians who are clearly the most central to Cone's theology are Karl Barth and Paul Tillich. Karl Barth was the subject of Cone's doctoral dissertation (1965) and he figures prominently throughout Cone's work. It must be acknowledged that Cone's dissertation lacks any real critical analysis of Barth beyond a single chapter which engages at a very surface level Barth's Reformed dogmatics. The lack of any serious critical engagement does call into question, at least at this stage of his development as a theologian, the level of sophistication with which Cone was familiar with Barth's theology. Cone uses Barth in several ways. He is the source of Cone's dialectic method. Barth's idea of the infinite qualitative difference between God and humans (Cone, 2018a:51-54) and Barth's view that the revelation of God is found primarily in the person of Jesus Christ are primary ideas in Cone's work (Cone, 2018a:116-136).

Barth was known as a dialectic theologian and in this way Cone's theological method is thoroughly Barthian. The central guiding metaphor of Cone's Black Theology is a synthesis between the seemingly disjointed views of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. Cone's primary theological motivation is a search for a synthesis between Malcolm's radical "blackness" and King's radical Christianity. This theological frame propels and brackets all of Cone's theological work (Cone, 2012).

Cone uses Barth's infinite qualitative distinction to nuance his view of God's act of liberation and to distinguish the opinions of oppressed individuals from the revelation of God in the oppressed community. "When the oppressed are inclined to use their position as a privilege, as an immunity from error," Cone argues, "they will do well to remember the Scriptures witness to God's righteousness as other than human. On this point, Karl Barth was right: There is an infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity" (Cone,

1982a:122). Cone uses Barth's argument to affirm his own position that God is present in his revelation through the oppressed community but that the oppressed community when it speaks or acts apart from this revelation acts in error.

Cone also uses Barth's understanding of God as the ground of freedom, and as a way to further his argument that God is the God of liberation. Cone appropriates a particular portion of Barth's argument found in "The Gift of Freedom." Barth (1978:77-79) asserts that in this essay, "God's freedom is essentially not freedom *from*, but freedom *to* and *for*.... God is free for *man*." God's freedom for mankind finds articulation in Cone's idea that God is at work granting freedom to the oppressed. God as the ground of freedom—God's free choice to be *for* humankind—makes him the liberator of the oppressed. Cone is less interested in Barth's restrictions in this same essay on the freedom of mankind to be "for" God. Barth especially disallows human freedom "to preserve, to justify or to save oneself" (Barth, 1976:78). Cone does not build on the limitations of human freedom in his work.

Cone also appropriates Barth's view that God's revelation is evident and complete only in the person of Jesus Christ. But Cone (1982a:119) also qualifies his support of Barth's understanding:

Because Christian theology begins and ends with the Biblical story of God's liberation of the weak, it is also Christological language. On this point Karl Barth was right. Unfortunately, Barth did not explicate this Christological point with sufficient clarity, because his theology was determined too much by the theological tradition of Augustine and Calvin and too little by scripture.

Cone's argument seems to "beg the question." Barth, according to Cone, is right in his assumption that the revelation of God is in Christ. But he is wrong because he does not share Cone's view that Scripture points to the liberation of the poor. Therefore, his view of Christ is based too much on Augustine and Calvin and too little on the Scriptures, which of course points directly to the liberation of the poor. Had Barth been focused on the liberative nature of Scripture he would have proclaimed the revelation of God in Christ that points to the liberation of the oppressed. But, since Barth does not reach this conclusion, his approach has to be unscriptural. Cone's insistence on the *a priori* of liberation as the guiding motif of Scripture leads him to view Barth's view as insufficient.

The degree to which Barth's influence is found in Cone's writings remains a matter of debate. Cone does evidence a dialogical approach to theology but this was common in

Cone's day and would have been a part of his theological training apart from any clear understanding of Barth. Cone's work uses Barth's arguments but never in an extended way and often with qualification. The Barth that is evident in Cone seems substantially different from the current understanding of Barth. Perhaps this distance is explained by Carr's (2011:30) assessment that Cone is reading Barth within Barth's political context—that Cone "read Barmen as precedent" in his view of Barth. —ultimately assuring that this unconventionally political Barth lies latent at the heart of Cone's theology. This, however, seems unlikely given that neither Cone's dissertation nor subsequent writings evidence a clearly delineated thesis on the political nature of Barthian theology. The exception, mentioned earlier in this chapter, would be Cone's passage in *A Black Theology of Liberation* (2018a:51-52) specifically arguing that Barth was so adamant in his attack on natural theology because of the political conditions of the day and that Barth in fact moves more in the direction of natural theology in *The Humanity of God* after the political conditions changed. This is embedded in a discussion of revelation and the importance of natural theology to Black Theology, and the political discussions of Barth seem forced and overstated or perhaps even coincidental. They could hardly be seen as conclusive as regards Cone's view of a political theology or motivation in Barth. This is in spite of the fact that his theological mentor, William Herndon, was an early proponent of a political reading of Barth.

Moving from Barth to Paul Tillich does not yield different results. Cone utilizes Tillich's methodology, particularly Tillich's use of symbol and correlation, but never in a consistent or predictable way. Cone seems, per Bolton's assessment above, to fully embrace Tillich's existentialism, but never without qualification. He seems to be especially drawn to Tillich's notion of being and nonbeing, but transforms their use. Cone also seems to both embrace Tillich's notion of culture as the operative element of theology and at the same time opposes it.

Cone's acceptance of Tillichian symbolism is clear. "Black Theology," he says, "takes seriously Paul Tillich's description of the symbolic nature of all theological work" (Cone, 2018a:7). James Robison (1974) makes the case that Cone's use of ontological blackness functions as just such a symbol, while Cone (2018a:60, 61) himself speaks of the word "God" as a symbol that must contain the liberation of the oppressed otherwise it must be overturned. But Cone is reluctant to draw a clear line between symbol and reality,



preferring an intentional blurring that requires his readers to work out the degree to which his pronouncements are one or the other.

Cone also uses correlation, but his corollaries are different from those of Tillich. According to Carlyle Stewart (1983), Tillich's primary corollary is between God and humanity, with the latter viewed as a universal whole. But Cone makes clear distinctions between the correlations of God and the oppressed, God and the oppressor, and the oppressor and the oppressed. Stewart (1983:35) also does not see these three corollaries as foundational in Cone, but posits instead that the central work of correlation in Cone is the correlation between the liberation of the oppressed in Scripture and the liberation of the oppressed in contemporary contexts. If Stewart is right then there is little relation to the working out of correlation in the theology of Tillich and the theological conclusions that the same method yields in Cone. Thus, correlation functions as methodology not theology in Cone's work.

This being the case, it is possible to see any connections to Tillich's theology as secondary in Cone's work. Even Cone's use of Tillich's corollary between being and nonbeing forms primarily a sub-point or illustration in Cone's overall argument. The fact that the fight for liberation is a fight for being against nonbeing is evident, though not always explicit, in Cone's primary arguments, but Cone's arguments are not dependent on Tillich's understanding nor do they extend beyond the use of the phraseology to engage extensively with Tillich's theology of being and nonbeing. Cone even leverages the terms toward a different end than Tillich, applying them to Black consciousness as opposed to the fullness of all humanity as it finds its being in God. In many ways Tillich's theology functions like a proof-text in Cone's work.

Fredrick Herzog (1975) provides an important comparison between Cone and Tillich. Herzog notes that Tillich's primary method was to bring the questions of contemporary society into conversation with the revelation of God, whereas Cone posits his theology on a preexistent revelation of God the liberator and asks how that view of God speaks to the contemporary lives of the oppressed and the oppressors. Herzog (1975:61) explains: "It is one thing to predicate theology on the statement, 'I am anxious, what's the answer?' It is another thing to base theology on God's question, 'Your neighbor is oppressed. What is your responsibility?'"

Cone also distances himself from Tillich on the use of culture in theology. While he affirms that the intersection of the two is readily accepted in contemporary society, he wants to subject the use of culture to Feuerbach's assumptions about God as a manifestation of man's deepest aspirations for himself. Cone (1982a:120) asserts that "the question is whether divine revelation in scripture grants us a possibility of saying something about *God* that is *not* simply about ourselves." Cone's conclusion is that "unless this possibility is given, however small it might be, then there seems to be no point in talking about the distinction between white and black theology or the difference in falsehood and truth." Cone is affirming an authoritative, revelational check on culture that he sees as absent in Tillich.

Like his use of Barth, Cone's use of Tillich is primarily methodological and polemical. Tillich serves as illustration, proof-text, negative example, and starting point in Cone's work. Tillich, unlike Barth, appears primarily in Cone's early work, and his influence seems to wane in Cone's later theology.

Other White theologians who feature in Cone's work include Jürgen Moltmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer serves primarily the function of exemplar and proof-text in Cone's work. Cone sees much of Bonhoeffer's work as useful because of the latter's exposure to Black Liberation Theology in Harlem and his personal oppression at the hands of the Nazis in Germany. Even so there is no sustained treatment of Bonhoeffer in Cone's work.

The only White theologian to receive more than sporadic treatment in Cone's work is Reinhold Niebuhr. Cone (2011:30-64) has a lengthy theological engagement with Niebuhr in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Cone chastises Niebuhr for his gradualism on issues of race and his lack of significant engagement of race in his theology. Cone does, however, see both Niebuhr's ethical realism and his concept of the transvaluation of values as useful.

Niebuhr's ethical realism appeals to Cone because its starting point is justice not love. Justice as a concept resonated for Cone because it denied the supremacy of love in racial relations and at least opened the door for liberative acts beyond nonviolence. Likewise, Niebuhr's transvaluation of values fits into Cone's understanding of God's privileging of the oppressed. While this concept will be engaged in detail later in this chapter it is enough at this point to say that Cone found in Niebuhr's ethics actual theological principles with which he engaged in ways he did not with other White theologians. It is also important to note that

this is a later development in Cone's work. There is no sustained treatment of Niebuhr prior to or subsequent to the publication of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. While his engagement with Niebuhr in this one instance is substantial it is not enough to view Niebuhr as influential on the full body of Cone's work.

Jürgen Moltmann also seems to have had at least a limited influence on parts of Cone's theology. Cone is reluctant throughout much of his writing to allow the influence of eschatology. Cone seems concerned that the "other worldly" focus inherent in most formulations of the doctrine would pull the focus of Black liberation theology away from the actual liberation of the oppressed in this world. But he also struggled with the very real presence of an eschatological hope in the worship life of the Black church. He seems to reconcile this tension in Moltmann's view of eschatology as a present hope. Cone's own assessment is that "Moltmann's analysis is compatible with the concerns of black theology. Hope must be related to the present, and it must serve as a means of transforming the oppressed community into a liberated-liberating community" (Cone, 2018a:148). While Moltmann does seem to provide the solution to Cone's problem with eschatology, the doctrine itself is at best a minor point in Cone's theological system and so the influence again seems small.

As regards evangelical/conservative theologians, Cone seems averse to engaging with them. He does mention Jonathan Edwards negatively but never more than briefly. What then does this say about the influence of White theologians on Cone's theology and about how evangelical theologians should engage with Cone? First, Cone does engage the methodologies of both Barth and Tillich and in minor ways the theologies of Niebuhr and Moltmann. But it seems likely that if most of the instances of Cone's use of these theologians were withdrawn from his work, they would not alter his theological conclusions. Cone is clearly working within a liberal modernist theological perspective but it is possible to view his engagement as critical of traditional liberal theology. Given this reality evangelicals must be careful not to assume that discrediting the theological views of Tillich, Barth or Niebuhr necessarily discredits the arguments offered by Cone. But inversely, these White theologians, if used cautiously and critically, might serve as a bridge between White theology and Cone.

Second, Cone's use of Niebuhr and Moltmann does lend itself to constructive engagement. Likewise, his tacit approval of Bonhoeffer seems to present a point of departure for White theologians left unexplored by Cone.

Finally, if this view of the secondary nature of White influence on Cone's work is accepted it must be admitted that Cone's work is more unique than has otherwise been assumed. This is true of his early work directed primarily at White theologians where White theologians are frequently referenced. White evangelicals must, therefore, view Cone as unique and Black theology as reflecting a position in direct tension with modernist liberal theology, while also allowing that Cone viewed himself as working at least within the general frame of liberal theology. This would indicate that there may be more common ground in Cone's work than would be acknowledged by either Cone or evangelicals. With this in mind it is now possible to deal in turn with both Cone's method and his theology and to ask how the latter speaks to evangelical bias.

### **2.2.2 Cone's theological method**

Cone's theological method can best be described as fragmentary, contextual-dialectical, foundational and hermeneutical. Not using a descriptor for a particular type of hermeneutic is intentional. While Cone could be easily classified as practicing a liberation hermeneutic it is doubtful, he would be happy with the descriptor because it is too broad to distinguish a Black hermeneutic from, say, a Latin American hermeneutic. This description is merely meant to say that Cone had, as described below, three primary hermeneutical components that guided his methodological work. While Cone himself only mentions contextual-dialectical as his preferred understanding of his own methodology, there is much in his actual methodological discussions that can be better explained under the other three categories.

Referencing David Tracy's work on theological fragments, Ryan Cummings (2009:395-416) suggests the fragmentary nature of Black theology generally and Cone's work specifically. The term "fragmentary" is used to express the particular and unique concerns of Black theology in contrast to the supposedly universalizing and totalizing concerns of White theology. The argument is that White theology, in limiting its theologizing to those elements of existence that can be seen as universal to the human condition, misses those equally important theological concerns that are particular to portions of humanity.

Cone's theology, however, emphasizes the way these "fragments" create both a unique theology but also the ways that unique theology intersects with the totality of humanity. Black theology is fragmentary because it begins with the particulars to determine the universals. In this way Cone's theology resists large scale metanarratives, overarching and controlling dogmatic categories, and systematic schemas.

Both Cummings and Tracy view this aspect of Black theology as positive and its use raises some important questions for White evangelical theology. How, for example, does the totalizing tendency of White theology tend to ignore the particulars of race, gender, class and other categories that are difficult to assimilate into White theologies' broader theological systems? How does this omission render evangelical claims to universal truth lacking or incomplete? And finally, is there a way to perceive of a particularist/fragmentary evangelical theology that might create a legitimately universal theology?

Cone's preferred description of his theological method is contextual-dialectical. By "contextual" Cone (1975a:100, 101) means that truth is to be found in the lived experience of the Black community. All truth emerges for Cone out of lived contexts and all truth is evidenced in the concrete actions that those truths elicit. To be true, theology must be contextual and must as a matter of methodology be derived from lived experience. But the theological task is also dialectical. This is true in two senses. First, theology places in dialogue the revelation of God in Scripture with God's revelation in the lived experience of the community. Theological truth emerges from this dialectic. Secondly, it is dialectical because theological answers are paradoxical. This is true primarily because they are understood and voiced only in the light of temporal circumstances. God and God-talk is understood only in the light of shifting contemporary experiences. Thus, for Cone the dialectic between the past revelation of God and the ongoing work of God in the contemporary context generates the content of a relevant theology.

The dialectical nature of theology in Cone presents a critical challenge to evangelical theology, which sees theological truth as set. It is a legitimate issue for evangelicals who wish to maintain the authority of Scriptural truth. But it also raises the question of how evangelicalism can deal with the ongoing work of God in the lives of believers. It is important to ask to what degree the anemic nature of contemporary experience in evangelical theology

isolates the work of God to the historical past and limits the ability of God to speak in and into contemporary reality.

While it does not require further elaboration, Cone's method is also foundational. His theology rests on an authoritative source. It has already been mentioned that Cone alternately bases theology on the authority of Scripture, God's revelation in Christ and the revelation of God in Black experience. These authoritative sources are Cone's foundation. The implications for evangelical theology are clear: there is, at least in the case of Scripture, a starting point to converse with Cone's theology.

Cone's theology is also hermeneutical in at least three ways. These include his focus on form as equal to content, his use of liberation as a hermeneutical lens, and his focus on praxis as theology.

Cone is noted for insisting that form equals content. This is part of his justification for the embeddedness of theology in the Black cultural experience. Cone (1978:142) describes how this works in an article on the theology of Black worship: "The style of Black worship is a constituent to its content, and both elements point to the theme of liberation." He goes on to explain the way praise, shouting, call and response preaching, and other aspects of Black worship carry specific theological meaning. This is why Cone also blurs the genres of autobiography and theological essay, and why he prefers interacting with the Black church experience instead of with formal theological writings. Cone's central task is in fact the recovery of theology from the Black community, which involves a deep historical-theological reflection on the spirituals and the blues, sermons, slave testimonies, and other artifacts of Black culture in which the way a story is told may affect its meaning as much as the story itself (Cone, 1974:76-84).

Cone also works within the confines of a hermeneutical lens. He chooses to view everything from the standpoint of liberation. It is, in fact, an *a priori* understanding for Cone. He does at points justify this choice by locating the theme in Scripture, but it seems clear that its identification was prior to the study of Scripture, not following out of that study. Cone also uses this lens to disallow any view that either rejects or omits liberation from its discourse.

Cone also insists that theology must lead to a liberation-focused praxis. He argues for an orthopraxis that is centered on the belief that truth is realized in action and that the gospel

is holistic, which means it must be lived out in all of life. On the former, Cone (1976:25) insists that “truth therefore is not an idea but a divine event which invades history and bestows freedom in wretched places.” The “invading” of divine truth is a continuous action in the present. The holistic nature of theology insures, as well, that it cannot be simply an intellectual exercise but must be realized in action toward the liberation of the oppressed. This means that theology is understood most fully in its practical applications in life. The proof of theological consistency with the gospel is its ability to create change in the world. In this sense Cone’s work is consistent with the work of both Thiselton (2007) and Vanhoozer (2005), both of whom view theology as a hermeneutical task that moves from orthodoxy to orthopraxis.

Cone’s particular hermeneutical approach to theology offers both challenges and opportunities for evangelical theologians. Evangelicals struggle to define what constitutes evangelical theological production. Cone’s insistence that form is content models the possibility for evangelicalism to see its worship, its hymnody, its sermons and its confessions as theological source material. Some of this theological evaluation will be positive while other parts of it might in fact affirm Cone’s opinion that at the heart of evangelical theology is a latent racism. Evangelicals must ask themselves how the history of segregated worship, political action and affiliation, and silence may signal problems with evangelical doctrinal formation. This goes to the heart of a praxis-oriented theology in which evangelical inability to demonstrate an antiracist agenda might warrant a consideration of racist elements within evangelical theological formulations.

Cone’s insistence on liberation as the guiding hermeneutical lens for both biblical interpretation and theological formulation offers a different kind of challenge. Cone’s exclusive use of this theme does shed light on the ways liberation is at least a theme in Scripture. His view that liberation must be seen in its literal, historical context also offers a challenge to evangelicals who tend to spiritualize the theme when encountered in Scripture. In this way Cone’s exegesis may be seen as more directly faithful to the content of Scripture than evangelical interpretations. What must be sorted out is the degree to which Cone’s singular use of liberation excludes other important themes in Scripture. This will have to be worked out in later chapters and in the context of specific doctrinal discussions. Regardless, Cone challenges evangelical theology to think in more nuanced ways about the reality of liberation in theological and biblical discourse.

Methodology is never neutral and Cone's methodology has much to offer evangelical theologians in the way of challenge to their current ways of thinking. If Cone's methodology is challenging, his specific doctrinal stances are even more so. It is therefore necessary to conclude this chapter with some preliminary understandings of Cone's doctrinal positions. This analysis will then form the basis for later constructive theological and exegetical work in Chapters Four and Five.

### **2.3 Cone's doctrinal positions**

It cannot be overemphasized that Cone's engagement with doctrine is more constructive than systematic, more targeted than exhaustive, and more narrow than broad. Cone is opposed to the idea of a systematic theology and traditional White theological categories. But he is unable to avoid discussion of doctrine, particularly in those writings focused primarily on refuting White supremacy. It is possible, therefore, to piece together Cone's views about traditional doctrinal categories, but any analysis of these categories will by necessity be fragmentary.

While the remainder of this chapter will address Cone's views on revelation, Christology, God, anthropology, ecclesiology and eschatology, what he has to say about each is at best partial and clearly focused on how these doctrines oppose White supremacy and affirm the liberation of the oppressed. This does not mean Cone's treatment of doctrine lacks relevance to the current study. His spotlight on particular points of doctrine offers a salient challenge to evangelical doctrine even when those observations lack a comprehensive scope.

#### **2.3.1 Revelation**

It is important to begin any statement related to Cone's view of revelation with a disclaimer: Cone never ranks dogmatic categories. While his works do begin their discussion of theology by referencing revelation, there is little that ties the doctrine to other categories. It is also important to keep in mind that Cone's views on revelation are fluid. They change over time, shifting from what can only be described as a conservative view of the authority of Scripture, to Barthian concepts of the revelation of God in Christ, and ending up affirming the view of



the revelation of God in the experience of the Black community. Each of these views of revelation plays an important role in the way Cone shapes Black theology.

Cone (2018a:48-50) discusses revelation by insisting that revelation functions both in history and in faith. The historicity of God's revelation is a repeated theme in Cone's theology with implications beyond the doctrine of revelation. Cone believes that "it is not possible to retain the essence of biblical religion without seeing God as a God who is involved in human affairs" (2018a:49) God's revelatory, self-disclosure in and through history is critical to Cone not just as an authoritative foundation for his theological work but also because he wants to center his understanding of God on the history of God's liberating work. This shifts the focus off the propositional text and onto the actual historical events of God's liberating work on behalf of his people. In this way historical revelation becomes a marker for God's preference for the oppressed and of God's faithful action on their behalf.

This raises a few questions that must be considered later in discussions of how Cone's views interface with White evangelicalism. How might Cone's understanding of God's revelation as embedded in God's historical acts require consideration of the historical details of God's acts as more than merely incidental to the revelation God? Also, how might Cone's understanding of the historical event as the center of revelation be brought into conversation with debates about synchronic and diachronic readings of the biblical text and their subsequent use in theological discourse?<sup>3</sup>

Beyond the revelation of God in history Cone also emphasizes the role of faith in the way God's self-disclosure is understood. Cone makes the understanding of revelation exclusive to the community of faith. Those outside the community cannot comprehend God's self-disclosure. This point plays critically into Cone's understanding that the revelation of God emerges from within the context of the oppressed community. Cone is unclear whether this is a contemporary revelation apart from Scripture or the byproduct of the discernment of the biblical text. Although he tends toward the latter, he at times seems to affirm both.

It is important to note that Cone believes that the oppressed community is closer to the horizon of the biblical text because it is closer to the revelation of God (Cone, 1982a:122). What Cone envisions is a hermeneutic and theology of revelation that is neither beholden to

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<sup>3</sup> For an example of how evangelical biblical exegesis is shifting toward synchronic readings of the text see Sailhamer, 1999.

Gadamer's horizons nor Foucault's hermeneutics of suspicion. Gadamer proposes only a temporal distance between the ancient text and the contemporary reader (Thiselton, 1980:314-319) thus treating contemporary interpreters as a single reading community. Foucault (2003:239-264) posits that every act of interpretation and all human acts are acts of power. Thus, Foucault can be seen as a predecessor to modern theories of intersectionality that treat power analysis as central to the task and make shifting power dynamics critical in interpretation. Cone, on the other hand, both fractures Gadamer's contemporary horizon and ignores Foucault's destabilization of dualistic power dynamics in the interest of privileging the oppressed Black community. For Cone, the oppressed community is the location of God's revelation and therefore is the community of readers who best interpret the revelation of God in Scripture. Proper theology is the theology that is derived out of the experience of the oppressed Black community. This, according to Cone, places the oppressed community in closer proximity to the horizon of the biblical text, thus fragmenting the contemporary horizon. Similarly, the White community is placed at a greater and in some ways insurmountable distance from the text. "God has chosen to disclose the divine righteousness in the liberation of the poor." Cone begins. He then continues, "Therefore to be outside of this community is to be in a place where one is excluded from the possibility of hearing and obeying God's Word of liberation. By becoming poor and entrusting divine revelation to a carpenter from Nazareth, God makes clear where one has to be in order to hear the divine Word and experience divine presence" (Cone, 1982:122). What this view of revelation suggests is a possible reconsideration of who can and cannot rightly interpret Scripture and rightly understand the revelation of God. This view will require further consideration.

Cone (2018a:51-55) moves beyond his discussion of history and faith to include a slightly nuanced discussion of general and specific revelation. As a Barthian Cone might be expected to deemphasize general revelation. He does not. Instead, he appropriates it in the interest of liberation theology. General revelation, Cone reasons, is the purview of the oppressed Black community. By virtue of their oppression this community is seeking a liberator. Because God's nature is liberation the oppressed are able to see God in the very act of the fight for liberation. Oppressors have no access to general revelation because their nature and their gaze is pointed away from liberation. They cannot see the general revelation of God because they are not looking for a God whose essence is liberation. The oppressors' gaze is pointed away from God's true being.

It is uncertain how evangelicals might interact in other than a negative way to Cone's perception of general revelation. Evangelicalism that embraces Calvin's ideas about general revelation will be at a particular loss. If, as Calvin believes, general revelation is inaccessible and serves only as a witness to human guilt, then any perception of general revelation open to any segment of humanity is inconsistent. General revelation as a theological category is not, however, a major point of departure for either Cone or evangelical theology and the differences in viewpoint do not, in and of themselves, forestall theological dialogue.

What is more critical for the work of evangelical scholars is a clear understanding of Cone's views of specific revelation, particularly since these views seem to shift throughout Cone's work. Cone distinguishes three sources of specific revelation, which include Scripture, Jesus, and the experience of the Black church.

Cone's view of Scripture is complicated. At times he affirms the authority of Scripture as foundational to theological understanding. But he clearly denies the inerrancy of Scripture. Cone's "Bible-focused" African Methodist Episcopal (AME) background seems to compel the former while his attempt to engage liberal theologians seems to drive the latter. Cone's use of Scripture tends toward literal/historical exegesis but always with a disclaimer. These disclaimers do not, however, affect his ultimate conclusions related to his use of the Scriptures. The narrative account of the birth of Jesus still affirms Cone's conclusions about the social status of Jesus even if those narratives in Cone's estimation are not historically accurate. So ultimately Cone's analysis also defaults to a literalist reading of the narratives he references. But this point is key. His use of Scripture tends more toward the narrative accounts to the exclusion of the propositional texts. And the fact that Cone's use of narrative insists on a historical ground for the text distinguishes his work from that of either Bultmann or Barth. The text is never merely symbolic or mythic.

Cone's understanding of Scriptural revelation might also be categorized using traditional evangelical frames of reference. If Scriptural revelation is thought of in terms of biblical authority, inerrancy and sufficiency, then Cone might be said to build his concept of the authority of Scripture on a beginning point of sufficiency rather than inerrancy. Cone might say that the Scriptures are authoritative to the extent that they are sufficient to answer the challenges of contemporary life. For Cone, God's work on behalf of the oppressed in the past, present and future as revealed in Scripture means that Scripture is sufficient, and

therefore authoritative, because it addresses the needs of the oppressed Black community. The Bible has meaning because it is relevant to the struggles of the oppressed.

While Cone's denials of inerrancy are problematic for some evangelicals, his insistence on the sufficiency of Scripture for contemporary settings does at least provide a starting point for dialogue. The issue of sufficiency, within evangelical systematic schemes, seems to be one area that must be considered in any engagement with Cone around the doctrine of revelation.

At the very least Cone's prioritization of the contemporary setting requires that the text be taken seriously for how it addresses contemporary issues. Evangelicals who take seriously the sufficiency of Scripture would be forced to ask how, or if, a sufficient Bible addresses itself to the problems of racism, power, and privilege within the church and society. A higher regard for sufficiency might elevate conversations about the coherence between orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Cone's insistence on the continuing acts of God as governed by the past acts of God in Scripture certainly points to the need to engage more comprehensively in a consideration of sufficiency in light of both Cone's assessment and standard evangelical discourse on revelation.

In addition to his focus on God's revelation in Scripture, Cone also affirms, in very Barthian fashion, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Cone uses the revelatory nature of Christ to bridge his notions of God's revelation in Scripture and God's revelation in the contemporary Black community. Cone (1997b:99-121) formulates his ideas about Jesus as the revelation of God with reference to Jesus being "who he was", "who he is", and "who he will be".

When Cone asserts that Jesus is "who he was" he is stating that "there is no knowledge of Jesus Christ today that contradicts who he was yesterday, i.e., his historical appearance in first-century Palestine. Jesus' past is the clue to his present activity" (Cone, 1997b:106). Cone, affirming Pannenberg, is insistent that Jesus must be understood first in his historical context and only then can he be understood as the Christ of eternity. For Cone, our understanding of Jesus must begin with the conditions of his birth, his existence as part of an oppressed people under occupation, and the political realities of his crucifixion. The historical Jesus must precede the spiritual savior in order to properly understand who Christ is today. In this context the Gospels become central to an understanding of the historical

Jesus. Their portrayal of Christ as one who lived among, and suffered on behalf of, the marginalized is critical to any application of Christ to contemporary situations. The Jesus who was is the biblical Jesus.

But the Jesus who was is also the Jesus who is. “While the *wasness* of Jesus is Christology’s point of departure, thereby establishing Christ’s inseparable relationship with the historical Jesus, the *isness* of Jesus relates his past history to his present involvement in our struggle” (Cone, 1997b:110). Cone is insisting here that the reality of the resurrection ensures that Christ’s work is ongoing in the contemporary context. It also assures that who he was is manifest in who and what he is today. If Jesus came to liberate the oppressed in first-century Palestine he is still liberating the oppressed in South Central Los Angeles today. This bridges the revelation of God in Christ found in Scripture with the revelation of God found in the contemporary oppressed community. If Christ is at work today liberating the oppressed, his work and God’s self-disclosure in and through it continues to reveal God’s self in the midst of contemporary movements of liberation.

Cone also insists that Jesus is who he will be—that the crucifixion and resurrection point toward the hope of the coming kingdom in which Jesus will consummate the work of liberation. For Cone, the hope of the coming kingdom is a present hope that requires present action. Unlike Pannenberg, who sees divine history as past and future, Cone insists that the future requires continuous action in the present. Who Christ will be must inspire and inform who Christ is for the present community of the oppressed. The oppressed Christ who was and the liberating Christ who is finds ultimate completion in the consummating Christ who will be.

It is in the continuity of Christ’s work of liberation that God reveals God’s self to those who suffer under oppression. Christ as the revelation of God reveals God’s nature as the liberator of the oppressed.

While evangelicals should have no problem embracing the idea that Jesus was who he was, there is likely to be disagreement related to which aspects of Jesus’ historical condition are viewed as revelatory and which are viewed as incidental. Evangelical theologians will tend to see the salvific work of Christ in spiritual terms and in relation to a predetermined view (according to their own frame of reference) of God’s will for Christ. They are likely to read the Gospels through the lens of a post-resurrection church that has

already seen the end of the story. Cone, on the other hand, challenges readers of the Gospels to read as if they did not know the ending. He asks that they take seriously the social, cultural, economic and political circumstances and that each of these be seen as part of God's revelation in Christ. Cone requires that no part of the Gospels be taken as incidental to the revelation of God in Christ.

Evangelical theologians are also likely to struggle with Cone's concept of the Jesus who is and the Jesus who will be. Carl Henry (2003) bemoans the divorce between evangelical perceptions of supernaturalism and evangelical concern for social impact. According to Henry, evangelicals tend toward a revivalist perception of Jesus that makes his present reality nothing more than a personalized issue of salvation and his second coming proof that efforts at social transformation are nothing more than naïve optimism. Cone challenges evangelical theology to think about the place of Christ in the social context of contemporary society and Christ's second coming in the context of efforts to struggle toward a present kingdom of God. Henry echoes Cone's assessment of evangelicalism's impoverished social conscience:

Protestant Fundamentalism ... is a stranger in its predominate spirit, to the vigorous social interests of its ideological forbearers. Modern Fundamentalism does not explicitly sketch the social implications of its message for the non-Christian world; it does not challenge the injustices of totalitarianism, the secularisms of modern education, the evils of racial hatred.... (Henry, 2003:39).

Cone's view of the continuing liberative work of God in the world in Christ, though not identical, does share something in common with Henry's ideas of a social imperative in the Gospels. This again suggests at least the possibility of further dialogue.

Aside from Scripture and the revelation of God in Christ, Cone also believes that God is revealed in the experiences of the Black church. By this Cone (2018b:56) intends both that the revelation of God is only comprehended within particular human experience and that revelation is always a contemporary event happening in the present tense. It is only through the church's interpretation of Scripture and the Christ event that God is understood. There is no revelation accessible outside the limitations of human understanding. Thus, revelation is always dependent on human language, speech, culture, and the particulars of human experience.

Cone sees God's revelation within the experiences of the oppressed community as a consequence of the active nature of revelation. God's revelation represents continuous action and is never truly past but has its meaning in its present reality. Cone (2018a:56) insists:

It is not enough to say God's revelation is a Christ-event; it is a *black*-event— that is, black persons expressing their being in spite of three hundred and fifty years of white oppression. This is a reality that shapes the black perspective. To know God is to know about ourselves, our beautiful black selves. This is what revelation means to blacks. It is a contemporary decision about a contemporary event, the event of black and white being.

Cone's view of revelation is critically tied to this concept of a "contemporary decision" about a "contemporary event." Cone is not suggesting a progressive revelation or a process view of God. Nor does he see a disconnect between God's revelation in Scripture and in Christ and the communities' continuing perception of that revelation. They are all connected in Cone's thought. But revelation is never about determining what God said in the past without also determining what God is saying in the present. God, for Cone always speaks in the active voice and in the present continuous tense.

Cone's view of the revelation of God in the experience of the Black community might at first glance appear problematic for evangelical theology—that is, if Cone's theology suggests an experience separated from the Scriptural narrative of the person and work of Christ. But that is not what Cone is suggesting. His primary concern is with the ongoing implications of the revelation of God to the contemporary reality of Black Americans living with the degradation of White racism.

### **2.3.2 Jesus Christ**

Cone's Christology centers primarily on the work of Christ. He works diligently to show the ways that the historical Jesus lived in solidarity with the oppressed, as well as the way the risen Christ liberates the oppressed. Cone avoids in-depth analysis about the humanity and divinity of Christ, preferring to ground his discussion in the work of Christ almost to the exclusion of considerations about the person of Christ. Cone's Christology is, therefore, primarily focused on the earthy ministry of Jesus, his crucifixion and his resurrection.

Cone (2018a:117-120) insists that authentic Christology must ground its view of Jesus in the historical realities of Christ's earthly existence. Just as in Cone's view of revelation, the circumstances of Jesus' birth, his life outside the structures of political and

religious power, his ministry directed at the marginalized, and his death for political subversion as an oppressed Jew in an occupied land, are theologically significant. The grounded literality of his historical life speaks to the plan and will of God for Christ and for contemporary society.

But Cone (1997b:122-126) also insists that to rightly understand Christ in contemporary context one must employ a hermeneutical lens. Understanding Christ requires the affirmation that Christ is Black. In Cone's thought the only significant contemporary category that compares with Christ's life as an oppressed Jew in an occupied Palestine is the category of "Blackness." Cone (1997b:123) states clearly that, "*Jesus is Black because he was a Jew.*"

Cone's perceptions of Christ's ontological Blackness is critical to his Christology. Christ's Blackness ensures that he is identified with the oppressed not the oppressor. His Blackness ensures also that Christ is perceived as for and Black persons not against them. The Black Christ is a Christ who suffers in solidarity with the Black community. The Black Christ, who overcomes his suffering in the resurrection, is the victorious Christ who offers hope to those who linger in oppression. The Black Christ is the exemplar of the fight for liberation, the one who gives the oppressed Black community the courage to fight for freedom. The Black Christ is the Christ who hangs on a cross in condemnation of White oppressors, the one who through his Blackness becomes more readily identified with the crucified than the crucifiers. But this move is not merely symbolic, nor does it follow from the Black community's desire to identify Christ with their cause. Cone affirms that Christ is Black because Christ's suffering as a first-century Jew is identical with the suffering of the contemporary Black community.

How does Cone's view of the work of Christ challenge White theology? Cone offers a critical challenge to White theologians to center Christology, in similar ways to revelation, around the social, political, cultural and economic realities of Christ's life in the world. He asks that these aspects of Christ be pulled out of the background and into the core of theological analysis of Christ's work. Again, like his views of revelation, his Christology opposes a too ready spiritualization of the work of Christ in the doctrine of Christology.

Cone's view of the Black Christ is problematic for White evangelical theologians. White evangelicalism argues, contra their own tendency toward spiritualization, that



historically Jesus was a Jew and therefore any assessment of Jesus' race should avoid hermeneutical moves and ground Christ's race in historical reality. But this point, when made by White evangelical theologians, completely misses the long history of anti-Semitism that removed the significance of Jesus' Jewishness and that by default supported an image of Jesus as the White Christ. It also fails to take into consideration the degree to which Jewishness is viewed as a religion, not an ethnicity, in US contexts where Jews are usually perceived as ethnically White. Further, it completely ignores the iconoclastic stream within evangelicalism that emerged from American New England Puritanism. The non-depicted, non-descript Christ is a completely spiritual being who has no reference point in contemporary life and is the default view of Christ in White Christianity. (Blum and Harvey, 2012)

Cone's urging of a hermeneutical category that will free Jesus from either a nonsensical Whiteness or a spiritualized nothingness seem reasonable as a theological corrective. It is also fair to ask how the embrace of a Black Christ by White theologians might or might not open new avenues for Christological reflection.

Cone's views certainly make room for cruciformity. The crucifixion for Cone is what binds Christ to the oppressed and the oppressed to Christ. The experience of suffering shapes the oppressed and opens them to a cruciformed life. Christ's experience of suffering unites him in solidarity through the cross with the oppressed. Christ becomes identified with the oppressed in this singular act of solidarity. Cone makes this point at length in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011). Cone identifies the suffering communal memory of lynched Black bodies with the suffering communal memory of Christ's crucifixion. The mutuality of suffering unites Christ and the oppressed, but the crucifixion of Christ is not just about the suffering. The Black community can see on the cross both the suffering of Christ and the power of God in Christ. The fact that Christ never loses his power on the cross speaks to what cruciformity means to the Black community. It means embracing the power within, even in the midst of suffering.

Cone's reflections on the cross also speak to the nature of cruciformity for Whites. Cone (2011:34,35) draws on Niebuhr's understanding of the transvaluation of values in this regard. Niebuhr identified the central driving principle in human interaction as self-interested power, what Nietzsche defined as the will to power. But God demonstrated that God values

weakness not power as Christ is crucified “like a lamb to the slaughter” on the cross. The cross reverses human values and suggests that those who come to Christ must surrender power in order to truly follow the crucified Christ. By this Cone suggests that cruciformity for White Christians means the surrender of power and privilege in the interest of others.

Cone’s view of the cross poses the most serious challenge to White evangelical theology of any point that Cone makes. If Cone’s view of cruciformity, drawn from Niebuhr, holds up to further biblical assessment then at the very least evangelicals have to ask what this says about the abandonment of power and privilege at the cross and what the greater implications are for evangelical views of soteriology.

The cross for Cone both demonstrates Christ’s solidarity for the oppressed and pushes Blacks and Whites toward two different realizations of cruciformity. The cross also has an atoning work in Cone’s theology. Atonement, for Cone, is realized in Christ’s victory over evil on the Cross. Cone defines evil primarily in terms of social ills that result in the oppression of others and with little to no reference to individual morality. Christ’s victory on the cross identified his opposition to evil and his work of liberating the oppressed from the evils that oppress them. Christ’s victory is certain and assured but the battle against evil continues and it is Christ who provides hope, in the midst of present struggles, that though the battle rages the victory is assured.

Cone’s embrace of the Christus Victor theory of atonement, in and of itself, causes little concern for evangelical theologians. But his definition of evil does. White evangelicalism focuses its perceptions of evil primarily in relation to discussions of individual moral failure. It has rarely produced fully formed theologies of societal evil. Categories including sexual deviance, murder and theft are more likely to receive treatment in evangelical definitions of evil, while equally applicable categories like power, poverty, racism, and sexism are likely to be overlooked. Cone’s work seems to suggest a view of evil that is, if not at odds with White evangelicalism, at least suggestive of a different prioritization of categories.

Cone also suggests that there is an ongoing role in continuing Christ’s victory over evil by opposing evil directly in this world. Evangelicals, if convinced of the social nature of evil, would also have to consider what it means for the church to engage in a continuing battle

with societal evil and how this understanding might shape their doctrines of sanctification and ecclesiology.

Cone has a very clear theology of the cross, but his theology of the resurrection is very limited. He does not deny traditional views of the resurrection and their connection to soteriology and the eternal life of the believer. Because these ideas are central to the Black church, they are central to Black theology as well. But he does insist that the resurrection also serves as a model, almost a typology, of God's liberation of the oppressed. Cone (2018a:125) reasons that "his [Jesus'] resurrection is the disclosure that God is not defeated by oppression but transforms it into the possibility of freedom." There is also a psychological rationale inherent in Cone's view of the resurrection. Because Christ has defeated death, the oppressed no longer need to fear dying and can give themselves to the liberation struggle with the assurance that whether they live through victory or die fighting for their freedom they are assured of ultimate freedom in Christ. Christ's defeat of death provides the psychological freedom from the fear of dying and makes rebellion possible.

It is unclear how Cone's somewhat loosely defined understanding of the resurrection might inform evangelical theology. Eternity in heaven, for evangelicals, is not a given for all and therefore cannot hold hope for all oppressed people. Cone's symbolic use of Christ's resurrection to justify an interpretation focused on human liberation, seems to limit, not enlarge, theological understandings of the resurrection. Contending with this limited development will play a role in later constructive theological work.

Cone's Christology insists on the historicity of Christ, the Blackness of Christ, the centrality and cruciformity of the cross, and the reality of liberation in the resurrection. Cone also speaks of Christ in terms of Christ's kingdom, but that will be discussed below under considerations of eschatology. The next section on God will make it clear that Cone's Christology is far more complete than his doctrine of God.

### **2.3.3 God**

Cone limits the doctrine of God, or at least his treatment of it, to points where the doctrine intersects with his interests in liberation. For example, he has no clear discussion of the Trinity and intentionally avoids metaphysical and apologetic statements related to the existence of God, stating only that the existence of God is a given for Black theology. Cone's

discussion of God, particularly in *A Black Liberation Theology* (2018a) calls on classic theological categories but seems reluctant in its use of them. Cone's discussion in *A Black Liberation Theology* mentions God as creator, God as immanent and transcendent, and the providence of God, but his discussion is forced and the categories do little to advance his own theological view. Where Cone is more fully engaged is in his treatment of the sovereignty of God, love as an attribute of God, and God in relation to theodicy.

Cone (2018a:58-86) centers his understanding of the sovereignty of God in Barth's postulation of the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man. God as sovereign is the seat of all power. All power belongs to God and is God's alone. Therefore, oppressors who pursue self-interested power are idolaters who seek what is God's alone. They attempt, through power, to make themselves in the image of a god. But for Cone the sovereignty of God is one of God's infinite qualitative distinctions, or to use more traditional theological categories, it is one of God's incommunicable attributes. Because of this, humanity cannot aspire to what is wholly God's.

Cone would categorize White theologies' misappropriation of God's sovereignty as a primary cause of racism in theology. The embeddedness of concepts like the divine right of kings and the doctrine of discovery in theology has been underpinned by extending God's sovereignty to human agents (Brueggemann, 2018:109-118). Cone insists that White theology must examine the ways it has appropriated the sovereignty of God and applied it to human agency.

Cone's discussion of God as love has more to do with his efforts to defend Black Power as an ethical means than it does with any attempt at a full understanding of the attributes of God. But it does seem to make contributions toward a broader theology of God.

The love of God, Cone (2018a:58-86) insists, cannot be understood apart from the righteousness of God. God's righteousness also entails God's wrath. Without the wrath of God, love breaks down into sentimentality and the concept of love leaves no room for God to express God's love through the punishment and defeat of oppressors and the ultimate defeat of evil. Love is only love, according to Cone, when wrath is exercised in the pursuit of righteousness. Cone insists on the formula "love plus righteousness equals justice". Justice for Cone is both the ultimate goal of love exercised with righteousness and the central defining attribute of God. Love is just one constituent part of God's justice and is impotent

when it is seen in isolation. For Cone, the justice of God is manifest in the liberation of the oppressed by virtue of his pouring out his wrath on oppressors. God is justice in this—that he exercises love for the oppressed by exercising his wrath on oppressors.

Cone also views God through the lens of the question of theodicy. His final word on the question of Black suffering in the face of a seemingly loving God is, “I’ve asked the same question all my life and still have no answer” (Cone, 2018b:144) Cone’s reticence at this point has to be seen more as a reluctance to “let God off the hook” or to downplay the significance of Black suffering than any real resolve to let go of the question. Cone’s work, in spite of his insistence to the contrary, offers the possibility of an answer.

He does this first and foremost by reframing the question, moving it away from classic discussions of the culpability of God toward discussions of the nature of God and humanity in the midst of suffering. The place of God in the midst of suffering functions for Cone as a clearer statement on the nature of God than any statement about the culpability of God for human suffering. For God to make sense, given the reality of suffering, God has to be on the side of the sufferers and working for their liberation from suffering. If God is not working toward the liberation of the oppressed then God is monstrous and must be opposed. It is the liberative work of God that frees God to be both a just and loving God in the face of human suffering. There is simply no way for God to be loving in light of Black suffering unless God is at work on behalf of those who suffer.

God is love, in Cone, also because he is the means of liberation as expressed in human agency in the midst of suffering. Cone (2018b:154) quotes Baldwin on this: “I conceive of God, in fact, as a means of liberation and not as a means to control others.” Baldwin’s point, which Cone affirms, is that God is that which moves others toward those acts that will free them from suffering or give them strength in the midst of suffering. The reality of God-empowered human agency for Cone is expressed in three divine certainties.

First, “our circumstances do not have to define us.” The testimony of the Black church in the midst of suffering was that they were not what Whites said they were, and their certainty concerning this was derived from the fact that their experience of God told them otherwise. It was the power of the Spirit of God in the worship of the Black church that taught them that they could overcome and not be defined by their suffering—that their relationship with God and not their circumstances defined who they were.

Next, Cone (2018b:167) argues, along with Baldwin, that everyone pays for what they do to themselves and others. Whites do not escape their hatred or apathy, “...they pay for it very simply: by the lives they lead’—wasted lives, empty lives, meaningless lives.” Cone makes this point about suffering with his discussion of the wrath and justice of God echoing in the background. God stands against the oppressor on behalf of the oppressed. But Cone also wants to express an opposing consequence of God’s love for the oppressed: “I would rather be the one who suffered wrong than the one who did wrong.” He says, “The one who suffered wrong is stronger than the one who did wrong. Jesus is stronger than his crucifier” (Cone, 2018b:167). There is a divine strength in the righteousness of the oppressed fighting for their liberation.

Finally, Cone insists that suffering is a universal bridge that has the ability to unite all humanity. While at face value this may seem antithetical to Cone’s normally particularistic bent, there is a way of seeing it as consistent with the rest of Cone’s theology. The universality of suffering in Cone is important on several levels.

On a philosophical level suffering is the byproduct of the existential condition of humankind—what Sartre and Camus saw as the primary concern of humanity—how to live a meaningful life in the face of the certainty of death. Cone is a theological existentialist and so it is not inconsistent for him to embrace the universality of suffering as his one irreducible aspect of the human condition.

Theologically, Cone is drawing on his understanding of suffering in solidarity with the oppressed. The unifying potential of universal suffering is in the ability, but not the certainty, of individuals to connect their existential understanding of their own suffering with the reality of suffering in the oppressed, thus opening them to greater understanding of, and greater solidarity with, the oppressed. Theologically this experience has its being and end on the cross. It is on the cross that God experiences human suffering, thus sharing in the suffering of humanity unto death. It is the cross, and Christ’s suffering on the cross, that unites God to humanity, humanity to God, and humankind to one another. The solidarity of suffering in this way is theologically wedded to the cross of Christ. The oppressor’s primary hope is to see the suffering savior in the suffering of the oppressed. The universality of suffering is the only hope for the salvation of those outside the oppressed community within the framework of Cone’s theological system. It is important to note that Cone’s own work is not this

developed. He offers this assessment in the final chapter of his autobiography. Cone had intended a larger work but his health prevented its completion so the chapter is an abbreviation of what he planned. What is offered here is a logical inference on the universality of suffering based on a broader reading of Cone's theological corpus.

Unlike Cone, evangelical theology has approached theodicy as either an apologetic or pastoral task. Apologetic approaches attempt to explain away the culpability of God for human suffering with the ultimate goal of justifying God in the face of that suffering. (Erickson, 2001:147-153) This approach does little to address suffering in itself. Pastoral approaches, on the other hand, are often pointed toward Christian faith in the midst of individual suffering (Hauerwas, 2001). Cone suggests a different approach. First, by asking not whether God is culpable but where and in what way is God present in suffering? Cone's work, if deemed correct, would suggest a need to come to terms with an understanding of theodicy that addresses both the love of God and the wrath of God in connection with the centrality of justice in the nature of God.

Secondly, Cone also avoids the tendency to individualize evil and suffering by pointing to the social and communal nature of evil. To bring evangelicalism into conversation with Cone at this point would require that social evil be given proper consideration.

Finally, it seems likely that Cone's reflections on the universality of suffering have something to say to White theologians about the importance of the suffering solidarity of the cross. Determining the degree to which such solidarity can be incorporated into evangelical theologies of the cross will require further work.

Overall, Cone's doctrine of God opens up at least the possibility of a critical dialogue around God's sovereignty, God's nature, and God's relationship to suffering. Cone's ability to use the Black experience to enrich his understanding of these concepts is perhaps his greatest achievement. His insights raise critical questions for the work of evangelical theologians. While not as well developed, his anthropology does the same.

#### **2.3.4 Humanity**

Cone's anthropology insists on the concreteness of human beings in the world and the particularity of the human subject. Cone does not believe that it is possible to speak of a

universal humanity but only of human beings in their unique circumstances. Cone intends in this way to distinguish between an anthropology focused on a nonexistent universal, which is usually a stand-in for Whiteness, and an anthropology that speaks to the nature of Black oppression as a contradistinctive to the nature of white supremacy. Thus, much of Cone's discussion of the doctrine of humanity is centered on themes of being and nonbeing, as well as the distinction between oppressor and oppressed in relation to original sin and the definition of sin.

Following Tillich, Cone believes that human nature manifests itself in the struggle of humanity between being and nonbeing. Cone (2018a:95) applies Tillich's understanding that "the courage to be is the ethical act in which man affirms his being in spite of those elements of his existence which conflict with essential self-affirmation." For Cone the "ethical act" of "self-affirmation" is the oppressed choosing being over nonbeing in spite of White opposition to Black being. This struggle for Cone is basic to human nature and is grounded in the *imago Dei*. The image of God in humanity, according to Cone, is the will to freedom, which in turn is the will to demand being over nonbeing. For Cone freedom is what it means to *be*.

Cone defines freedom, and by extension humanity, as human *being* seeking the extension of the limits of humanity. Cone (2018a:93) asserts that "to be (fully) human is to be separated from everything that is evil, everything that is against the 'extension of the limits of humanity.'" Thus, Cone equates evil with anything that limits human freedom and human potentiality.

Likewise, sin, for the oppressed Black community, is the denial of God's intention for human freedom. It is an unwillingness to embrace being and deny nonbeing in the face of White supremacy and it is the unwillingness to embrace freedom and full human potentiality. But sin is also the act of stepping outside the liberative purpose and plan of God as revealed within the faithful oppressed community. To sin is to put self-interest ahead of the liberating interests of God for and within the community of the oppressed. While all this can be seen as the definition of sin for the Black community, Cone posits a different understanding of sin for the White community. Sin for the White community is the failure to see the evil inherent in White supremacy and the failure to abandon it in the interest of liberating the oppressed. It is a failure to move in solidarity with the oppressed. And



ultimately it is the failure to see God who is only visible and accessible through the oppressed community.

Without launching into a full critique, it must be admitted that Cone's total dependence on theological existentialism makes his arguments difficult to embrace. He certainly is at a considerable distance from evangelical views of anthropology. His arguments make poorly defended claims about freedom as the essence of human nature and the quest for human potentiality as the sum of humanity's work. Without more support these unsubstantiated claims open up Cone's entire argument to attack. It is unlikely that evangelicals will be able to make positive use of Tillichian theological existentialism. But this does not mean that there is nothing to learn from Cone's analysis.

The idea of a duality in the definition of sin could open up evangelical theology to a fuller definition that asks how power and the lack of power might lead to different manifestations of sin in the powerful and the powerless. A critical assessment of the sins of the powerless might prove particularly fruitful. Also, evangelical theology might benefit from a theological engagement with notions of freedom and bondage in the human person. Cone's challenge would be to ground these concepts first in concrete earthly realities while avoiding the tendency to spiritualize. All of this assumes that there is enough support within Scripture itself to warrant the use of double meanings and applications of sin and the application of particular texts in different ways to different groups of Christian readers.

Cone also embeds his limited discussion of soteriology within his doctrine of humanity. Salvation comes through deliverance from sin but, in this case, sin understood within Cone's dualistic definition. Salvation is also more the result of earthly liberation than freedom from spiritual bondage. Cone does not deny the latter but works at length to elevate the former. Evangelicalism will struggle to see any real benefit from Cone's soteriology. Perhaps there might be some work to be done by White theologians in relation to the benefits of salvation to concrete human existence, but it is doubtful the conclusions would be acceptable to Cone. It is also true that, as it relates to soteriology, Cone seems to miss an opportunity that he might have explored. The doctrine of election might have given him a way to look at God's preference for the oppressed and to equate this preference to election. This would still be problematic given that oppression is a category applied both inside and outside of the church. If oppression determined election, then oppression itself would become

the agent of salvation, a charge that scholars have leveled against Cone's soteriology. All things considered; Cone's doctrine of humanity will be the most difficult to reconcile to evangelical thought.

### **2.3.5 The church**

Cone's ecclesiology has already been outlined in earlier discussions of his view of the White church as anti-Christ. Cone (2018a:138, 139) affirms three marks of the church. Its *kerygma* (proclamation) shares Christ's proclamation that he has come to "set the captives free." Its *diakonia* (service) is to render the same service to the world that Christ has rendered to the church by giving itself on behalf of the oppressed. Finally, its *koinonia* (fellowship) consists in being "a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality." That is, the church should include within its fellowship only those who have been shaped by the gospel to work for the freedom of the oppressed. The implication is that the church should exercise church discipline in expelling oppressors and racists from its fellowship.

Cone's full arguments in this regard are compelling and must be taken into consideration by evangelical theologians. The White evangelical church's impotence in dealing with racism and power within the church must in some way flow from a flawed ecclesiology. It will be important to ask to what extent Cone's ecclesiology might be both correct and corrective.

### **2.3.6 Eschatology**

It is interesting that in *A Black Theology of Liberation* (2018a) Cone gives only a small amount of space to his treatment of eschatology. While he does not deny the importance of the doctrine, Cone works to decenter it in his own theological discourse. Concurring with what is primarily the views of the theologians of hope, Cone views eschatology as functioning in the present tense and only secondarily in the future tense. Cone sees the eschatological vision as providing a future hope that allows the oppressed to fight for liberation in the present. He also views the future kingdom as a present exemplar which provides for the oppressed a model for the kingdom they are striving for now. But even these perspectives are downplayed in Cone's work. Eschatology as a whole can be viewed, in

Cone, as an embedded doctrine, that is, it arises in relationship to discussions of other doctrines.

As limited as Cone's eschatology is, it does challenge classic evangelical eschatology. How might, for example, evangelical theologians think of a present shaped by an eschatological reality? In what ways might the coming kingdom require a public or political theology that takes into consideration the contemporary social reality? And finally, is eschatology meant to be seen primarily in the present and future tenses?

### **2.3.7 Systematic schemas**

While Cone engages with theological doctrines, he seems to avoid any real systematic connections. Cone's reasoning for this is that Black theology has different forms and those forms are nonsystematic. It seems more likely that his interests, focused as they are on attacking White supremacy, point toward specific doctrines and away from others. Cone is not working on a systematic theology but on a theological treatment of a specific theological problem. Thus, the previous observation that Cone's theology is intentionally fragmentary holds.

That does not mean, however, that there is nothing to be said about the connections among doctrines in Cone's work. Both soteriology and eschatology are secondary doctrines for Cone and they are always embedded in the discussion of other doctrines. Christology is an overarching doctrine which governs Cone's perception of all other dogmatic categories. The crucifixion also holds a primary place within Cone's Christology. Christ in suffering solidarity with the oppressed on the cross is central. The doctrine of God is secondary to the doctrine of Christ. This flows out of Cone's belief that God is only known through and in Christ. God is elicited to make specific points about justice, power, and suffering in the world. Cone is more likely to speak of God as a theological symbol than he is to speak of Christ in the same way. The Holy Spirit plays almost no role in Cone's theological reflections. Other doctrines, especially ecclesiology, anthropology, and revelation, are used apologetically to make particular points in opposition to White supremacy. Liberation itself is, surprisingly, not put forth as its own doctrinal category but is used throughout Cone's theological discourse as the primary element by which all of Cone's dogmatic reflections cohere.

What is certain is that to place Cone in conversation with systematic theology will require a fair amount of constructive engagement. The implications of Cone's critique in one area may require fuller engagement with evangelical theology in areas he does not cover. This may require interaction with Black theologians whose work is adjacent to Cone's. Evangelical theologians may also need to come to terms with Cone's assessment that systematic schemas are themselves flawed. It may be necessary to ask how elevating one doctrine above another might alter what is being said about key points of intersection between theology and contemporary events.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The primary work of this first movement has been to ask how hearing Cone vis-à-vis Cone might challenge evangelical bias toward an evangelical theology of power and privilege. This chapter assessed Cone's agenda, persona, methodology, and doctrinal positions. It defined Cone's agenda as focused on the fight against White supremacy and on an apologetic for a truly Black Christianity. Cone's persona was defined, contra Andre Johnson, as that of a Rebel. Further discussion elaborated on his methodology as fragmentary, contextual-dialectical, foundational and hermeneutical. This chapter concluded with a discussion of Cone's primary doctrinal categories, including revelation, God, Christ, humanity, ecclesiology, and eschatology. It also included a discussion of Cone's views on theological schemas.

During the course of each section various questions, challenges, and issues were raised that must now inform the work of exegesis in Chapter Four and the constructive theological work in Chapter Five. But before moving to either, there needs to be an assessment of the validity of Cone's assertion that White theology has embedded racism and White supremacy in its doctrinal formulations. This is particularly necessary because Cone spends little time proving this theory, especially as it regards evangelical theologians. To understand whether in fact Cone's assessments are correct about evangelical theology is necessary for placing him in conversation with that theological tradition in Chapter Five. The next step, therefore, in Movement One will consist of four historical case studies that examine the intersections of power and race in the theological work of John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, and Carl F. H. Henry.

### **3.0 Evaluating the Evangelical Theological Tradition (Movement One, Step Two)**

Having engaged in an empathic-analytical reading of Cone it is now possible to consider Step Two of Movement One, which is an historical interrogation of evangelical theology in light of potential issues raised by Cone. Having stated that Cone's assessment rests on an understanding that White theology, which includes White evangelical theology, is racist at a discursive level, it seems logical that this assumption must be demonstrated to be true prior to any attempt to engage in a constructive theology of power and privilege that uses Cone as a conversation partner. In fact, if Cone's assumptions are not true then it might be possible to suggest that evangelical theology is in fact not racist and therefore in need of no further consideration. If, however, Cone's assumptions are shown to be true, then the evangelical theological position may require some constructive engagement to mitigate embedded racism. This is not, however, a straightforward task.

There are at least three considerations that must be taken note of prior to beginning any actual historical analysis. The first is an examination of Cone's argument to determine whether Cone has already made a strong enough case for his assumptions to stand without further consideration. Secondly, if Cone's own work needs further clarification, then it is necessary to determine on what methodological grounds a study of embedded racism would need to proceed. This would need to include a definition of racism and the clarification of parameters of identification that will be employed. Finally, because it is impossible in the scope of the current work to survey the entirety of the evangelical tradition, some justification for the selection of the individuals under consideration must be provided. The satisfactory nature of Cone's own work is the first point under consideration.

### **3.1 Method and approach**

#### **3.1.1 James Cone's assertions of embedded racism**

Cone makes clear that racism, embedded in White theology, is the central problem he intends to address. Stating the problem in the form of a question Cone (1999:131) asks, "Is racism

so deeply embedded in Euro-American history and culture that it is impossible to do theology without being anti-black?” to which he answers yes. But to what degree is Cone able to prove the embeddedness of racism?

He suggests at least five reasons that racism permeates White theology. First, White cultural bias has been demonstrated by the sociologists of knowledge to limit what will and will not be considered. Thus, White theologians have no cultural reason to consider race, racism and White supremacy in their work because their cultural experiences do not suggest it is necessary (Cone, 1997b:48).

A second, and closely related, part of Cone’s argument is that discourse on racism is largely absent from the work of White theologians. This absence in and of itself is racist, but it also ensures that White theology never comes to terms with its own racist character. Cone (1999:132) states emphatically, “As long as religion scholars do not engage racism in their intellectual work, we can be sure that they are as racist as their grandparents, whether they know it or not.” The argument from silence is a critical component in Cone’s work. All a theologian has to do to be accused of being racist is to fail to take up the question of race in their work.

Cone’s third assertion is that theology in the United States has emerged out of a cultural and intellectual environment that is consumed by White images and ideas and where the term “universal” is a stand-in for “White”. “White images and ideas dominate the religious life of Christians and the intellectual life of theologians, reinforcing the ‘moral’ right of white people to dominate people of color economically and politically” (Cone, 1999:131). And further, “twentieth-century white theologians are still secure in their assumption that important theological issues emerge, primarily, if not exclusively, out of the white experience” (Cone, 1997b:42, 43). These arguments presuppose that whiteness is so ingrained in White theology that it fails to take full consideration of the suffering of Blacks and of its own theological blindness.

Fourth, the reason that white supremacy persists is because White theologians, regardless of theological tradition, have interpreted the gospel in light of White self-interest (Cone, 1997b:43). White theologians work for White interests, and in doing so in opposition to Black interests their theological output is racist by way of preferencing White interests over those of Blacks.

Finally, Cone connects White theology to the emergence of racial ideologies within the Enlightenment. “US theology,” he asserts, “did not arise from the social existence of black people. On the contrary, its character was shaped by those who, sharing the consciousness of the Enlightenment, failed to question the consequences of the so-called enlightened view as reflected in the colonization and slavery period.” He further asserts, “for black and red peoples in North America, the spirit of the Enlightenment was socially and politically demonic, becoming a pseudo-intellectual basis for their enslavement and extermination” (Cone, 1997b:42).

Cone’s argument seems to rest entirely on a non-discursive and sociological analysis. We will see below that a non-discursive analysis alone cannot establish Cone’s claim of embedded racism in the entirety of White theology. It can merely point to instances where particular theologians seem to act in racist ways. Cone would have to demonstrate, on the basis of his arguments, that White culture and the White culture to which each theologian was exposed was in fact racist. Based almost entirely in sociological analysis Cone only seems capable of saying that theologians living in times clearly evidencing racism will be guided by the predominate culture and self-interest to express racist views, either by omission or explicit defense. Cone attempts to provide at least passing explanations of the mechanisms that allow White theologians to succumb to embedded racism. But his analysis ultimately falls short of a full explanation that would allow his totalizing claim that *all* White theologies are racist or to explain how racism becomes embedded in theological discourse.

Cone’s historical analysis is also lacking. His reference to the effects of the “consciousness of the Enlightenment” seems to draw upon the theories that place the emergence of racism in modernist periods that begin with the Enlightenment. In this way Cone seems to be referencing Snowden (1970) and West (2002). But Snowden’s assertion that the concept of race, and by extension racism, did not exist prior to the modern period has come under question in recent years (See Eliav-Feldon, Isaac and Ziegler, 2009 and Kaplan, 2019). West’s use of this theory, which will be dealt with in detail below, implores the kind of Foucauldian metanarrative that is treated with skepticism by many modern historiographers.

Cone’s argument also suffers from collapsing White theologies into a single theology. While Cone is aware that theologies are in fact different, he still asserts that “American

theologians from Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards to Reinhold Niebuhr and Schubert Ogden, including radicals and conservatives, have interpreted the gospel according to the cultural and political interests of their group (whites).” He continues, “White theologians, because of their identity with the dominate power structure, are largely boxed within their own cultural history” (Cone, 1997b:43). But this argument seems to fail at two levels when mustered to defend the totality of embedded racism. First, it cannot account historically for groups of European and American theologians, who would be part of the Euro-American theological canon, who were by no means connected to the structures of power during the time they produced those theologies. A case in point would be the radical reformers who were themselves persecuted by the political powers. But Cone’s theory would identify all theologies that emerge out of the Euro-American cultural experience as racist because of their connection to structures of power.

Secondly, as a non-discursive analysis it fails to demonstrate where (what will below be identified as) racist logics and grammar are to be found in theology itself. If all Euro-American theology evidences racism, just how does it do so within the context of its theological discourse? Cone’s analysis is focused on how individuals become racist while seeming to omit detailed analysis of how theological discourse and doctrine have embedded racism within White theology as a whole. If whole theological systems are to be impugned, then some sense of where racism emerges within theology and how this remains operable at the level of doctrinal formulation, across varying doctrinal and theological traditions, must be established in order to prove Cone’s thesis.

Cone never attempts this type of analysis and his historical theological work is lacking. He is particularly uninterested in proving his case in relation to evangelical theology. His (1997b: 46) assessment of evangelicals is characterized by his remarks like: “Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale . . . are the best examples that religious conservatism and White racism are often two sides of the same reality.” Cone does not suggest either how at the non-discursive level Graham and Peale were racist, i.e., he does not make the purely social historical case. For Cone, the racism of White evangelicals is self-evident.

Cone’s argument serves, at best, as a kind of theological intuition and as such cannot function as rational proof that would allow its adoption without question in this current study. It is not possible to say that Cone’s assertions are unquestionably valid and can, therefore,



simply be accepted, thus avoiding the need for a further examination of racism in evangelical theology. But Cone's failure at this point does not also necessarily forestall the current project. It cannot be said that evangelical theology does not have an element of embedded racism simply because Cone failed to adequately demonstrate that this was the case. He in fact never makes the attempt. What is needed is further analysis that can engage both at the non-discursive and discursive levels, that has a clear methodology for doing so, and that engages evangelicalism specifically apart from any question of the larger subgroup of all White theologians. To do so requires that we consider Cone's argument in light of other theologians, philosophers, and critical theorists to determine what the best approach to an historical theological analysis might be. That is the work of the following section.

### **3.1.2 Critical Race Theory: applicability to historical theological study**

The most prominent multidisciplinary approach to the understanding of race and racism is Critical Race Theory (CRT). In fact, CRT forms the starting point for many studies on race. Cone developed his notion of the embeddedness of racism in theology at a period when CRT was not yet codified and Cone persisted with this pre-CRT argument even after CRT would have provided him more direct access to a specific set of arguments to support his claim. Cone was certainly familiar with critical theory in general, especially Marxist theory. He remained, as has already been demonstrated in Chapter Two, apathetic about Marxist theory precisely because it seemed to support class analysis above racial analysis. It is impossible to say why he did not gravitate to CRT once it emerged to address this failing in Marxist critical thought. Regardless, CRT was never treated by Cone in his work. It is fair to ask then if CRT might be just the theory that could bolster Cone's claims and provide a theoretical methodology for the historical theological interrogation of evangelical theology. The answer to this question is no. It will be argued that CRT fails at several levels to present a viable methodology for the analysis of historical theological materials.

In evaluating CRT this study follows the commonly accepted summation of its tenets by DeCuir and Dixon (2004:26-31). According to DeCuir and Dixon, CRT's primary assertions are: 1) the use of counter-storytelling, 2) the permanence of racism, 3) Whiteness as property, 4) interest convergence, and 5) the critique of liberalism. They also assert that CRT differs from other critical theories "in that it has an activist aspect, the end goal of which

is to bring change that will implement social justice.” It is important to consider each of these components of CRT and the theory as a whole.

CRT, when taken as a total theory of race and racism, falls short on at least two levels when considered as a methodological tool in historical theological research. First, CRT’s activist bent means that the research is predisposed toward a particular conclusion. CRT assumes the embeddedness of racism in all forms of White culture, which would include theological discourse. Thus, it is impossible to utilize CRT to test *whether* racism is embedded in White theology. CRT can only potentially demonstrate *how* racism is embedded in White theology. Thus, CRT cannot answer the question most at issue for this study. It is at best only of second order assistance, if that. Second, CRT’s theoretical premises are focused on an understanding of the symptoms, not a detailed analysis of the disease. CRT demonstrates racist actions but does not immerse itself in the questions of the internal logic and grammar of racism, power, and privilege. Thus, it would be difficult to apply to discursive phenomena. While CRT has done a lot to deconstruct contemporary notions of race and equality the work is more broad than deep and has further to go in suggesting the kind of micro vocabulary and logics that would lead to the conclusion of embedded racism in all areas of White culture.

Similarly, the independent assertions of CRT have their own unique failings when applied to the current project. Counter-storytelling (see Banks, 1995:329-335), for example, would seem to require something that is, at the very least, difficult in historical theological analysis—the availability of a counter narrative that demonstrates a theologian’s specific racist bent. So, for example, it would be difficult to find a slave narrative that countered Calvin’s notion of predestination that highlighted the way the doctrine might operate as a racist discourse. The analysis in this case requires a deeper understanding of how predestination might have within it a logic that is accessible to the overall logic of racism. In contemporary settings counter-storytelling operates to eliminate stereotypes. So, a perception of the presence of Black student athletes at elite schools only because of their athletic ability might be countered with a story of Black student academic success. It seems unlikely that an adequate use of this type of point-counterpoint analysis would be useful in historical analysis at a discursive level. While it is true that as a historical-tool counter narratives, or what in historiography is described as “history from below,” go a long way in repairing mistaken

notions of historical context, it is difficult to conceive of this approach being as effective when applied to a text that has a life beyond its particular historical moment.

The idea of the permanence of racism (see Bell, 1992) is difficult on a whole other level, primarily because it assumes a future not yet in evidence. Like Marxist theory, it predicts a societal state by projecting current historical contexts onto future outcomes. It cannot be assumed that because racism has reemerged repeatedly in North American history it will continue to do so. Nor can it be assumed that racism will always, at all times and in all places, be identifiable with contemporary racism in the United States. Static theories of history have proven problematic. It also predisposes historical analysis to the foregone conclusion that if racism is permanent then all analysis of “White” cultural production must assume and include an analysis of how it functions in ways that can be described as racist. Bell’s theory presupposes outcomes in ways that are not useful for this current project. The permanence of racism functions in historical research primarily as an anachronism, subsuming historical persons, texts, and events into a contemporary analysis of racism projected into an unknowable future.

Whiteness as property is perhaps one of the more difficult concepts to grasp within CRT. DeCuir and Dixson (2004:28) summarize the work of Harris (1995): “property functions on three levels: the right of possession, the right to use, and the right to disposition. Furthermore, the right to transfer, the right of use and enjoyment, and the right of exclusion are essential attributes associated with property rights.” Harris suggests that these functions and attributes of property historically have been deployed in the service of establishing Whiteness as a form of property. Whiteness as property, therefore, associates the category of “White” with power so that those who have the label can utilize it for personal gain, determine who does and does not possess it, and exclude those who are outside the category from participating in the benefits of those who are in. While it is easy to see how this form of determining “who is in” and “who is out” functions in ways that feed racism, it is harder to determine, on the basis of the current state of CRT studies, how to distinguish certain “in-out” determinations from others. How do religious rites that set boundaries on who is a part of the religion and who is not get assessed under this category?

An example of the problems raised by the application of Whiteness as property is Denise Kimber Buell’s assertions in her essay “Early Christian Universalism and Modern

Racism” (Buell, 2009:109-134). Buell argues that early first-century New Testament notions of a new Israel open to anyone who would leave their own identities to identify as a part of the people of God in Christ is the basis for modern-day racist practices emerging out of Christianity. This in-out dichotomy, for Buell, is at its base racist. In this Buell follows the tenet of Whiteness as property and applies it to Christianity both modern and ancient. Calling this process compulsory mutability, she asserts, “compulsory mutability needs to be understood as a strategy legible also as racist in producing and authorizing hierarchical, discriminatory power arrangements legible on the body.” And more specifically as regards Christianity, she states, “Early Christian universalizing claims to be a people whom all can and ought to join in order to count as fully human allow for arguments that those who do not become Christian (or even the correct kind of Christian) should be signified as only potentially human/Christian or less than fully human” (Buell, 2009:128, 129).

The problems with Buell’s analysis are multiple. She cannot avoid painting early Christian universalizing as racist. In focusing on Christianity in relation to its connections with the history of empire and colonialism she misses several important points. First, Christianity in its first generation, and subsequent generations prior to the Constantinian era, was a persecuted sect—persecuted first by the Jewish religious hierarchy and subsequently by the governmental authorities. Buell does not account for how this language spoken under the conditions of oppression might be different from later expressions of similar ideas used for racist exclusionary proposes.

Her assumptions are also anachronistic both in the application of modern critical theory and in her assumptions that Christianity’s exclusionary practices were unique. In fact most ancient faiths had particular requirements for conversion. First-century Judaism required circumcision for male converts and also held to its own understanding of its faith over that of Christianity (Wright, 2005:127). Buell’s study fails to account for why Christian compulsory mutability emerges in the modern era with Christianity and not out of the context of other faiths during the same period. In this way she seems to lose sight of her own proposal. If it is the idea of compulsory mutability itself that creates racism in later Christian doctrine and practice then the idea should produce this in other instances apart from Christianity. Instead, the idea has to be combined with a specific modernist historical context and a specific condition of power to produce an undeniable racist ideology.

But Buell refuses to do the actual hard work of causality, believing instead that “the relationship between ancient discourses of human differences and modern forms of racism cannot simply be charted in any causal or linear fashion.” She prefers instead “to attend to indirect and unstable resonances and echoes” (Buell, 2009:129). Thus, she is left with an anachronistic application of modern critical theory to an ancient text separated by centuries from her point of departure, modern racism, and makes no connections that would allow either her condemnation of the ancient text or its application to modern racism.

Buell’s work is offered as an example of how modern critical theory can be misapplied to historical theological engagement. While this project will champion below a method that, like Buell, will look at particular concepts that shape the grammar and logics of racism, it will also do the hard work of assessing the degree to which those concepts are operable within the time period and within the theological discourse itself, while also asking whether this in fact is either racist at its inception, contributory to later theology that might make racist applications, or simply within its context and later applications functions in ways distinct from racist definition. Further, it will do so while not prioritizing modern theoretical assumptions about the development of racism.

Interest convergence is likewise difficult to apply to theological discourse. While historically it might be possible, say, to make the case that Carl Henry had it in his best interest to mention racial injustice because to not do so would undermine his overall thesis that Christianity was the answer to all forms of social problems. But even if this case can be made, the question would remain how this affected his overall body of theological work. He might perhaps choose to thoroughly integrate this into a nonracist theology, or his understanding might be so superficial as to have no effect on his theology, which might then carry latent concepts that support racist ideology. Regardless, the best approach to this problem is to allow the source material to uncover Henry’s actual views on the subject. Being situated in an historical era when it was in Henry’s best interest to be conciliatory in regard to race does not mean that this actually occurs in his work. Nor does a move to antiracist language necessarily imply a move in a self-interested direction. Antiracist language might be prophetic and self-damaging.

The final tenet of CRT, the critique of liberalism (see Gotanda, 1995:257-275), is the one area where CRT might hold some promise because of how broad a category it entails.

Certainly, all forms of analysis have to critique the existing assumptions inherent in the productions of ideas at any period in time. The specific ideas derived from this tenet are of less value than the concept itself. For example, it would be difficult to access the notion of colorblindness in Calvin and Charles Hodge because the notion did not exist, nor did the modern-day debate over the neutrality of the law. The concept of incremental change, however, is likely to have been operable and observable in both Calvin and Hodge. Likewise, this idea could be further extended to categories like the fixity of human status and environmental determinism that are to be found in theological appropriations of Aristotelian philosophy. Theological doctrines need to be examined for the ideas they have inherited from philosophy, science, and other areas of cultural production and those inherited traits subjected to detailed analysis. This is not in and of itself an adoption of CRT as much as it is the product of normal historical theological assessment.

Ultimately the problem with most uses of CRT in the interrogation of theology, as it regards the embeddedness of racism, is that it simply maps contemporary theory and its contemporary conclusions onto historical theological analysis. Doing so is both anachronistic and ensures a predetermined outcome. Thus, CRT is of limited value as a methodological technique in exploring Cone's assertions. If CRT does not present a clearly articulated methodology, it is then fair to ask what other evaluations of race and theology might suggest other alternatives. The approaches of Cornel West, Willie Jennings, and J. Kameron Carter will be considered prior to outlining the method to be used by this study, which will be developed in conversation with the work of David Goldberg. The work of James W. Perkinson (2004) will be excluded from treatment here, not because it is unimportant, but because its primary point of departure is critical whiteness theory that is derived primarily from CRT. Therefore, assessments of the usefulness of Perkinson's work in determining racist "embeddedness" would have already been addressed in the discussion of CRT above.

### **3.1.3 West, Jennings and Carter: approaches of theologians and philosophers of religion to theology and racism**

There is a group of studies that have addressed the question of racism in White theological discourse that must be considered because they advance Cone's proposal either in historical or philosophical detail. This includes the work of Cornel West (2002), Willie Jennings

(2010), and J. Kameron Carter (2008). It is necessary to critique first the underlying historical method that seems to be at work in each of these writers and then to deal with their specific proposals in terms of theological racism.

All three of the writers seem to work from the notion of a genealogical account of history derived from the work of Michel Foucault. Foucauldian genealogy attempts to identify historically the turning point in history where an idea or notion takes shape as something distinct from what has been proposed before. This is the underlying method in much of the history of ideas and is the way in which historians and philosophers denote eras such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Modernity, and Postmodernity. The very clear shortcoming of this approach is its tendency to de-complicate history and to enforce subjective, external categories on broad and disparate phenomena. It is interesting that historical studies have tended to take Foucault's method in this particular direction. Sociology, specifically the sociology of science, has utilized Foucault's actual philosophical conclusions to posit a more complex view of human events than is allowed by most former conceptions of social and historical phenomena. These Foucauldian sociologists, or actor network theorists, atomize human, physical, and material interactions to posit society as a complex web of individual interactions that once viewed as a whole may demonstrate patterns, but requires a very complex microanalysis to reach anything approaching a theory of societal change (see Latour, 2005).

Whether one accepts the methodology of Actor Network Theory (ANT) or not, its critique of the way historians and sociologists have created order out of diverse phenomena and imposed the "invisible hand of the social" must be acknowledged. To begin with a theory of social change and then go to the historical or contemporary data to prove it often results in predisposing the answer. ANT insists that the data yield the theory:

ANT claims to be able to find order much better *after* having let the actors deploy the full range of controversies in which they are immersed. It is as if we were saying to the actors: "We won't try to discipline you, to make you fit into our categories; we will let you deploy your own worlds, and only later will we ask you to explain how you came about settling them." The task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst. This is why, to regain some sense of order, the best solution is to trace connections between the controversies themselves rather than try to decide how to settle any given controversy. The search for order, rigor, and pattern is by no means abandoned. It is simply relocated one step further into abstraction so that actors are allowed to unfold their own differing cosmos, no matter how counter-intuitive they appear (Latour, 2005:23).

ANT serves to demonstrate the dangers in the approach that West, Carter and Jennings take in outlining a history of racism in theology. Ultimately, they cannot reach beyond their initial intuition toward clear proof of the ongoing embeddedness of racism in theology. It is important to examine the ways in which each of their efforts fall short because while they all have a flawed historical method their work errs in different ways and has challenges beyond just historical method.

Cornel West (2002) advocates for the ways various influential ideas that emerged during the Enlightenment shape all areas of intellectual and cultural life toward a racist bent. He has two objectives. First, to show the discursive mechanisms by which enlightenment and ultimately modernist intellectual discourse embraces racism and White supremacy. Secondly he aims to demonstrate the ways in which Black theological and philosophical thought serve to counter these intellectual streams.

The latter objective moves beyond the interests of the current study, which is to identify whether or not racism is embedded in White theology. But the former is helpful at a limited level. West (2002:49-50) shifts the conversation from the non-discursive social and historical manifestations of racism to the discursive—the logics and rhetoric of racism. In doing so he moves beyond a mere analysis of the truth of the emergence of racist acts in the modern era as a proof or refutation of Snowden’s theory that racism is a distinctly modern phenomenon to an actual analysis of racist logics that could answer *how* racism emerges. But the problems with West’s approach are several. First, he uses such broad categories that he falls victim to the critique that has been made by ANT and the criticism of CRT that was raised above. West does not prove by way of specific texts or detailed historical analysis, nor by specific connections, that the intellectual streams he mentions are in fact the defining moment of racist formulation in modernity. While there are studies that have treated West’s claim that racism emerges from the establishment of the authority of science during the scientific revolution, Cartesian philosophy’s focus on “the primacy of the subject and the preeminence of the representation,” and ultimately and more importantly a classical revival that shaped an aesthetic notion of human beauty centered on Western bodily aesthetics, West does not demonstrate these as paramount on an historical level. They serve as a set theory for his broader thesis that presupposes historically embedded racism.



But West also fails to make a direct connection between the discursive trends above and the White theological tradition. Arguably this is not his objective. Instead, he has in mind a demonstration of the superiority of the Black theological and philosophical tradition in combatting racism within society. The fact remains, however, that the absence of a clear argument connecting these Enlightenment scientific and philosophical traditions to modernist theology demonstrates the way in which the thesis of racial embeddedness remains presupposed, not proven, in West. How, for example, might West reconcile the varying ways in which Enlightenment and modernist ideas have been received within varying White theological traditions? How, for example, might West's theory prove problematic when applied to Christian fundamentalism that largely rejected scientific worldviews? If fundamentalism is devoid of the scientific bent of modernity, is it, therefore, also devoid of racist tendencies at the discursive level? West's theory seems primarily focused on liberal theology, which held closer in its arguments to emerging scientific and philosophical trends. But even here West fails to draw the connections between the cultural discursive writ large and the development of, even, liberal modernist theology.

Thus, West fails, in his usefulness to the current study, at two levels. First, in his inability to distinguish the complex ways in which varying theological traditions appropriate, participate, and/or create counter-cultural movements within broader historical-intellectual contexts. Secondly, West does not extend his philosophical analysis to a direct analysis of White theological discourse, leaving the connections between his operable categories and the specific field of White theology in question and the ways in which White theology is distorted by these thought traditions unanswered.

However, West is helpful in at least one way that is also affirmed by Carter (2008:44-53). By shifting the conversation away from purely non-discursive analysis, and by suggesting that the logics of philosophy, science, theology, and culture can themselves shape racist behavior, apart from any necessary non-discursive use, West's work is important to the work of this chapter. What this demonstrates is that racist logics and vocabularies can exist within theological discourse apart from any apparent racist actions on the part of the theologian engaging in the discourse. It is not necessary, therefore, that Calvin owns slaves or affirms the slave trade, in order for racist logics to exist within the body of his theological discourse. What is lacking in West is a clear way, or attempt, to analyze at a micro-level the operability of racist grammars, vocabularies and logics that create either overt or latent

opportunities for racist praxis at the non-discursive level. So, West's notion of discursive racist operability will be affirmed in what follows, but it will need to be supplemented with a different methodological approach to meet the needs of the current study.

Carter (2008), as mentioned above, follows West in his assumption of the importance of discursive analysis. Building off of West, he attempts to expand West's thesis to posit instead a discursive idea that is more directly grounded in theological discourse and that grounds theological discourse in a particular philosophical tradition. Carter argues that racist theology and racism is traceable to a Kantian rationalized and rationalist Christianity that underpins both North American governmental, legal, and cultural institutions and later theological discourse. In this way Carter cannot be accused of not suggesting a connection. He connects Kant both to an earlier strain of Christian theological discourse and the later modernist theological discussion. But he also perpetuates problems that are evident in West's analysis. Carter is looking for a single unifying moment, which he finds in Kant, to further a Foucauldian genealogical explanation of the embeddedness of racism. Thus, he misses the opportunity to demonstrate or disprove the complexity of racist logics within theological discourse itself. He, like West, also fails to show how the discourse which he believes is responsible for racism within theology is operable in a universal way in all forms of White theology. Carter, in fact, leaves himself more at risk here. By making Kant the center of his racist turn he subjects himself to a very specific limitation. Kantian rational Christianity as the source and grammar of racism in modernist White theology requires a demonstration of its existence in every type of White theological discourse. That said, Carter's attention to detailed analysis and his attempts to bridge Christian theology and philosophy is a valuable methodological example to be taken up below.

Willie Jennings' (2010) work is closely aligned in some ways with the work of Carter. This is not surprising since Jennings served as an external reader on Carter's dissertation, which formed the basis for Carter's book. But Jennings is distinguishable from both West and Carter in that he merges both discursive and non-discursive analysis and he gives primary place in his analysis to theological discourse and only secondarily makes connections back to scientific and philosophical discourse. But Jennings' study also suffers from a tendency to look for a genealogical turning point on which to fix the emergence of racism and white supremacy, although it is less pronounced than in either West or Carter. Jennings ultimately sees racism as a product of the history of European and American colonialism and the

outgrowth of modern forms of chattel slavery that emerged out of the colonial era. Thus, he moves the central operable cause of racism out of the discursive and into the non-discursive. Doing so means for Jennings that his analysis becomes dependent on a historical moment that cannot carry the weight of embedded racism. What is to subvert Jennings' argument that José de Acosta, John William Colenso, and Olaudah Equiano's theological discourses are specimens of their historical moment with limited influence, if any at all, on theological discourse beyond that specific moment? This argument might be reinforced by the fact that the only thing that seems to connect his three examples is their context of colonialism and slavery. Thus, while Jennings' method of bringing back into conversation both discursive and non-discursive phenomena will be followed below, it will become necessary to posit a discursive connection between historical figures that can "carry the weight" of continuity between disparate historical moments.

In the final analysis, West provides no clear evidence of racist embeddedness beyond an *a priori* assumption that a racist society has created a racist theology among White theologians. So, West adds a philosophical intuition to Cone's theological one but presents little of value to the current study beyond his elevation of discursive analysis as a method. Both Carter and Jennings present more in the way of proof. But Carter suffers from an overly broad understanding of White theology and an overly narrow discursive moment in his pinpointing of Kantian rationalism, which makes his work problematic. Jennings, on the other hand, presents a discursive analysis so dependent in its connections on a particular historical moment that it cannot demonstrate the continuance of the discourse beyond the particular moment of its genesis. It should be noted as well that Jennings and Carter both reach the same conclusion and narrow the theological operability of racism to a single theological concept: supersessionism. This creates a problem for Cone's assumptions because if particular White Theologians or White theologies can be proven to be anti-supersessionist then they would in turn be proven to be non-racist. There will be further discussion of supersessionism as a category of theological racism below. But for now, it is important to note that a search for a single moment or a single unifying idea can at times forestall further investigation and more complex analysis.

If West, Carter and Jennings do not offer a definitive methodology for exploring embeddedness or a conclusive proof of its existence, what must be considered? There are two processes whereby a suitable method for exploring the question of racist embeddedness

can be proposed. First, there needs to be a clear definition of the term “racist”. Secondly, a method must be proposed that 1) connects discursive and non-discursive analysis without making the discursive solely dependent on the non-discursive; 2) the theologians and their theologies who are being analyzed theologically must demonstrate a unified body of thought that is in some way continuous across historical moments; 3) those under analysis must also represent influential figures within a particular theological tradition, although their influence might be defined beyond a single particular tradition; and 4) there must be a clear understanding of what constitutes (what will be described below as) racist vocabularies, grammars, and logics. The question of definition will be treated first.

### **3.1.4 Defining racism**

While at first glance defining racism, within the current contemporary context, may seem simple, it is in fact a highly contested idea within the interdisciplinary study of race. For that reason, as noted by Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler (2009:5), “any study of racism must be based on a clear idea of what it is, what it is not, and what distinguishes it from other forms of inequality and discrimination.” But many examples exist of scholars discussing race without ever defining either race or racism or conflating the two. Mark Noll’s (2008) *God and Race in American Politics*, while asserting that “race has always been among the most influential elements of American political history” (Noll, 2008:1), never pauses to define what he means by race.

The definitions of racism and race are complicated by the uncertain nature of racial definition itself. Race was commonly understood, in the early part of the modern era, to be synonymous with biology and genetics. But this theory has been largely denied in contemporary discourse. This calls into question the very existence of racial categories. Goldberg (1994:69-89) points out that since the collapse of biological theories of race it has subsequently been understood as class, culture, ethnicity, nation, and political construct. For Goldberg, race may contain elements of all these various categories but also must be defined in ways that distinguish it from each. But definitions are further complicated by questions of the distinction between racialization and racism. Racialization is understood as placing persons into racial categories that could have either racist or nonracist motivations. Racialization may be in evidence when a Black man proclaims that “he is Black and proud”

as a form of self-identification. So, definitions of racism have to be distinguished in ways that exclude benign racial categorization.

What then is possible in the way of a definition of racism that can guide this study? It might be possible to follow the definitions of Eliav-Feldon, Isaac and Ziegler (2009) but their actual definition is somewhat elusive. They primarily determine that racism is an “idea, or set of ideas, and an ideology” (2009:12). They further distinguish racism from other forms of prejudice by claiming that racism “claims that the characteristics of the other are determined by nature while the latter attributes them to custom, social forces or education and the like. The former unlike the latter thus claims that human characteristics are unalterable and passed on from one generation to the next” (2009:12). But this denies the modern history of racism that initially ascribed racial difference in conjunction with racial characteristics to environmental differences. It also ignores the continuation of racist logics in contemporary society even though biological explanations for racial difference have been largely disputed. Furthermore, their insistence, later in their essay, that racism can be “understood as an ideology or an attempt to construct rational, conceptual frameworks for irrational and emotional forms of group hatred” seems to suggest, contra Goldberg, that racism can be both irrational and rational. They claim that racism is irrational and place it in the category of ideology, which suggests that racism is a belief structure with no connection to logical, rational systems. This would anchor racism to specific individual or collective “emotional” responses in specific historical contexts and therefore is not helpful in determining ongoing embeddedness in theological discourse as a whole. This study will follow, instead, both the formal definition, and the extended argument that supports it, offered by Goldberg (1994). Goldberg defines racisms as:

. . . promoting exclusions or the actual exclusions of people in virtue of their being deemed members of different racial groups, however racial groups are taken to be constituted. It follows that in some instances expressions may be racist on grounds of their effects. The mark of racism in these cases will be whether the discriminatory racial exclusion reflects a persistent pattern or could reasonably have been avoided. Racists are those persons who explicitly or implicitly ascribe racial characteristics of others that purportedly differ from their own and others like them. These ascriptions, whether biological or social in character, must not merely propose racial differences; they must also assign racial preferences, or explain racial differences as natural, inevitable and therefore unchangeable, or express desired, intended or actual inclusions or exclusions, entitlements or restrictions (Goldberg, 1994:98).

While Goldberg's definition provides a clear determination for what can be called racist discourse, it does not completely capture the methodological insights that he brings to an understanding of the way racism, as a discursive logic, is constructed and operable in various contexts. What follows will utilize Goldberg's understanding to formulate a model of racial discourse that can be applied to an analysis of specific theological systems. It should also be stated that while the use of Goldberg may not be immediately evident it is important to understand that both Carter and West affirm Goldberg's approach to racism but leave it unrealized in their own work. Since the current work continues a line of reasoning and a conversation on theological racism that is inclusive of West, Carter and Jennings, it seems the logical choice to work within a methodology and definition embraced by two of the three. The use of Goldberg here allows the current work to continue and extend a line of reasoning that is also a part of the work of West and Carter.

### **3.1.5 Methodological considerations in identifying racism in theological systems**

This study embraces Goldberg's understanding of the inner workings of racist discourse and its subsequent manifestation in various ways, at various times, and in various socio-historical contexts. It must be noted that his formulations are very complex and not as clearly delineated as what follows. For that reason, the assertion being made here is that while Goldberg is largely responsible for the rationale that follows, he might not, in fact, fully embrace the use of what follows as a method or the specific ways that each category is described and applied in the historical analysis to which it is applied.

Goldberg suggests at least four levels of racist discourse. At the most basic level are what he calls racism's primitive concepts—those ideas that are necessary as the constructive elements that lead to the notion of racism but are not explicitly or necessarily racist, in and of themselves (Goldberg, 1994:48-52). Secondly, Goldberg suggests that holding these concepts together is a systematic deployment toward a common goal, in this case racist formulations. They are, as Goldberg phrases it, “a set of discursive rules (that) emerge from an economy of epistemological production in virtue of which ‘truth’ may be differentiated from ‘falsity’” (Goldberg, 1994:52). Next, Goldberg (1994:117-138) suggests that racial discourse has a rational and rationalizing logic that can be identified. He argues persuasively against the common perception that racism is irrational by suggesting identifiable ways in

which racism constitutes its own rational system which is by implication observable in racist discourse. Finally, Goldberg sees racist discourse as evident in and shaped, in varying ways, by the deployment of racist logics in various actual cultural and historical contexts. Goldberg (1994:115) states, “The field of racial discourse, then, is a product of socio-discursive praxis in determinate historical circumstances. The power of racist expression conjoins with the power of other discursive expressions—notably, though not only, those of class, gender, nation and capitalism—to determine the subjectivity of individuals at established times and places.”

What Goldberg’s understanding of racist discourse does for the current study is to provide a means through which theological discourse can be interrogated at all four of the levels he suggests and the ability to make a determination on the degree to which racist discourse might be integrated or not into theological systems. But it is important to clarify how this model will be utilized and what will specifically be examined at each level.

To better differentiate and explain the various levels of complexity offered by Goldberg for racist discourse it will be suggested that a textual analogy might function best here. At the most basic level one might think of Goldberg’s primitive terms as the *vocabulary* of racist discourse. At the secondary level, where the vocabulary is brought together by conjoining ideas within various discourses, it might be suggested that these conjoining ideas form the *grammar* of racist discourse. Third, the level of racist argumentation where both the vocabulary and grammar are deployed in a concerted argument might be imagined as the *narrative* of racist discourse. Finally, the non-discursive praxis flowing out of an assumed or evident racist discourse could be categorized as the *performance* of the narrative. If these are accepted, how then might they be applied to analysis of historical theological discourse?

The vocabulary of racist grammar must be approached from the standpoint of certain basic ideas that are implied within the definition of racism provided by Goldberg. These terms are not, however, intended to be foundational in any structuralist way. Not all terms have to be present to indicate a tendency toward racist discourse. Their existence also does not require a racist outcome. They are merely a part of the underlying “web” of ideas out of which racist logics can emerge.

Goldberg provides the following vocabulary that will be utilized in the analysis below: “classification, order, value and hierarchy, differentiation and identity, discrimination

and identification, exclusion, domination, subjection and subjugation, as well as entitlement and restriction.” The historical analysis below will attempt to determine whether any of these terms are operable in the writings and theological discourse of the theologians under consideration. At this stage of the analysis, it will not be asked how they function, it will simply be asked if they are present and where they are present in the theological discourse. So, by way of example, if Calvin includes a discussion of hierarchy in both his discussion of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God and in his commentary on Ephesians 6, then the presence and location of his discourse on hierarchy will be noted.

At the grammatical level of the analysis, it will be asked specifically how the vocabulary functions and is extended by the theological discourse as a whole to form a coherent defense for either latent or inherent racism. To continue the hypothetical example above, if hierarchy exists within or is supported by Calvin’s doctrine of the sovereignty of God, it will be asked what discursive elements hold together and define the use of hierarchy for Calvin in this context. Further, it will be asked how these discursive elements connect the doctrine of the sovereignty of God to other doctrinal formulations that might carry forward these notions of hierarchy beyond the immediate instance. It might also engage apparent doctrinal structures that seem to be suggested independently of vocabulary.

In this instance, and given the scope of the task laid out here, it should be made clear that the study will use a “surgical” approach by which it will examine elements in each of the theologians that are suggested by either the secondary literature on racism or by the secondary historical literature on the theologians in question. A few examples and early indications should be provided.

Supersessionism is the most well-documented theological category used to explain White supremacy and White racism. It is offered exclusively as the turning point in modernist racist discourse by both Carter (2008) and Jennings (2010). Likewise, Maimela (1987:25-40) sees it as operating in apartheid South Africa for racist ends and Kaplan (2019) directly ties supersessionist ideas to both anti-Semitic and anti-Black racist discourse from the Middle Ages to the modernist period. But supersessionism is a difficult category in relation to the theologians under consideration here and it might even be said that they lack enough of a treatment for its consideration. Therefore, this study will focus on other areas of interest that



are more readily at hand and suggested by specific historical study of the theologians involved.

More directly apparent and directly traceable to various forms of racist narratives is the idea of Constantinianism. The direct acquiescence of the church to state authority when states support segregation, slavery, apartheid and even racial genocide is well documented. One has only to look to the forceful condemnation of Constantinianism found in the Kairos document (1985) with its opposition to a state theology of apartheid that was either ignored by the church or in some cases aided by the church's own theological engagement. Likewise, the Barmen Declaration, which opposed Nazi attempts to dictate that the church remove converted Jewish priests from its ranks, also opposed the States' rights and authority to dictate church doctrine and practice and the church's emerging theology that supported the Nazi's anti-Semitic program. These and other documents suggest that the interaction of State power with church theology or the writing of church theology to support State acts of racial exclusion is an idea that carries some historical weight as a racist grammar. Thus, each theologian's understanding of the limits of authority and church opposition to civic government will be examined in each of the theologians under consideration.

Likewise, the work of historians like Paul Harvey (2016), who has studied the intersections of Christianity and race in the southern part of the United States, suggests at least two other instances where doctrinal belief becomes the overriding grammatical logic for the justification of slavery, segregation and other forms of racial bias. These studies are filled with examples of racial logics predicated on the authority of Scripture and literalistic interpretations of particular biblical texts, as well as the doctrine of predestination. Thus, views of providence, hermeneutics and revelation will all be examined for potential racist grammar.

Thus, in addition to any categories that might arise out of an examination of the vocabulary of racist and proto-racist discourse, Constantinianism, biblical authority, and predestination will also be examined independently, assuming they do not arise directly from early interactions with vocabulary. At this level of analysis, it is critical to understand how or whether larger arguments are brought into a coherent rational pattern that fits Goldberg's definition of racism.

Continuing from the grammatical to the narrative level, it will be asked to what degree racist vocabulary and grammar are deployed into specific arguments for racist outcomes and ends. Are the concepts simply latent in the theological arguments as a whole, or are they marshalled for a specific racist narrative and outcomes? So, if Hodge uses racist vocabulary and doctrinal grammar to defend race-based slavery, this line of defense would be seen as a racist narrative.

Finally, the analysis will move from the discursive to the non-discursive categories to examine any evidence of racist sentiment in the lives of the theologians under consideration. If, say, Charles Hodge seems to oppose slavery in his writings but in fact owned slaves, or if Jonathan Edwards' writings seemed to praise Native Americans but his policies in fact harmed and subjugated them, then in both cases it would be necessary to look for some connection between the discursive and non-discursive that explained the disparity. It will also be necessary to ask in what way the discursive is affected by the non-discursive, and if there is a clear disconnect, in what way the discursive might function beyond its origins as either a form of racist or nonracist discourse.

After each individual under consideration is evaluated, a determination will be made to what extent and at what level, if any, their theological work can be categorized as containing embedded racism. Furthermore, after all four theologians have been assessed it will be possible to make some cautious estimations of the embeddedness of racism within evangelical theology as a whole. It should be noted before moving on to a justification of the theologians under consideration that an assessment that a particular doctrine might be racist or support racist logics is not at this point an assessment that the doctrine or certain component parts of the doctrine must be removed from evangelical dogmatics. A discussion of the viability of particular doctrines will have to wait until Chapter Five. At this point only the existence or nonexistence of racist logics within evangelical theological systems are being considered. With that in mind, it is now possible to consider which theologians are representative enough of the evangelical tradition to make good candidates for analysis, as well as to answer a few historiographical questions that are important to this project.

### 3.1.6 Interrogating the evangelical theological tradition

In determining the direction of the historical analysis that follows at least four issues must be addressed. First, what type of historical method will be assumed? While this is covered in part in the methodology section above, a word seems in order about its relationship to other historical and sociological methods. Second, it needs to be stated where the current study stands in relation to the ongoing debate about the history of racism. Third, which stream of evangelicalism will be in view as this project progresses? And fourth, what rationale is being used to determine the primary historical figures under consideration? Answering each of these questions will give at least a point of departure for an ongoing conversation within evangelical theology in regard to embedded racism. While the answers provided here are limited in scope to the individuals examined and their relationships to a particular stream of evangelicalism, they do provide at least the ability to advance this study forward. Others will be left with the task of broadening the discussion and determining whether these conclusions hold for evangelicalism as a whole or White theology universally.

Having already outlined Goldberg's method above as the approach to be followed in regard to particular historical sources, it is also necessary to ground Goldberg's method in relation to an actual historical/socio-historical approach. ANT has already been mentioned and this study will in many ways appropriate its idea of patterns emerging out of complexity as a central guiding method for this chapter. What Goldberg's method does is provide for the complex interaction of ideas and concepts, grammars and logics, at particular moments and across time. It also allows for the evaluation of the interaction between discursive and non-discursive phenomena, thus allowing for the mapping of various moments in the potential development of racist discourse. It also allows for the interaction between discourses and various historical moments in ways that demonstrate both continuity and diversity. While a full ANT analysis is beyond the scope of this project its primary principles will be kept in view.

Perhaps the closest historical method to ANT and what is proposed here is what William Brackney (2004) means when he speaks of *genetic* history. For Brackney, historical study involves "a genetic approach that attempts to make a historical connection between the various streams of Baptist thought, while allowing for diversity in evolved thinking. In assessing Baptist life and thought adequately, two factors are absolutely essential:

development across time and diversification” (Brackney, 2004:3). A genetic history seeks the connections that exist historically and discursively while allowing for both continuity and diversity. This approach differs from Foucault’s genealogical method in that it does not seek a punctuated moment of change in time but seeks to understand varying moments of time in relationship both to their ongoing connections and their diversity of perspective within their own context. Thus, the moments of critical divergence or critical continuity emerge from the study, not the other way around.

The second issue related to historiography is where the current study can be placed in relation to existing historical theories of the development of race and racism. It has already been stated that the prevailing theory, proposed by Snowden (1970), is that race and racism emerged with the modern era and that it is not evident in antiquity. It has also been acknowledged that this theory is being challenged by contemporary scholarship in the area of historical and literary studies. While scholars wishing to test Cone’s theory of the embeddedness of racism in White theology as a whole would need to deal with Snowden’s theory, the current study does not propose that broad a question. By limiting the question to the embeddedness of racism in evangelicalism, the time period is limited to early modern and modern historical eras. This means that it is unnecessary to counter Snowden, given that this study rests clearly within his timeframe for the development of racial discourse. Since no scholar would challenge the view that racial discourse is a part of modern and early modern discursive practice, the current work falls outside the need to defend against Snowden’s theory.

The other issue that arises in relation to historical studies of race is where exactly in modern discourse racism arises. It has already been shown that West (2002) and others prefer both scientific and philosophical origins, while Jennings (2010) and Kaplan (2019) prefer primarily theological explanations. The point of this chapter is to address theology constructively and in doing so to answer the question of racial embeddedness *en route* to a purely theological outcome. The question of racism’s discursive origins is tangential to the current project. What is being asked is how or whether racism is a part of evangelical theological discourse, not whether theological discourse is the source of racist logics. Therefore, the question of origins has little effect on what is envisioned here. It does not matter if racism finds its way into theology through the appropriation of science or rational

philosophy; the question is simply whether or not it is to be found within theological discourse. Thus, the questions of origins are outside of the considerations of this work.

With the questions of historical method and historical placement answered, the question of determining the stream of evangelicalism is now in view. Understanding what any one individual means when they speak of evangelical theology is dependent on the contemporary vantage point from which they are viewing evangelicalism as a movement or a theological descriptor. Roger Olson (2004) in fact provides seven distinct ways that the term “evangelical” can be understood historically. The term takes on various meanings, histories, and specific theological orientations depending on the ending point of the historian who is examining it. (See for example Sweeney, 2005; Noll, 2003; Ramm, 1973; and Marsden, 1975). Likewise, evangelicalism as a contemporary movement is representative of several denominational groups and several theological persuasions. The latter ranges from Calvinism to Pentecostalism. The theological genetics of the movement therefore is specific to the various groups within the movement. These genetic branches are distinct and their theologies are diverse. It is, therefore, less important for the current study to focus on the few common unifying theological positions within contemporary evangelicalism than it is to be very clear which branch of evangelical theology is under consideration.

This study will limit its analysis to the form of evangelicalism that emerged in the United States in the 1940s out of and as an alternative to separatist fundamentalism. Further, it will focus its consideration of that theology to a stream that is largely Reformed and historically indebted to Calvinism via English Puritanism as it emerged in the United States as New England Puritanism. As such, its conclusions, although offering broader possibilities, will be limited to this branch of North American evangelicalism. Even with this limited scope, the limits of this study will not allow a full exploration of all those whose theology could be delineated within these parameters. So, further clarification of the figures under consideration is necessary.

North American evangelicalism within the Reformed stream can be traced by following two mutually interactive but somewhat different streams that come together to shape the movement as a whole (Olson, 2004). These include pietistic and doctrinal branches. One might decide to trace what is called neo-evangelicalism, through Billy Graham to Billy Sunday and Dwight Moody, to New England Revivalism and John Wesley. But the

evangelists, particularly the more contemporary ones, provide less in the way of theological discourse that can be analyzed. The other approach, and the one taken below, is to trace this branch of evangelical theology through its recognized theologians who have produced academic theologies, although not necessarily separate from the life of the church. Taking this approach, four individuals seem to emerge for consideration. They are Carl F. H. Henry, Charles Hodge, Jonathan Edwards and John Calvin.

Each represents a different era in the development of Reformed evangelicalism in North America. John Calvin is the early reformer most referenced by later Reformed evangelical theologians and offers the foundational theological tradition from which later Reformed evangelical theology emerges. Jonathan Edwards inherited Calvinistic theology through early English Puritanism. He is also the leading theological example of what would become known as New England Puritanism and the later strands of North American theological thought that would emerge from it. Princeton Seminary in the mid to late nineteenth century inherited the thoroughgoing Calvinism of Edwards through the theological work of Charles Hodge. Hodge himself was the early architect of what would become under his predecessors, A. A. Hodge, H. Gresham Machen, and B. B. Warfield, the early roots of North American fundamentalism. Later fundamentalism emerged from Hodge to become North American separatist fundamentalism, the movement out of which Carl F. H. Henry emerged and distinguished himself. But Henry was interested to preserve the legacies of Hodge, Edwards and Calvin while suggesting a different path that would be called neo-evangelicalism by fundamentalists and simply evangelicalism by Henry and others.

There is also direct discursive evidence connecting the four theologians. Carl Henry (1983) interacts directly with Calvin, Edwards and Hodge in his six-volume systematics, *God, Revelation and Authority*. Charles Hodge (1993) makes great use of Edwards and Calvin in his systematic theology and other works. Edwards likewise references Calvin in his theological writings. These discursive and non-discursive connections will allow for further connections to be drawn between the theological systems of each representative theologian, as well as highlighting instances of theological convergence that might suggest different outcomes to the question of embedded racism. Ultimately it will allow the discourse of theology to be mapped in relation to the discourse of race and racism to determine intersection and divergences.

While it is true that historical theological branches and dependence can only be seen from contemporary starting points looking backward, the development of those branches must be viewed from the past forward. With that in mind, what follows are four historical case studies that will utilize Goldberg's method to interrogate embedded racism first in the theology of Calvin, then Edwards, Hodge and finally Carl F. H. Henry.

### **3.2 John Calvin and racist logics**

Before moving directly to an analysis of Calvin's work it is important to recognize a few dynamics at play in Calvin scholarship, to address the intentionally limited scope of the study, and to provide some sense of the use of the extensive primary literature. The breadth of the task and the limited space afforded by this study must be clarified.

It should be noted from the start that Calvin and the various Calvinist systems derived from his teachings play variable roles within particular global contexts. While Calvinism and Calvinist ideas come to play some part in the defense of race-based slavery in the United States (Paul Harvey, 2016), and in fact function as a defense of this institution more often than as support for abolitionist beliefs, this was not the case in South Africa. Within the South African context Calvin and Calvinism were used both to support apartheid and to advocate for its elimination. The South African use of Calvin, therefore, becomes instructive on the possibility of (mis)reading Calvin's theological corpus in ways that support racist logics, while at the same time suggesting that there is a paradox in Calvin that allows for variable readings on race. This issue is taken up directly by De Gruchy (1986), Buys (2009), and Naude (2017).

Buys' (2009) work is a direct attempt to demonstrate that Calvinism, as understood through its doctrines of grace (salvation) and central to Dordt's reading of Calvin, contain, in Buys' view, anti-racist implications. Buys' work will be important to the constructive theological work of Chapter Five, but it lacks, and in fact does not claim, a direct historical analysis of Calvin through Calvin's own works, because it focuses on a later systemization of Calvin. Thus, its arguments cannot be used to suggest that there are no racist or proto-racist sentiments evidenced or discernable in Calvin's work. That is not to suggest that Buys is incorrect about the anti-racist potential of later Calvinist systems, which is why his work will need to be taken seriously at a later point in the current study.

While Buys' work defends the anti-racist nature of Calvinism, both de Gruchy (1986) and Naude (2017) suggest that Calvin can be read in a multiplicity of ways. De Gruchy (1986:42) discusses the malleability of Calvin's thought as it regards social transformation. "Perhaps" de Gruchy concludes,

The main problem which the proponents of Calvinism have to overcome is the tendency, which has recurred several times in history, for it to start out as a theology of social critique and transformation and end up as a theology of totalitarian dominance. Gwendolen Carter in her *Politics of Inequality*, it may be recalled, remarked that 'from the political point of view it is significant that Calvinism is inherently authoritarian. Where Calvinists have fought for freedom of conscience,' she continues, 'it was due to circumstances rather than theology.'

While de Gruchy is not suggesting that Calvinism has no components that can be read as anti-racist or anti-authoritarian, he is suggesting that these readings of Calvin exist beside more authoritarian and hierarchical readings of both Calvin's theology and social ethics.

Naude (2017) holds more hope of a transformative social ethic in Calvinist Reformed theology, but nonetheless recognizes the simultaneous possibility of reading the tradition in a way that supports authoritarian and hierarchical readings. "Those of us who have been writing and doing theology in South Africa over the last three decades know that the Christian gospel—as interpreted from the Protestant or more specific Reformed tradition—can simultaneously be used as a powerful force against social transformation and as a positive force for justice and the transformation of society" (Naude, 2017:1).

What seems to be uncontested is that there exists within Calvinism at least the possibility of (mis)reading Calvin in ways that support authoritarianism, hierarchy and racist apartheid policies and attitudes. This is not to affirm as appropriate subsequent interpretations of Calvin along these lines, but simply to suggest that Calvin scholars and Calvinist theologians are aware of this stream within Calvin. In the case of the current project more definition and specificity will need to be provided than is the case in the work of either Buys, de Gruchy or Naude.

This suggests the need to articulate the limits of the current study. First, by suggesting that this stream exists within Calvin's work this study does not wish to make a claim that all later Calvinist systems reproduce Calvin's reasoning at every point or that all of Calvin's theology is totally corrupted by this stream. Although, as an aside, Cone would say that the latter is of necessity the case. This study suggests only that the evidence of racist or



precursory logics in a particular theologian produces the possibility for its emergence in subsequent uses of their theology. All that is pondered here is the “potentiality” of its use within particular theological systems.

Second, as an extension of the statement above, this study is looking at four influential theologians within the context of a particular strand of Reformed North American evangelicalism. Therefore, this study makes no claims to identifying racist logics within other strands within the Calvinist tradition as a whole or specific Calvinist traditions outside of this limited North American context. The work of extending to larger traditions is outside the scope of the current project.

Third, what is envisioned here is not a full study of Calvin’s, or subsequently Edwards’, Hodge’s or Henry’s, theological system but any attempt to identify *potential* parts of that system that could or might, as opposed to must, be used to support racist logics in subsequent applications. This fits the primary focus here on *embeddedness*. An embedded component is by definition a part of a system even if it is not intentional, required or primary to the system. While it is true that when the study below moves from Goldberg’s level of vocabulary to his level of grammar there will be specific suggestions made about how racist logics affect or are determined by broader categories of theological reasoning, it should be clear that the component parts operating at even the level of vocabulary suggest on their own the potentiality for racist use.

The further the study moves from vocabulary to grammar to narrative, the more impactful the embeddedness becomes, but the primary reason for this part of the study must be kept in mind. It simply purports to ask if there are racist logics or elements of racist logics embedded in the North American Evangelical tradition in view here. The intent is not to pass judgement, at this point in the study, on the implications of the embeddedness of racist logic for contemporary systems of theology. That work is reserved for Chapter Five. The reader is asked to keep this in mind and not prejudge that the conclusions of Chapter Three are necessarily indicative of the conclusions of Chapter Five.

Finally, it is taken as an *a priori* conclusion given the work of Buys, de Gruchy and Naude above that there are elements within each of the theologians that might be useful in the construction of anti-racist theologies. This will be recognized in Chapter Five, but the work of this chapter will focus exclusively on racist logics.

Before preceding to an analysis of Calvin it is important to understand the approach taken to the primary literature. Calvin's corpus is extensive and there simply is not room to include a full analysis here. What is offered is a specific look at Calvin's work at those points where he seems to suggest a racist or precursory reading. These texts are not, however, chosen randomly, but are drawn from, and as suggested by, the existing secondary text literature and Calvin's treatment of the biblical text at those points that seem most susceptible to racist or precursory racist interpretation, including Romans 13, the household codes, and the patriarchal narratives. Calvin's discussions of these appear primarily in his commentaries and sermons, but are also extended in his theological reflections in the *Institutes*, especially Book 3 on the Christian life.

Secondarily, where the secondary literature seems to suggest it, specific texts addressing broader theological issues will be engaged as they appear in the *Institutes* and Calvin's other more polemical works. Given that this is a historical study offered primarily within the context of a constructive theology, it will include an ongoing conversation with secondary literature where the literature intersects the narrow concerns of this study.

### **3.2.1 Vocabulary**

Goldberg's definition of racist vocabulary suggests that there are components of racist thought that can be evident in discursive texts and that may not be directly related to racist discourse but form the "primitive" logical components of racist logic. These components include "classification, order, value and hierarchy, definition and identity, discrimination and identification, exclusion, domination, subjection and subjugation, as well as entitlement and restriction" (Goldberg, 1994:50). With these categories in mind, Calvin's thought does not appear to be absent from these components of "primitive" racist thought. While Calvin has little to say about race specifically, he does apply categories of exclusion, hierarchy and negative characterization as a form of classification, that are central components to primitive racist speech, according to Goldberg. This vocabulary will be connected later to larger theological and doctrinal categories.

#### **3.2.1.1 Exclusion**

Calvin's primary means of exclusion are religious. The distinctions between the elect and the non-elect, the believer and the non-believer are pronounced. This means of distinguishing those that are in and those that are outside of the grace of God is a repeated theme for Calvin (Loader, 2009). While all humanity shares a common tie in Adam and God, God does not ask that we "altogether despise others," Calvin says, but that does not change the fact that "the more nearly a man approaches to God, he ought to be more highly esteemed by us" (Calvin, 2003:181) (on election see Link, 2009:105-129).

Additionally, given the use in later racist discourse of the patriarchal narratives to justify racial exclusion, particularly the use of Abraham and Ishmael, Babel, and the "curse of Ham," it is important to see the degree to which Calvin might interpret these passages in similar ways. While Calvin does not evidence the kind of exclusionary language found in later exegesis on Babel and the "curse of Ham" he does directly tie election with ancestral descent in his discussion of Abraham and Ishmael. "Ishmael," Calvin exclaims, "shows that the whole progeny of Abraham should flow from one head. He promises also to Ishmael, that he shall be a nation, but estranged from the church, so that the conditions of the brothers shall, in this respect, be different; the one is constituted the father of a spiritual people, to the other is given a carnal seed." (Calvin, 2005a:544-545)

This distinction is framed in the context of race, ethnicity, or perhaps ancestral origin. Either Calvin is claiming a direct connection between ethnic heredity and election or he is offering Abraham's line as spiritually representative of the church/elect and Ishmael's line as representative of all unregenerate/non-elect peoples (Calvin, 2005a:546). The spiritual conclusion does not necessarily imply a historical exclusion in Calvin's thought that views the ethnic descendants of Ishmael as outside the providence and election of God. But it must also be noted that within Goldberg's definition either spiritual or hereditary forms of exclusion fall within the definition of primitive vocabulary.

### 3.2.1.2 Hierarchy

If exclusion is primarily confined to religious exclusion in Calvin the same cannot be said for hierarchy. Calvin recognizes a multiplicity of categories that rank and subject individuals within human society. These include gender, economic status, slave/master relations, and governmental authority.

Calvin's views on hierarchy and social order are well established in the secondary literature. This is true of the authoritarian tendency identified by de Gruchy (1986:42), Kayayan's exposition of Calvin's support of slavery (2013), Vorster's (2017) and Thompson's (1988) view that Calvin so limited the role of women that he subordinated the image of God within women to make his point. Potgieter (2019:81) sums up Calvin's view: "Calvin admitted that within God's providence there is variety and indeed room for inequality with regard to earthly means, wealth, and potential among people." Calvin's views emerge within his writings on the Pentateuch, the Gospels and Paul's letters, particularly Romans 13 and the household codes.

Calvin, as noted by Wallace (1997:158) affirms, "The subjection of the inferior to the superior in the relationship of ruler to people, master to servant, husband to wife, child to parent, is part of an individual order established by God the Father; unless such order is observed and those under authority submit to those over them, then human society cannot be maintained."

For Calvin, this order is at times grounded in the created order and at times grounded in the necessity of the Fall. The latter is true for Calvin of the relationship between men and women and some forms of slavery (Wallace, 1997:158). But what is important here is the degree to which submission and authority and its attendant hierarchy become a divine mandate in Calvin's thought.

For Calvin, God has determined fixed relations that humanity is bound both to preserve and to honor. In his discussion of Miriam and Aaron's uprising against Moses, for example, Calvin (2005b:45) states, "Now since Aaron and Miriam were not superior to others, they were thus reminded that they were far behind Moses in rank." And he does not limit this judgement to the narrative but extends it by way of application: "the pride and temerity of Miriam were sufficiently chastised, but God wished it to be a lesson for all, that everyone should confine himself to his own bounds" (Calvin, 2005b:46)

Calvin sees stepping "out of bounds" as violating the authority and providence of God and as subject to divine punishment. Likewise, in discussing the sins of the people of Babel, Calvin asserts, "it cannot be otherwise than that everyone who transgresses his prescribed bounds, makes a direct attack on God" (Calvin, 2005b:324).

The idea of status based on religious standing, wealth and occupation are also a part of Calvin's way of thinking. This is evident in his exegesis of the story of Peter's stay in the house of a tanner in Joppa. He is quick to point out that someone of Peter's status would have surely stayed with a chieftain had there been any in the church. But the church must have had only "the common sort of men." He also goes on to insist that the tanner must have been a merchant and not merely a tanner. This is extra-textual speculation on Calvin's part, based on his own cultural perspective (Calvin, 1995:404). This passage highlights Calvin's sensitivity to class distinctions and class etiquette.

Calvin likewise accepts disparities between the rich and poor as the providence of God:

For although rich and poor are mingled together in this world ... in saying that the condition of each is divinely appointed, he (Solomon, Prov. 24:13) reminds us that God, who enlightened all, has his own eye always open, and thus exhorts the poor to patient endurance, seeing that those who are discontented with their lot endeavor to shake off the burden which God has impressed upon them (Calvin, 1993:178).

For Calvin, any attempt to change a person's position in life by "shaking off the burden which God has imposed" is to be out of the will of God (see Freudenberg, 2009).

Calvin also recognizes the hierarchy inherent in relationships between husbands and wives, masters and slaves, and parents and children (Calvin, 2005c:317-333). Thus, hierarchy applies to the micro-relationships of the household as clearly as they do to the larger social roles and relationships.

His views of slavery, likewise, maintain traditional hierarchical relationships while requiring of masters a duty of benevolence. Some might see this requirement of mutual duty as indicative of a softening of authoritarianism in Calvin. But as both Kayayan (2013) and Sytsma (2020) point out, Calvin is employing the Aristotelian notion of distributive justice or analogical right. There is a duty of benevolence, but it is still determined and limited by a strict understanding of role, place and order within the established hierarchical relationship of inferiors to superiors. Thus, distributive justice works to create an ideal of ethical treatment but leaves undisturbed the hierarchical relationship and grounds of power and authority.

Additionally, Calvin affirms the responsibility of Christians to submit to civil authority. He makes no distinction between types of government, nor does he allow for

revolution. Everyone is to recognize the authority of all magistrates because they are given that authority by God (Calvin, 2005d:477-485).

Some mention should be made of Calvin's highly limited doctrine of contingent submission here. Calvin is very reluctant to apply it and is very hesitant in affirming it at all. For Calvin the only time an individual has the right to refuse submission is when the government is asking the person to do something that God forbids, though again Calvin is even unsure at this point (see Hall, 2016). But regardless of this doctrine there remains a clear hierarchical distinction between magistrates and private citizens.

It is evident that for Calvin hierarchy is not only present in society but both necessary and ordained. "It is God," Calvin says, "who appoints and regulates the arrangements of society" (Calvin, 2005c:331). Calvin also provides a reason for social hierarchy. "In order, therefore, that everyone should confine himself within his own bounds, let us learn that in the human race God has so arranged our condition, that individuals are only endowed with a certain measure of gifts, on which the distribution of offices depends" (Calvin, 2005b:303-304). Calvin also asserts that these gifts create a mutual dependency within society that leads to good order and goodwill (see Hall, 2016:54, 59). When Calvin makes hierarchy both a divine act and part of the natural order, he opens himself fully to Goldberg's definition which states that racist categories are "natural, inevitable and therefore unchangeable" (Goldberg, 1994:98) as within the definition. Calvin certainly would see hierarchy as natural, inevitable and unchangeable.

Hierarchy and social stratification in Calvin, therefore, furthers the providence of God; ensures order in social relations; is evident at all levels of society; and is incumbent on obedient persons to maintain. Hierarchy is also fixed and unchanging as stated above, but even more so because Calvin has no notion of progress or attainment of higher social status. (See Bouwsma, 1988:181 on the determination of calling and social position in Calvin).

### 3.2.1.3 Negative characterization

Beyond hierarchy, negative characterization of persons based on some innate feature not necessarily attributable to individual character traits is another mark of racist vocabulary. Calvin engages in this form of discourse as it regards gender, class and possibly race. While

the secondary literature does not treat this aspect of Calvin's discourse, evidence can be found in his commentaries.

Calvin in places characterizes women as weak, ambitious, and high-spirited. The latter term is not intended to be a compliment. "For the ambition of the female sex is wonderful," he says, "and often have women more high-spirited than men been the instigators not merely of squabbles, but of mighty wars" (Calvin, 2005b:46).

Likewise, Calvin at times characterizes slaves in a negative manner. He describes slaves as diseased (Calvin, 2005c:330), addicted to flattery and prone to duplicity (Calvin, 2005c:331), wicked, depraved, useless (Calvin, 2005c:357) and unfaithful (Calvin, 2005c:356).

Calvin's estimation of the poor can easily get lost in his insistence on the charity that they are owed because of Christ's command to care for them. But a close reading shows that Calvin does on occasion characterize the poor as lazy, afflicted and despised. Calvin rarely chastises the wealthy for despising the poor and seems to indicate that they deserve it. His only admonition is that they should not let this attitude stop them from caring for the poor, not because the poor have any value in and of themselves but because God commands their care (Calvin, 2005e:180).

Finally, there is at least one instance where Calvin seems to make, if not a direct characterization, at least an implied negative assessment based on race. In his commentary on Miriam and Aaron's objection to Moses' wife Zipporah he states that she is "called an Ethiopian," but Calvin opines, "I have no doubt but that they maliciously selected the name (Ethiopian), for the purpose of awakening greater odium against Moses" (Calvin, 2005b:46).

Calvin seems to fill a need to make the text suggest that Zipporah was something other than an Ethiopian. He moves beyond the literal sense of the text to assert a personal bias that implies that he agrees that if Zipporah was indeed an Ethiopian then Aaron and Miriam's complaints against Moses would in fact be reputable. Therefore, they had to have solicitously implied an origin for Zipporah that was inaccurate in order to bolster their case. While this example alone cannot convict Calvin of racial bias it does suggest that he might harbor negative feelings for "Ethiopians" which in Calvin's day was used to distinguish Africans of all origins from more Middle Eastern-looking North Africans.

#### 3.2.1.4 Conclusions on vocabulary

Calvin's discourse does seem to evidence those components of thought that Goldberg considers primitive racist categories that form what is being identified as the vocabulary of racist logic, although only in two instances cited above is this directly applied to a racist or hereditary category (see discussion above on Abraham and Ismael and Moses and Zipporah). But Calvin does provide discursive material that, in its primitive form, could be appropriated for racist discourse. Calvin evidences at least three of Goldberg's primitive categories, including exclusion, hierarchy, and negative characterization, which is a form of negative classification. The question then remains: does Calvin also employ these categories and other contingent ideas in a way that could be described as a racist theological grammar?

#### 3.2.2 Grammar

It is necessary to ask, for the sake of this study, to what extent Calvin's theological discourse shows evidence of racist grammar that may form racist logics. Goldberg's understanding of racist grammar is "a set of discursive rules (that) emerge from an economy of epistemological production in virtue of which 'truth' may be differentiated from 'falsity'" (Goldberg, 1994:52). For Calvin, these truths are formulated by what he views as correct doctrine, and so the question at hand is: are there doctrinal pronouncements that include the primitive vocabulary of hierarchy, exclusion, negative characterization or others proposed by Goldberg, and that advance these concepts as theological "truths" and thus form the basis or possibility for racist logics?

In the case of Calvin several points of doctrine and theological argumentation do seem to have the potentiality, latent or otherwise, to support racist logics. Although it must be noted that Calvin does not explicitly employ this discourse toward racist ends, at least not in the sense of a modernist discourse on race, Calvin's arguments might be said to be supportive of racist logics even if not part of an explicit racist narrative. This is true to the extent that they might be seen as presupposing later racist constructions. Among the theological categories to be examined below are providence, the operation of authority-submission-obedience in Calvin's theology, objections to revolution, the divine ordination of civil government, spiritualization/biblical hermeneutics, charity vs. liberation, economics, and Calvin's general rhetorical orientation.



### 3.2.2.1 Providence

The degree to which providence is used as justification for race-based policies and institutions is well documented in the historical literature (see Harvey, 2016; Noll, 2008; and Kaplan 2019). So, it seems reasonable to ask whether Calvin's understanding of providence has the potential to undergird racist logics regardless of Calvin's intentions in formulating the doctrine. Michelle Sanchez writes,

One could think of providence (in Calvin) as the leitmotif closing the first movement of a musical. It is the climax of the opening act, but it also establishes a central motif that will repeat throughout the show, enabling layers of semiotic richness and narrative complexity (Sanchez, 2019:470).

While exceedingly poetic, Sanchez's view does express a common understanding that the doctrine of providence does not play a minor role in the *Institutes* or in Calvin's theology as a whole, but, as she says, is a repeating theme that runs throughout the body of Calvin's work.

Thus, providence deserves attention as a primary unifying part of Calvin's theological logic. It should also be noted that providence functions in Calvin's work as a principal argumentative tool for explaining ethical issues and interpreting biblical texts that run counter to Calvin's own sentiments. Kayayan (2013), for example, demonstrates convincingly that although Calvin had a personal distaste for the institution of slavery, he nonetheless defended Paul's support of the institution and its contemporary practice. All of this, according to Kayayan, Calvin frames with reference to slavery as an institution *within the providence of God*. Calvin, per Kayayan, accepted "that (the) condition (of slavery) and the political order that engendered it . . . falls under the scope of divine providence" (Kayayan, 2013:5). It is this malleable use of providence to explain and justify contemporary practices that makes it of particular interest to this study. Thus, it is important to consider Calvin's formulation of the doctrine of providence as it appears in the texts of interest here: *The Institutes*, *Commentary on the last four books of Moses*, *Commentary on Paul's Letters* particularly Philemon, and his *Commentary on Ezekiel*. They may suggest ways in which the doctrine might be (mis)applied to racist discourse.

Calvin's view of providence insists that God has not released his providential acts to an ambiguous set of natural laws. "Those, moreover, who confine the providence of God within narrow limits, as if he allowed all things to be borne along freely according to a

perpetual law of nature,” Calvin says, “not more dethrone God of his glory than themselves of a most useful doctrine” (Calvin, 1993:174). By this Calvin intends to make the greater point that God is the “prime agent” who is also fully present and fully engaged in everything that occurs.

Calvin wants his readers to understand that God is not only a creator but “he is also a governor and preserver, and that not by producing a kind of general motion in the machine of the whole as well as in each of its parts, but by a special providence sustaining, cherishing, superintending, all the things which he has made, to the very minutest” (Calvin, 1993:172). It is this involvement of God in the “minutest” details of human existence that undergirds Calvin’s understanding of human will, God’s use of means, and God’s engagement with evil actors.

For Calvin (1993:179) it is clear that the human will is under the influence of divine providence, so much so that individuals are “so governed as to move exactly in the course which he has destined.” Likewise, he asserts that the will of God is not exerted merely on invisible, passive influence but God’s providence uses means and assumes a visible form (Calvin, 1993:187). This insistence on the asserted will of God and the use of means requires Calvin to affirm that God also uses evil actors.

Following Augustine, Calvin (1993:203) is convinced that God uses, as Augustine says, “the evil wills of bad men” for God’s providential plan. Likewise, Calvin (1993:200) asserts that God does not merely give permission to bad actors but directs the evil actions of these bad actors. He justifies God in doing so by concurring, again with Augustine, that such an act of God might be viewed as evil were it not for the fact that God is “omnipotent to bring good out of evil” (Calvin, 1993:199). By this he means that all actions do not merely work by the power of God but by God’s “election and decree.” Calvin is trying to distinguish between God’s allowance for evil or incidental use of evil and God’s incorporation of evil actors into God’s divine plan. In Calvin’s way of seeing things God has ordained that evil actors will perform evil deeds according to God’s will (Calvin: 1993:177).

The results of a view of providence that sees all acts and actors as guided by the providential hand of God, as a means to God’s providential ends, whether those actors and actions are good, evil or neutral, is that it locks all human conditions into the will of God. Thus, everything including economic disparity, slavery, and tyranny is seen by Calvin as

within the providential will of God. A few specific examples will illustrate this point and demonstrate points of connection between ideas inherent within racist logics.

Calvin uses the doctrine of providence as an explanation and defense of inequality. According to Calvin it is God's will that "some are elevated, while others remain without honor" (Calvin, 1993:178). Second, he insists that success in this world equals God's blessing, and calamity is the result of God's curse (Calvin, 1993:179). Third, God also afflicts the innocent according to his own good will (Calvin, 1993:183, 184). The consequence of all of this is that humanity must take the position that "the Lord willed it, it must therefore be borne" (Calvin, 1993:185).

Calvin seems to recognize that we see a contradiction between a good God and one whose providential will includes suffering. But he refuses to allow human critique to take the place of the truth of God by removing God's providence from human suffering, preferring instead to believe that what appears to us as evil is in fact working for good within the "hidden counsel" of God. The issue with slavery, pointed out above, is one example (Kayayan, 2013). God has ordained that those who are slaves are there according to God's providence. That slavery, therefore, must be borne as a part of that providence. Why God would choose to bring such suffering on those who are bound to serve as slaves is unknown and must be accepted and left to the "hidden counsel of God" knowing that it will all work out for good according to God's plan.

This is also true of economic inequality. Calvin, as regards disparity of wealth, states that, "God in whose hands are the ends of the earth, to destroy and to overturn at His will its kingdoms, and to change the government of nations, much more (has the right) so to distribute the wealth and possessions of individuals, as to enrich some and to reduce others to want" (Calvin, 2005b:214). Thus, for Calvin God has "decreed and elected" the lot of the impoverished. Furthermore, a change in the status of the poor would be an extraordinary, not an ordinary, act of God. Calvin makes this point in his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, where in Calvin's estimation God's concern for the mistreatment of the poor is a result of extraordinary injustice requiring the extraordinary intervention of God on their behalf (Calvin, 1948:253).

If, therefore, it is God who has decreed and elected the poor to poverty, then, according to Calvin, it is incumbent on the poor to endure their condition with patience.

Calvin also emphasizes that patience is necessary in the poor, as mentioned above, lest they “endeavor to shake off the burden which God has imposed upon them” (Calvin 1993:178). Thus, attempts to rise above their poverty would be an act of rebellion against God and his providential will (see Potgieter, 2019:72-87).

As an aside, it should be mentioned that there are scholars who project a less authoritarian view of Calvin on the question of economic disparity by focusing on the command to charity which Calvin emphasizes. Freudentberg (2009) suggests, for example, that Calvin’s treatment of poverty, especially in his sermons on Deuteronomy, emphasize the responsibilities of the wealthy to engage in acts of charity in order to alleviate the suffering of the poor. He also suggests that Calvin elevates the poor by providing them a spiritual place within the providential plan of God. While Freudentberg is correct, at least to an extent, that Calvin does emphasize charity to the poor, Freudentberg does not discuss the focus on poverty as the will of God in Calvin, so his arguments fail to grasp the extent to which charity is seen as an attempt to alleviate immediate suffering, not to change the long-term condition of the poor or alleviate the disparity itself. It is this deterministic bent in Calvin’s view of providence that is so readily open for later racist (mis)interpretations.

It has already been stated that Calvin sees slavery as within the providential will of God but it is also important to highlight the degree to which Calvin involves God in the institution. Interpreting Paul’s advice in his epistle to Philemon, Calvin states that “it is as if Paul had said, ‘do not suppose that by the judgement of men you were thrown into slavery. It is God who has laid upon you the power of your masters’” (Calvin, 2005c:330) Of course Paul did not say this, Calvin did.

God is, therefore, in Calvin’s mind, the instigator of slavery. The whole institution exists as a result of the providential will of God and anyone who is caught up in the institution is there because God wills it. They must be content with their lot and their place. But Calvin is not just interested in their contentment but he also requires them to do their duty—not as a duty to the master but as a duty to God.

Calvin’s doctrine of providence, if what has been stated here is accepted, functions as a specific theological grammar that pulls the doctrine of God’s will into conversation with specific ethical conditions that ultimately allow the doctrine to act as an excuse or support of inequality, disparity, subservience and submission. While this certainly is not the only use of

the doctrine, it is one of the primary ways Calvin used providence to resolve ethical questions. While not applied directly to race in Calvin, the logic of fixity, inequality, and divine justification is certainly made available for future applications of the doctrine toward racist ends. While providence upholds concepts of inequality, it also supports the concepts of authority, obedience and submission in his theology.

### 3.2.2.2 Authority, obedience and submission

Calvin (2005c:317), in reflecting on the household codes in the Pauline corpus, affirms six classes of persons living in relationships defined by authority and submission. These groups include wives in submission to their husbands, children in submission to their parents, and slaves in submission to their masters.

Calvin has no view of mutual submission; that idea will not emerge within the evangelical tradition studied here until Carl Henry. He places the focus instead on the required submission of subordinates to superiors in the household codes. This distinction is magnified by Calvin's comparison of husbands to Christ (Calvin, 2005c:317-18). Calvin ignores the implication of Christ's sacrifice on behalf of the church and focuses instead on the church's obligation of submitting to the authority of Christ. Likewise, the wife must submit to the authority of the husband. In doing so, Calvin says, wives are not "to refuse the subjection by means of which they might be saved" for to do so "is to choose destruction" (Calvin, 2005c:318)

It should be said that while Calvin's focus in this commentary remains on submission, he does invoke the concept of a mutual yoke of duty described above in the discussion of distributive justice in the section on hierarchy. It is clear from Calvin that this duty does not erase but must sustain the difference in "station" and the requirement of obedience and submission on the part of the subjected. At best, the duty owed is one of benevolent treatment. But this in no way infers an obligation to equal treatment (Calvin, 2005c:329).

As regards slaves, this benevolent care is required by God because God "is no respecter of persons" and God sees the work of both the master and the slave as of equal value (Calvin, 2005c:331, 333). But again, this in no way creates a change in worldly status. Even if the subject is a "brother in Christ" they are not afforded different treatment as a result of this spiritual connection. The distinction in carnal and spiritual realities in Calvin will be

discussed below, but for now it is enough to recognize that while a master or a slave may be included among either the redeemed or the reprobate, inclusion in the former does not change God's will for the person's earthly state; redemption does not necessitate worldly liberation.

Authority in Calvin, therefore, is grounded in the fixity of a person's position in society and the social obligations and duties required by their station. Authority is derived from God's divine decree and therefore requires submission as an act of obedience to God.

Submission in Calvin is a universal state. Everyone, even those with the highest degree of earthly authority, have an obligation of submission because even the highest monarch is required to submit to God. As earthly submission to earthly authorities is a decree of God, it is also important to note that failure to submit also incurs the punishment of God.

Thus, Calvin uses the divine decree and divine revelation in Scripture to support divinely mandated distinctions of inferiority and superiority, authority and submission, obedience and power within human relationships. Thus, again he joins Goldberg's primitive categories of racism to a theological discourse and grants divine sanction to these ideas that exist as base parts of racist logics. This creates a grammar of submission and authority, inferiority and superiority within Calvin's idea of hierarchy that carries the weight of a theological "truth" for Calvin. While it may not exist in Calvin within a racist narrative it does carry forward a theology of subjection that is available for future racist applications.

### 3.2.2.3 Revolution

If there exists in Calvin a grammar of submission that is embedded in a theological truth supported by the doctrines of divine revelation and decree, the question might be asked, is there any instance in which rebellion and revolt would be allowed within Calvin's theology? The answer to the question is no. Calvin denies the right of revolution and rebellion and he grounds his defense in the doctrine of the Fall, whereby Adam's original sin was rebellion and the tendency to rebellion and revolution in humanity is part of humanity's sinful nature. In grounding the doctrine of original sin in revolt against God, Calvin shows a strict regard for the need of humanity to keep "in its proper place." According to Calvin,

The prohibition to touch the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a trial of obedience, that Adam, by observing it might prove his willing submission to the command of God, for the very term shows the end of the precept to have been to keep

him contented with his lot, and not allow him arrogantly to aspire beyond it (Calvin, 1993:212-13).

Calvin views this act of disobedience as an act of revolt against God and as the result of an ambition in Adam to raise above his station. This ambition to be more than he was created to be is, according to Calvin, the pathway to sin. “Infidelity opened the door to ambition,” Calvin writes, “and ambition was the parent of rebellion, man casting off fear of God, and giving free vent to his lust” (Calvin, 1993:213).

It is, therefore, central to Calvin’s view of Adam’s sin, and its subsequent imputation to all of humanity, that Adam’s discontent with his proper place, his ambition in trying to raise above it, and his refusal to remain in subjugation to the command of God is at the heart of humanity’s ongoing sinful acts. It is ambition leading to rebellion against God’s sovereignty which remains as evidence of the perpetuation of Adam’s sin in humanity.

This is also the primary cause of Calvin’s opposition to political revolution, even against tyrants and brutal monarchs. Because Calvin sees government, even bad government, as ordained of God and empowered by God’s providential will, Calvin will not allow political revolution. To rebel against the magistrate is to rebel against God. Again the ideas of subjection, obedience and observing one’s proper place are in view. “Although the Lord takes vengeance on unbridled domination,” Calvin argues, “let us not therefore suppose that that vengeance is committed to us, to whom no command has been given but to obey and suffer. I speak only of private men” (Calvin, 1993:674-75).

There is no recourse for individuals or groups of individuals to “throw off the yoke” of a tyrannical king; “all that remains to us,” according to Calvin, “is to implore the help of the Lord, in whose hands are the hearts of kings, and inclinations of kingdoms” (Calvin, 1993:674). Those afflicted by government oppression are left with prayer and patient suffering as their only recourse. Calvin (1993:674) elaborates,

If we consistently keep before our eyes and minds the fact that even the most iniquitous kings are appointed by the same decree which established all regal authority, we will never entertain the seditious thought that a king is to be treated according to his deserts, and that we are not bound to act the part of good subjects to him who does not in turn act the part of a good king to us.

Rebellion against the king is rebellion against God, even when the king acts in ungodly ways toward his subjects, and even if the kings themselves are reprobate and without God. Calvin

seems to allow only one exception: “We are subject to the men who rule over us, but subject only in the Lord. If they command anything against Him let us pay the least regard to it” (Calvin, 1993:675). But this is a very narrow exception and does not imply rebellion as much as civil disobedience and an understanding that the Christian subject must also accept the penalty for the disobedience. It is not even clear that Calvin is committed to his own exception, as is evident in Calvin’s refusal to support John Knox’s proposed rebellion against the Catholic monarchs in Scotland (Knox, 1994:195).

It is important to note one voice of dissent on this issue. David Hall (2016) argues that because revolutionary theology emerges in the work of Calvin’s students and subsequent generations of Calvinists, there are some aspects of Calvin’s work that must of necessity lend themselves to a revolutionary reading of Calvin.

But Hall’s account suffers in at least two ways. First, he focuses his arguments on Calvin’s discussion of what constitutes a just and unjust government. But this discussion is not intended to present the case for rebellion against unjust governments, as the evidence presented above illustrates, but to be a source of instruction for Christian magistrates in the establishment of just government. Secondly, he focuses extensively on Calvin’s exception to rebellion with little discussion of how tentative Calvin is in allowing the exception. Furthermore, Hall’s discussion makes no distinction between rebellion and disobedience. These issues weaken his argument and make it difficult to see how it would contravene Calvin’s own statements on the issue.

Thus, rebellion in Calvin is not an option and does not provide a recourse against unjust authorities. Further, it is grounded in a theological concept of sin and firmly embedded in Calvin’s notion of the Fall and in his understanding of Adam’s original sin. Calvin, therefore, all but forestalls any means of mitigating disparity, inferiority, and inequality and defines efforts to do so as sinful. Again, it must be noted that Calvin embeds the requirement of passive submission in the theological doctrines of the Fall and original sin. This means that he has again created a theological grammar that moves submission to the level of theological doctrine and divine “truth.”

#### 3.2.2.4 Civil government



Bouwsma (1988:206) summarizes Calvin's views on civil authority: "just as rulers are required to maintain order, subjects are obligated to obey them." Again, Calvin's views on civil authority intersect with his views on divine order and decree. Calvin lays out these views clearly in his *Commentary on Romans* and *The Institutes*.

Calvin bases his theological work on civil government primarily on his interpretation of Romans 13:1-7. His primary view is that government is a divine institution ordained of God for the purpose of keeping order by enacting justice for the protection of all. Because God, in God's providence, has declared all forms of government as duly ordained by him, all forms of government are acceptable. This includes those that fail in their obligations to God and human society. The government exercises the will of God in the world whether they do so for good or for evil. The magistrate holds a divinely ordained office and is due honor. Finally, private persons have no right to object, oppose or rebel against the will of the magistrate.

It might be helpful to look closely at three aspects of Calvin's doctrine that require special scrutiny. First, the operability of divine investiture in magistrates and particularly monarchs. Second, the role of private persons in civil government. And third, the distinct roles of the church and civil government in God's divine economy.

It is a legitimate question to ask to what degree the divine mandate of civil government is to be ascribed directly to rulers. For Calvin, this ascription is direct and absolute. Calvin (1993:668) asserts that the divine ordination of kings invests them "with a kind of sacred veneration and dignity." He goes further to suggest that those who serve as kings receive from God a special giftedness. Calvin states,

When he (God) was pleased to set Saul over the kingdom he made him as it were a new man. This is the thing meant by Plato, when alluding to a passage in the Iliad, he says, that the children of kings are distinguished at their birth by some special qualities—God, in kindness to the human race often giving a spirit of heroism to those whom he destines to empire (Calvin, 1993:252-3).

Again, it is important to point out that this is true whether or not the king is good or evil, Christian or not, or if they execute properly the office for which God has raised them up (Calvin, 1993:671). Calvin sees kings in much the same way that he sees governments. Good kings represent God's blessings on the people and bad kings represent God's punishment (Calvin, 1993:670). Both serve as instruments of God—either as instruments of God's mercy

or instruments of God's wrath. What is certain is that for Calvin not just the office but the person is sacred and, in an iconographic way, they are holy and worthy of reverence. This means that for Calvin their authority is absolute, second only to God. There is some similarity and continuity with the medieval idea of the divine right of kings in Calvin's thought.

Calvin also addresses the role of private persons in civil society, which has been covered to a degree in the discussion of revolution above. Not only is there a general obedience and submission owed to the magistrate but there is also an obligation to not interfere in public matters. In emphasizing this point Calvin states,

Under the obedience, I comprehend the restraint which private men ought to impose on themselves in public ... not interfering in public business, or rashly encroaching on the province of the magistrate or attempting anything at all of a public nature.

But what about cases where the laws are unjust? Calvin covers that as well:

If it is proper that anything in a public ordinance should be corrected let them not act tumultuously or put their hands to work where they ought to feel that their hands are tied, but let them leave it to the cognizance of the magistrate, whose hand alone is free (Calvin, 1993:669).

Thus, not only are private citizens not to rebel, they are also not to involve themselves in civil affairs of any kind. By this Calvin both affirms the absolute authority of the magistrate in civil matters and the absolute subjugation of private persons related to civil matters.

But what about the church? Might there be a role for the church in checking civil government? Calvin's answer would seem to be no, as long as the government does not force the Christian to abandon God or engage in idolatry.

Calvin holds to a division of roles between the government and the church. The church tends to the things of God and the souls of humanity while the government is to preserve order and administer justice. In fact, Calvin sees the usurpation and exercise of civil power by the Catholic Church as one of its chief failings and denies that his views of the church include the right to exercise any of the powers of government. In a debate with Jacopo Sadoletto Calvin argues:

And to appeal to facts rather than words, the power of the sword and other parts of civil jurisdiction, which bishops and priests under the semblance of immunity had wrested from the magistrate and claimed for themselves, have not we restored to the magistrates? All their (the Catholic Church's) usurped instruments of tyranny and ambition have not we detested and struggled to abolish? If there was any hope of

rising, why did we not craftily dissemble, so that those powers might have passed to us along with the office of governing the church? (Calvin, 1966:55-6).

The church does not have the right to exercise power over the government, according to Calvin. The only recourse that the church might have, and it remains a “might” in Calvin, is to disobey laws that forbid the worship of God or require the worship of a false God. But even then, the government still has the right to punish those who violate even these unjust and ungodly laws and the church must submit to punishment and endure persecution gracefully. Thus, the state holds absolute power in civil matters even over the church.

Thus, Calvin’s doctrine of civil government affirms a doctrine of authority and submission to the government that is centered in Calvin’s theology of divine decree and order. God has decreed submission and submission is required. Again, there is a connection in Calvin between submission, authority and the theology of God’s divine authority and divine decree. Submission moves beyond a mere ethical or moral good to a divine requirement that includes insured divine punishment for disobedience. This weds social submission in Calvin to his theological reflection on God and divine authority in a way that elevates it to the level of theological “truth.” Thus, Calvin’s doctrine of civil government is subject to affirming governmental authority even when that authority is focused on racial exclusion and racial prejudice. This remains true of Calvin’s theological grammar whether Calvin applies it to racial means or not.

### 3.2.2.5 Ancillary matters

There are several ancillary matters that undergird both Calvin’s vocabulary of hierarchy and his grammar of obedience, authority and submission that function as critical supports to these views and require specific attention. These include his exegetical method and the limits he places on charity to the poor.

Calvin’s exegetical method is far more complex than the often-prescribed designation “precritical” would suggest. George Stroup (1990:161), following Hans Frei, says that what Frei “believes to be distinctive and important about Calvin’s precritical reading of the Bible is that Calvin was convinced that the grammatical literal sense of the text was indeed the true sense, and that Calvin recognized the ‘natural coherence between literal and figural reading, and the need of supplementation by the other.’” But despite Calvin’s insistence on coherence

and uniformity of interpretation Stroup recognizes a tendency in Calvin to provide interpretative material and theological consistency where neither exists in the text. Stroup (1990:163) describes this tendency in Calvin as an inability to honor “what Auerbach describes as the ‘shadows’ in the text.” Stroup suggests that Calvin provides material where the text lacks it and consistency where none is in evidence because “he is unwilling to allow the text to be silent on theological matters that are of overriding significance for him. Calvin resolves the text’s silence and ambiguity by speaking for it. He explains what the text refuses to explain” (Stroup, 1990:163). Stroup believes that this tendency in Calvin “impoverishes both his theology and the biblical text he seeks to interpret” (Stroup, 1990:168).

Why is this particular issue important to the current study? If it can be agreed that racial logics depend both on the affirmation of inferiority and the denial or curtailment of basic freedoms or privileges, as Goldberg suggests (1994:98), then it stands to reason that racist logics require a methodology that allows it to reconcile the apparent differences between the biblical texts supporting authority and those suggesting liberation and freedom. Calvin both reconciles the disparity in his exegesis and provides the methodological practice for doing so. Thus, it is not surprising that Karl Barth (1955:208) surmises that for Calvin, “spiritual liberty is truly compatible with political subjugation. Our human status and the national laws under which we live are not the thing that counts, for Christ’s kingdom does not consist of such things.” With this in mind, it is important to consider just how Calvin employed these exegetical principles in order to understand how his exegesis creates openings for both subordination and the suppression of liberation.

Roland Frye (1990:172-194) goes a long way in identifying various strategies that Calvin employed in his interpretations of figurative texts. He ascribes Calvin’s identification of a figurative text to his understanding of the doctrine of divine accommodation or what some might call divine condescension. This doctrine holds that God, through his word, has presented his revelation in ways that humanity can understand (Frye, 1990:173-175). Anthropomorphism is the prime example. In this case the ascription of human features like arms, hands, or a face to God who is clearly spirit is a specific use of figurative language.

It should be noted that even when the language is not literal the figure or sign can be directly attributable to a spiritual truth or reality. Frye also suggests that Calvin attributes

three particular types of rhetorical devices to Scripture. These include metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche.

Metaphor is understood by Calvin as the use of signs and symbols in the biblical text. Metonymy is “a figure of speech which consists in substituting for the name of a thing the name of an attribute of it or of something closely related” (Frye, 1990:184). Frye provides the example of a person calling the White House and hearing the switchboard operator answer, “This is the White House”. This figure of speech is used to suggest the operator’s connection to the White House, not that the operator is actually the literal White House (Frye, 1990:183-84). Synecdoche, according to Frye (1990:186), was defined by Calvin as occurring “when the whole is sometimes taken for a part, sometimes a part for the whole.” Calvin commented that “this figure is constantly occurring in Scripture.”

The problem with applying Calvin’s rules for figurative language to the texts on submission and liberation is that neither subset of texts are used or interpreted by Calvin as figurative in the sense implied by any of the categories above. The only possible exception, which will be addressed first, is Calvin’s use of synecdoche to deprioritize charity and to downplay God’s preference for the poor in Scripture. However, understanding the disparity of interpretation between submission and liberation texts may require an application of Stroup’s understanding of Calvin’s need to reconcile texts theologically as opposed to the specific categories suggested by Frye.

So how exactly does Calvin utilize synecdoche in his interpretation of texts related to the act of charity and to God’s preference for the poor? While a definitive study would require a review of substantially more texts, perhaps a look at how Calvin handles the parable of the sheep and the goats in the Gospel of Matthew might be instructive.

This passage is particularly difficult for Calvin because it seems to connect salvation with the act of charity to the poor and the oppressed. Calvin, in his commentary on the passage, sees it as exemplifying the exercise of true virtue (Calvin, 2005e:178). However, Calvin is not willing to allow the texts prioritization of charity to the poor to stand, for he employs the idea of synecdoche to suggest that the passage has more in view than charity and benevolence toward the poor and oppressed. Calvin (2005e:179) states,

Christ does not here specify everything that belongs to a pious and holy life, but only, by way of example, refers to some of the duties of charity, by which we give evidence that we fear God. For though the worship of God is more important than Charity

towards men, and though, in like manner, faith and supplication are more valuable than alms, yet Christ had good reasons for bringing forward those evidences of true righteousness which are more obvious . . . Accordingly, Christ does not make the chief part of righteousness to consist in alms, but, by means of what may be called more evident signs, shows what it is to live a holy and righteous life, as unquestionably believers not only profess with the mouth, but prove by actual performances, that they serve God.

Calvin does not, of course, suggest that charity to the poor is unimportant, but he does shift the focus of the text to the broader category of virtuous living, decreasing the centrality of charity that seems to be suggested by a more literal reading of the text. This is a prime example of a use of synecdoche.

There are implications of this approach for the present study. The use of biblical texts related to the poor as defenses against racist forms of oppression is a standard part of the debate around liberation theology and biblical exegesis both by those who wish to defend it and those who wish to oppose it. At the very least, Calvin's use of this exegetical strategy weakens the use of texts related to the poor for theologies of liberation and strengthens the case for those opposed to liberationist interpretations.

The exegetical method itself is also problematic for those looking to make literal interpretations of these texts. The subsumption of liberation texts within a larger theological explanation creates a history of text reception that minimizes liberation themes. While the degree to which Calvin and others in the Reformed evangelical tradition (mis)read these texts in a way that is contrary to the intent of the text is a matter for Chapter Four, it can be noted here that the potential use of Calvin's reading and method do provide support for anti-liberationist readings and potentially for racist readings.

But there is a more apparent interpretive move in Calvin. He is, as Barth says, able to envision the coexistence of both liberty and political servitude. Calvin interprets texts related to authority and liberty differently when it comes to applying them to the temporal world. Calvin interprets texts related to submission as decrees from God to be applied literally in their application to the physical world. Whereas texts on liberty and freedom reference either an internal spiritual state or an eschatological future reality for the elect in heaven. Calvin notes and resolves this tension in his *Institutes*:

So why is it that the very same apostle who bids us 'stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not again entangled with the yoke of bondage' (Gal. 5:1), in another passage forbids slaves to be solicitous about their state (1 Cor. 7:21)

unless it be that spiritual liberty is perfectly compatible with civil servitude (Calvin, 1993:651-52).

Calvin's theology, rooted in civil order and the consistency of the biblical text, is unable either to live with "the shadows," as Stroup suggests, or to abandon the literal temporal interpretation of submission in favor of the literal temporal interpretation of liberty and freedom. Calvin's theology makes spiritualization the primary hermeneutical lens for envisioning liberation and interpreting biblical texts on liberty and freedom. Calvin's intention here was, as Frye suggests, "to make clear the saving meaning of God's word." But in doing so Calvin may confirm Stroup's (1990:164) insight that "Calvin wants the text to say more than it does. And when the text refuses to do so, Calvin provides the missing material." Stroup's final assessment of Calvin, mentioned above, is telling. He asks "whether Calvin's theology is least compelling precisely at those points where his theology leads him to say more than the text does" (Stroup, 1990:165).

Whether this is true or not will be left to the work of Chapter Five, but for now it is important to emphasize the degree to which Calvin's spiritualization of liberty texts in his reconciliation of authority and liberty in the Bible has been crucial to later racist logics that use this process to emphasize submission and deemphasize liberty (Harvey, 2016). It should also be noted that this text reception history presents a primary stumbling block to inclusion of liberationist interpretations within the evangelical tradition that might have forestalled racist logics within the tradition. If liberty and freedom can be moved via a connection with a spiritual theology to human interiority and eschatological hope by an exegetical move, then the biblical text cannot support an earthly liberation, and racist logic has at its disposal the tools of subjugation.

Thus, there seems to be real potential in Calvin's exegetical method and conclusions to support racist logics. He merges a theology of spiritual liberation with a theology of earthly submission to limit the text's impact on the question of liberty and strengthen its impact on questions of earthly authority and submission. Likewise, his use of synecdoche minimizes what scholars have viewed as a preference for the poor in the biblical text. So, again Calvin uses both a methodological move and a theological interpretation to limit liberty and freedom and enforce authority and submission, combining a racist primitive vocabulary with a theological focus lending truth to the racist primitive vocabulary.

### 3.2.2.6 Conclusions on racist grammar

What should be apparent, if the evidence presented above is accepted, is that Calvin does in fact evidence a set of interpretative rules that bring together his primitive racist vocabulary of hierarchy, authority and submission into direct relationship with a set of theological claims that lend to his understandings of hierarchy, authority and submission the moniker of divine truth. Among the theological categories by which these claims are advanced are providence, authority-obedience-submission, revolution and civil government and biblical revelation and interpretation leading to spiritualized readings of liberty and freedom. All of these critical moves in Calvin create a potentiality for later racist use even if Calvin does not make direct racist applications. Thus, he can be said to evidence the potential for racist logics even if he does not directly engage in racist rhetoric.

### 3.2.3 Racist narrative and performance

It must be admitted that as regards racist narratives and performance of racist acts any argument in regard to Calvin is largely an argument from silence. Calvin does not engage in direct argumentation that can be identified as racialized or racist. The documentary evidence does not indicate an interest in race as a category in his discourse. This lack of direct racist language seems to be subordinated to what Lindsey Kaplan (2019:14) describes as a preoccupation with “intra-Christian enmity” in the Reformers. Calvin seems to have no time for engaging in racial dialogue. Even Calvin’s discussion of slavery avoids racial distinctions by treating slavery more as a class-based, rather than a race-based, institution and by engaging it primarily in reference to its historical manifestations in ancient Rome.

Calvin does not own African slaves or engage in direct participation in the African slave trade. Calvin is, according to Kayayan (2013), aware of the thriving Portuguese and Spanish trade in African bodies, but he makes little use of it in his discussion of slavery and certainly does not engage in what was at the time a prevalent rhetorical debate on the inferiority of Africans in comparison to other ethnic and racial groups.

But there is something to be said, even if very tentatively, about Calvin’s silence on the issue of racial categorization and the traffic in human bodies. As Cone (2004) would



suggest, Christian theologians should speak on these issues if they are aware of them. Calvin's awareness and his deprioritization/ignorance of race as an issue might suggest not that he held anti-racist views but that racist views, categorization, and the justification of the trade in Africans was a fully reasonable set of arguments and did not require or were irrelevant to theological debate. While nothing definitive can be said in this regard, what is certain is that these kinds of discussions were not anachronistic but had been part of the theological debate since the fifteenth century, as Jennings (2010) has made clear.

That said, there seems to be little in Calvin that would conclusively support the existence of a racist narrative and there is nothing in Calvin that suggests a nondiscursive practice supportive of racist logics. The argument from silence remains speculative, at best. Ultimately it is hard to make a strong case for narrative and performative racist acts.

### **3.2.4 The conclusion of the matter: embedded racism in the theology of John Calvin**

What is suggested by the arguments above is that there are elements of Calvin's thought that could be useful to later, more clearly racist purposes. The case has been made that Calvin's theology may be seen to be in keeping with Goldberg's understanding of racist vocabulary and grammar, but these categories do not ultimately generate a racist narrative or defend engagement in performative racist acts.

Calvin's primitive vocabulary would support racist logics per Goldberg's definition, having been shown to include understandings of hierarchy, negative characterization, and exclusion. This vocabulary has also been shown to be a part of a larger theological grammar and to function in ways that are primary to it. This combination of Calvin's primitive vocabulary and theology lends the component of divine truth to claims for authority and submission within Calvin's thought. Calvin's theological engagement includes providence, authority-obedience-submission, the order of creation and the Fall, revolution and civil government, spiritualization of liberation and freedom, and an exegetical method that supports the latter. But again, Calvin does not use any of these arguments to develop a specifically racist narrative. It seems at best what could be said of Calvin is that he evidences what contemporary historians of race are calling a "proto-racist" logic (Kaplan, 2019). The understanding of proto-racism is that there are ideas that developed prior to specifically racist logics in modernity that are evident in antiquity even if they are not applied directly to racial

categories. If this categorization is allowed, then it might be possible to suggest that while Calvin does not evidence specifically racist language, he does show evidence of a theology of authority and submission, inferiority and superiority, and relational hierarchy that are typical of proto-racist logics. He also embeds these ideas within a theological framework that affects his overall theological system and lends divine justification to the categories. Thus, it is possible at least tentatively to say that Calvin at a very primitive level does evidence at least components of racist thought and does succumb, again tentatively, to Cone's assessment of embedded racism. This will become even more evident as continuity and divergence of these ideas are examined in Edwards, Hodge and Henry.

### **3.3 Jonathan Edwards and racist logics**

By way of continuity, it is reasonable to ask to what degree Jonathan Edwards, the great eighteenth-century North American theologian and religious philosopher, can be said to be an heir to the sixteenth-century continental European theology of John Calvin. According to George Marsden (2003:4), "Edwards was loyal to the theology inherited from the seventeenth-century Puritans and their continental 'Reformed,' or Calvinist, counterparts and he was pivotal in the emergence of international evangelicalism in the eighteenth century." Likewise, Minkema (2011:242-43) says,

He (Edwards) is an exponent of the Reformed, Puritan theological and pietistic framework that prevailed in New England since settlement and owed so much to Calvin. Yet from the beginning of colonization, significant divergences—including New England's intramural ecclesiastical experimentation with a 'Bible Commonwealth' and the emerging revival culture that heralded modern evangelicalism—were already evident, divergences that Edwards perpetuated and amplified even while hewing to certain core Calvinist teachings.

If Marsden and Minkema are correct, then Edwards does perpetuate certain core values held by Calvin while also innovating on those values. But simply stating that Edwards shared values with Calvin is not enough. This project must also affirm that Edwards perpetuated the proto-racist distinctions of Calvin within those areas that the two agreed on and that he also showed either racist or proto-racist tendencies in those areas where Edwards differs or where he innovates, because, as Minkema says, there are "significant divergences" in Edwards' theology. It is important to understand whether the divergences change the assessment of Edwards either for better or worse in terms of racist logics.

Edwards' own historical context also bears on the discussion, particularly to the degree to which race and racial diversity were so intimately a part of his life. Unlike Calvin, who was largely isolated from direct contact and concern for persons of non-European descent, Edwards had direct contact with African slaves and a substantial part of his ministry was spent as a missionary to Native Americans in Stockbridge, MA. This means that race and racial diversity were more directly a part of the experience of Edwards than of Calvin.

Edwards is also the first theologian in this study to be clearly working within a modernist Enlightenment frame of reference. This is particularly important for this study because this is the first period on which there is agreement by contemporary scholars that racist ideologies exist in their most readily identifiable form (Snowden, 1970).

All of this suggests that any assessment of Edwards should be easier simply because there are more points of contact with the modern phenomenon of race than with Calvin. Approaching Edwards from a textual basis, however, is made somewhat more difficult because his literary corpus, though less extensive than Calvin's, also is less systematic. Of all the theologians evaluated here Edwards is the only one not to have produced a work of systematic theology. This study will, as with Calvin, follow the lead of the extensive secondary literature, while also favoring those primary sources derived from Edwards' time at Stockbridge. This includes his sermons to his Native American congregation, letters referencing his work among Native Americans, and his theological works emerging from this period, specifically *The Nature of True Virtue* and *Original Sin*. There will also be references to the scant primary text documents related to slavery. We will diverge from these documents where the secondary literature suggests it is appropriate or necessary to do so.

As stated above, the analysis below will look at both points of agreement and divergence with Calvin and will also evaluate a few areas of thought that are unique to Edwards. This will again be done following Goldberg's understanding of the components of racism: vocabulary, grammar, narrative, and performance.

It must also be stated that, as with Calvin, there are a number of ways in which subsequent generations have viewed Edwards that might suggest a different approach than the one taken by this study, but this generally reflects a failure on the part of scholars to deal adequately with the materials focused specifically on race. The reality is that even given all the factors and points of intersection mentioned above between Edwards and the question of

race, very little scholarly work has been done in this area. This study aims to fill that void and so it will remain distinctly focused on Edwards' discursive output and its potential use in furthering racist logics. This is not to suggest that there might be elements of Edwards' works that could be utilized to undergird anti-racist theology. That part of Edwards' legacy will be revisited in Chapter Five. With that in mind, it is now possible to begin the analysis of Edwards by asking whether he evidenced components of racist logics at the level of vocabulary.

### **3.3.1 Vocabulary**

Edwards shares Calvin's use of language that affirms hierarchy, negative characterization of groups, and a language of exclusion. This vocabulary is not only directed at class, gender, and religion but is also at times focused on race.

#### **3.3.1.1 Hierarchy**

There is in Edwards a disposition toward the maintenance of hierarchy and the requirement to maintain one's "place" or "station" in life. Marsden (2003:3) places Edwards well within the eighteenth-century British cultural milieu. Marsden writes:

Eighteenth-century Britons viewed their world as monarchical and controlled by hierarchies of personal relationships. On both these counts, their assumptions were almost opposite of those of most Westerners today, who tend to think of society as in principle egalitarian and in fact controlled by impersonal forces. Eighteenth-century British-American society depended on patriarchy. One's most significant relationships were likely to be vertical rather than horizontal.

Likewise, Jon Pahl (1993:62-71) makes a strong case that Edwards substitutes an understanding of the spontaneity of God at work in the Northampton revivals for an ever-increasing hierarchical and ordered society. Pahl insists that this hierarchical bent had political implications within Edwards' theology.

Edwards affirms the idea of inferiority and superiority in human relationships and continues Calvin's idea of a dual bond of duty between superiors and inferiors, governed by the law of love without denying the deference due to superiors by virtue of their position.

Love will dispose to sustainable carriage between superiors and inferiors ... it will dispose children to honor their parents, and servants to be obedient to their masters, not with eye-service, but in singleness of heart; and it will dispose masters to exercise gentleness and goodness toward their servants (Edwards, 2000:9).

He says further that humility “leads also to a meek behavior toward men, making us condescending to inferiors, respectful to superiors” (Edwards, 2000:15). While Edwards’ language seems to affirm the need for loving relationships, and the focus in the texts quoted is on the way love sustains the social order, what is in view is still, as Marsden suggests, a securely hierarchical society. Edwards’ argument also sustains the concepts of superiority and inferiority in spite of its suggestions for ethical treatment of inferiors.

Edwards also sustains a racialized view of hierarchy. In a letter to William Pepperrell regarding the education of Native American children, he considers one of the benefits of education to be “that they would learn to respect their superiors” (Edwards, 1751a:135) The reference is not to adults but to the English and those of higher class and station.

Per Pahl’s (1993) arguments, Edwards sees this hierarchy of inferiority and superiority as necessary for order, which, as in Calvin, reflects God’s intended order in nature. Edwards insists that “there is a beauty of order in society . . . when the different members of society have all their appointed office, place and station, according to the several capacities and talents, and everyone keeps his place and continues in his proper business” (Edwards, 1980:35).

Edwards clearly establishes or perpetuates a hierarchical structure which meets Goldberg’s definition of a primitive category. The fact that it occurs in direct reference to a racial group is even more critical although not necessary for Goldberg at this level of distinction. What is important is that Edwards distinguishes between inferior and superior persons and implies an exclusion that if applied to racial categories, which Edwards seems to do, can fuel racist logics of superiority and privilege.

### 3.3.1.2 Negative characterization

Negative characterization, when it functions as a form of classification, would meet the definition of a primitive term for Goldberg. Edwards, during his time in Stockbridge, does engage in negative characterizations based on race in his writings about the Native

Americans. He clearly sees these characteristics as inherent in the group and not just an incidental occurrence in individuals.

Among other things, Edwards refers to Native Americans as savage, unclean, ignorant/stupid, uncivilized, wild and unhappy. In a letter to Sir William Pepperrell, he states that his end in evangelizing and educating Native American children is “in view of leading them to renounce the coarseness, and filth and degradation of savage life, for cleanliness, refinement and good morals” (Edwards, 1751:134). He also characterizes the Native American nations as “the dark parts of the continent” in a letter to Joseph Paice (Edwards, 1751/52: 141).

In all fairness he does describe the Dutch in the New York colony as “exceeding ignorant, stupid and profane.” But even here the baseline of comparison is the “savages of our American desert” (Edwards, 1751:129).

The secondary literature on Edwards does on occasion make reference to his use of negative characterization but generally only in passing and rarely specifically directed at connecting it to a racial attitude. The topic usually emerges in articles that intend to characterize Edwards as progressive in his views toward the natives “for his time” (see Armstrong, 2005:19-31 and Rachel Wheeler, 2003:736-765). These arguments will be taken up in more detail below. But for now, it is enough to suggest that regardless of any proof that Edwards was “less” racist than other pastors/theologians of his time it does not diminish the fact that his language, directed at Native Americans as a group, in fact constituted negative characterization of an entire racial group.

### 3.3.1.3 Exclusion

Likewise, Edwards’ language is exclusionary. Like Calvin, Edwards distinguishes between the regenerate and the unregenerate, the elect and the reprobate. Edwards, faced with Native religions, does not take an inclusivist position. Edwards instead sees native religions as devoid of real truth and derived from demonic origins. Any bit of truth or similarity between native religion and Christianity is the remnant of divine revelation dating back before the Flood. But this remnant had clearly been corrupted by the devil. (For a discussion of this “Prisca theology” in Edwards, see Beck, 2006:23-33). Thus, even the truth in Native religion

is corrupt and excludes them both morally and spiritually from any relationship to God's elect people.

Edwards argues that Native Americans as a people have been excluded in the past from the grace of God and have lived in a state of darkness, ignorance and unhappiness. Edwards ascribes many of the negative traits mentioned above as directly related to the distance at which the providence of God had placed them from Christ (Edwards, 1750/51:1000). Edwards' rhetoric also seems to suggest that the English are the elect, who, in the providence of God, are called to deliver the Native Americans from this state of ignorance and unhappiness (Edwards, 1731a:702).

Apart from the notion of religious exclusion, Edwards insists on a cultural exclusion as well. It might be better, perhaps, to suggest that Edwards equated inclusion within Christianity as requiring or inculcating an adaptation of British cultural norms and an abandonment of Native American culture. Thus, exclusion and inclusion become predicated on acculturation.

Edwards requires, as a precondition to a true understanding of God, that Native Americans must learn to read the Bible in English (Edwards, 1751b:976). He attributes this to the inadequacy of Native languages, stating, "their own barbarous languages being exceeding barren and very unfit to express moral and divine things" (Edwards, 1751c:131).

Beyond their ability to comprehend religious matters he sees the English language as civilizing. "(B)eing brought to the English language," he argues, "would open their minds, and bring 'em to acquaintance and conversation with the English, and would tend above all things to bring that civility which is to be found among the English" (Edwards, 1751c:131).

Edwards connected inclusion in God's kingdom with the civility evident in English culture and not in Native American culture. He viewed the negative traits of Native culture as emerging from their prior exclusion from the election of God. In this way notions of religious exclusion merge with cultural superiority in Edwards' estimation of Native Americans as a hereditary group. While religious exclusion remains a religious category in Calvin, it becomes caught up in a history of racial and national redemption that features the English as elect and the Native Americans as reprobate, uses that history to explain deficiencies in Native language, culture and morality, and ultimately expects acculturation

into English culture, if not as a requirement for religious inclusion, at least as an expected outcome.

#### 3.3.1.4 Conclusion of vocabulary

If what is presented above is accepted as true, there seems to be good reason for suggesting that there is evidence of racist vocabulary in Edwards. There is a difference in the solidity of the assessment when one moves from a consideration of Calvin to a consideration of Edwards. Calvin's use of hierarchy, negative characterization, and exclusion cannot be directly tied to specific race-related conclusions. Edwards, on the other hand, applies these categories directly to a specific racial group and therefore is more easily assessed as offering categories that support racist logics. Edwards' negative characterization of Native Americans, his insistence on categories of superiority and inferiority, his call for individuals to observe their proper place and station, and his exclusionary language that treats Native Americans as deficient in character because they have not aspired to either Christian religion or to English language, manners, culture and habits, all point to a view of Native Americans as racially and culturally inferior and English Christians as superior spiritually and culturally. While Edwards offers hope of the elevation of Native Americans as a group if they turn to Christ, this elevation comes only when it is attached to acculturation. Beck's (2006:26) assessment following Wilson Kimmich seems to ring true here: "Edwards' attitude toward the Indians was, for the most part, that of a typical eighteenth-century European: paternalistic and superior." Thus, it seems at least reasonable to posit that Edwards does exhibit a racist vocabulary that includes an understanding of hierarchy, negative characterizations, and exclusion tied directly to a racial group.

#### 3.3.2 Grammar

If it is accepted that Edwards exhibits a racially directed vocabulary of hierarchy, negative characterization and exclusion, the next step in this analysis is to determine whether there are points of theological arguments, and in Edwards' case philosophical arguments, that undergird this vocabulary and are able to be viewed as a racist grammar underpinning a racist logic. In order to show continuity and discontinuity with Calvin, the doctrine of providence, Edwards' theological arguments related to authority-submission-order, and Edwards' views



on civil government and revolution will be considered first. The study will then move on to examine ideas that are unique to Edwards and pertain directly to the question of race and racism. This will include Edwards' theology/philosophy of knowledge, his assertion of an eschatological manifest destiny (millennialism), an examination of Edwards' views on aesthetics, beauty and benevolence, as well as his prioritization of the spiritual over the material. The first three categories are suggested by the analysis of Calvin above; the theology of knowledge, eschatological manifest destiny, and prioritization of the spiritual is suggested by the secondary literature on Edwards; and an examination of Edwards' theories of beauty, aesthetics, and benevolence are suggested by Cornel West's study of discursive arguments that fed racist ideology in the Enlightenment.

### 3.3.2.1 Providence

It is important for the sake of this study to ask whether Edwards continues to maintain a view of divine providence that is deterministic of human disparity and hierarchy. The short answer is yes, but within a very different formulation of the doctrine.

Both Calvin and Edwards would agree that providence is more than a set of natural laws that God has put in place and then left to work on their own. Calvin's view might be compared to a cosmic chess player moving pieces on both sides of the board at a distance toward his desired strategic ends. Why God made the moves he did, what moves he will make in the future, and how the moves he made in the past might be interpreted are all lost to the hidden counsel of God. But what was certain was that everything that happened, happened because of God and should be accepted.

While Edwards would have concurred with Calvin's conclusions, his theological description of providence is significantly different. Edwards believed that the connection between God and his creation is relational and that this relational connection undergirds the doctrine of providence. This idea of a relational connection between the creator and creation is derived from Edwards' understanding of the relational Trinity, his notion of participation, emanation and remanation, and his notion of continuous creation.

Gerstner (1991:1:285) summarizes the intimate connection between the doctrines of providence and creation in Edwards' thought. According to Gerstner, "creation and providence are the same in Edwards' thought. Creation is merely the first time that God

brought something out of nothing. Providence is the subsequent times. Continuing creation is his doctrine of creation and we might say that continuing creation is his doctrine of providence.” Providence is the continuing creative act of God on which the creation is totally dependent for its continued existence.

Edwards also sees the creation and the continuing creative act of God as connected relationally. God is no distant chess player in Edwards’ thought. As Delattre (1991:76) points out, Edwards builds his ethics and much of his theology on the idea of humanity’s participation in God. This participation is framed as a relational connection. Edwards in fact goes so far as to suggest that creation is an enlargement of God’s own self. Thus, there is an intimate connection between creator and created that is preserved in the constant work of continuing creation. This is what Delattre (1991:90) means when he claims, “the process of continuing creation is represented by Edwards in this image of a cosmic flow of divine fullness in emanation and remanation.” There is a back and forth between the creator and the created as God extends himself through his providential acts and the creation responds in an intimate recognition of the glory of God.

There are three very important components to this relational notion of God’s providence. First, the purpose of everything that occurs within the providence of God is the glory of God. Humanity, creation, and human history are all continually created in and for the glory of God.

Second, humanity exists as a relational extension of God. Thus, God’s providential involvement in the world takes place through this relational connection. God’s involvement is emanate and personal. God is not a master chess player moving pieces on the board. God is directly connected to those on whom God’s providence acts. Edwards’ view of providence is far more personal and intimate than Calvin’s.

Third, creation’s connection to God, the emanation and remanations that bind the created to the creator create an extreme dependence of the creature on the creator. The doctrine of continuing creation further heightens this dependence by making the preservation of humanity dependent on God’s continuous creative act which is equal to God’s providence.

This notion is deeply connected in Edwards to his understanding of the relational Trinity. As Henry (2011:406) insists, “God creates a world that reflects his own perfection. Since God has lived in Trinitarian communion, his creation reflects the divine nature by also

living in relational community.” Thus, Edwards envisions the connection between God and creation as reflective of the connections within the Godhead.

But what of those who are not connected through regeneration to God in this relational way? This remains a problem for Edwards’ theology that he does not seem to resolve. The reprobate are still acted on according to the providence of God but this action is an external action of God, not the internal connection and influence that God has with the elect. Edwards describes this in terms of infusion and coercion. God’s will is infused in the elect but God’s will is coerced in the reprobate. But again, this description at times seems to be out of sync with the rest of Edwards’ views on providence (see Pahl, 1993).

So, while Edwards’ conception of providence differs from Calvin’s it still maintains the determinism of Calvin, and while Edwards avoids assigning culpability to God for conditions like poverty and slavery, ultimately, he affirms that all human conditions were from God and must be accepted. Minkema agrees that Edwards’ doctrine of providence “outdoes Calvin’s concerns to preserve absolute divine sovereignty and human dependence” (Minkema, 2011:245). When one adds Edwards’ views on hierarchy and order to this emphasis on sovereignty and human dependence then all events occurring within the providence of God require a submissive acquiescence.

This is demonstrated clearly in Henry’s study of Edwards’ views on property rights (Henry, 2011:401-420). Henry’s primary argument is that personal property and wealth are gifts bestowed on individuals by the providence of God. Similarly, the lack of property is also a part of God’s providential act. According to Henry, the idea of providence was critical to Edwards’ defense of personal property rights.

Likewise, Gerstner (1991) points out that providence in Edwards is synonymous with God’s distributive justice. As is clear from our discussion of this concept in Calvin, distributive does not mean equal. Edwards shared Calvin’s view that inequality could exist within the justice of God.

Edwards also differs significantly from Calvin in relation to how he views the use of history to map the providential work of God. Ronald VanderMolen (1978) charts the changes in the use of history from Calvin to Anglicanism to early Puritanism. According to VanderMolen (1978:30) Calvin “denied the validity of human judgements (as regards God’s providential will) based on historical obscuration.” Calvin saw no credibility in those who

sought to use history as a guide to the providence of God. Calvin kept historical events shrouded in the hidden counsel of God. Early Puritans, on the other hand, were not content to allow the providence of God to remain hidden but insisted that “God’s disposition and intentions in historical events are not limited to what scripture records; instead, the ordinary course of history becomes the revelation of God’s judgement” (VanderMolen, 1978:82).

Jonathan Edwards shared this belief with the larger Puritan tradition. It is this approach to providential history that allowed him to speculate on the spiritual history of Native Americans. According to Edwards, after Christ’s ascension Satan was forced to flee the known world for the more uninhabitable regions of the north and he took with him his own followers which included the Native Americans who ended up in North America. Likewise, God in his providence led the English to colonize North America in part so that they might evangelize the Native Americans (Edwards, 1750/51c: 1003). God, Satan and other spiritual forces were at work in the events of human history.

What then is to be made of the differences in Calvin’s and Edwards’ views of providence? First, Edwards’ relational explanation for providence does not alter the deterministic nature of the doctrine. He remains as deterministic as Calvin. Thus, human conditions including poverty, slavery and other forms of inequality continue to be intimately intertwined with the will of God and the requirement for patient endurance is maintained as well. Second, far from exonerating Edwards from racist use, his differing views on history actually provide him with the vehicle to narrate a history of Native Americans that framed them as demonic and savage and that supported the British colonization as the providential will of God. Thus, Edwards’ doctrine of providence contains the same basic language of passive submission and inequality as Calvin’s but also is employed in support of a racist account of Native American history and British colonialism. While Calvin’s views allowed for the suppression of individuals according to class, gender, and vocational position, Edwards’ doctrine is expanded to include the histories of hereditary groups described in racist ways. Thus, providence in Edwards, as much if no more than in Calvin, functions as a theological truth that supports racial distinction, inferiority, inequality and passive submission.

### 3.3.2.2 Authority, submission and order

It has already been made clear from the discussions of authority and hierarchy above that Edwards did not deviate from Calvin's ideas in this regard. Marsden (2003), Pahl (1993) and other Edwards scholars would affirm the admiration for submission to authority in Edwards. But it is also important to note that Edwards' view also moves beyond that of Calvin.

Edwards sees authority and submission as necessary to the maintenance of proper order. Order for Edwards is paramount. While the idea of proper social order in Calvin may be seen as supported by an obligation of obedience to Scripture, Edwards provides a far more metaphysical defense. In *Nature of True Virtue* Edwards argues that creation participates in God's own self. This participation reflects the divine. The beauty of God, and by extension the beauty of creation, rests in God's harmony, evidenced in the rational Trinity and God's order. The world as an extension, and through its participation in God, should therefore reflect the order and harmony of God. This social order, realized through relationships of inferiority and superiority, is part of God's natural design (Edwards, 1980). Thus, for Edwards, order is part of the imprint of God on human society providing for humanity's good. Ideas of authority, subordination, place and station are thereby wedded closely to the person of God. This infuses far more divine authority into Edwards' ideas of social stratification than exists in Calvin. For within Edwards' thought, order is mandated by the divine *person* while in Calvin it is mandated by the divine *decree*.

Thus order, harmony, authority, inferiority, and superiority all are codified within Edwards' theological system as direct attributes of God's own person. While Edwards may spend less time on the practical outworkings of these ideas, they do remain central to questions of station and place within his worldview.

What should be apparent is that Calvin has found a way to make order an aspect of the doctrine of God and to extend that order to humanity through notions of authority, inferiority and superiority. Thus, he brings together ideas inherent in racist logics with the doctrine of God to create a truth claim that is deeply embedded and dependent on his theology and creates the opportunity for its extension to racist logics.

### 3.3.2.3 Civil government and revolution

Edwards' views of civil government are best summed up by Jon Pahl (1993): "But Calvinists undoubtedly loved order at least as much as they loved freedom, and this logical side of

Calvinism, the side inclined to social stability, order and hierarchy, has remained largely unexplored in recent American studies.” This gap, as regards specific studies of Edwards’ views, is a real shortfall in Edwards scholarship. Gerhard Alexis summarizes aptly the state of scholarly opinion as it relates to Edwards:

Very little, has been the general view. Herbert Schneider thought Edwards ‘surprisingly blind to the political philosophy of the Holy Commonwealth.’ An historian decides that ‘he was a theologian and a mystic, and cared little about political matter.’ (He *therefore* cared little?) H. Richard Niebuhr, in his attempt to trace the changing meaning of the kingdom of God in America, concludes that ‘Jonathan Edwards seems scarcely to have been aware of the political problem.’ And if we did not know Perry Miller better, we might decide that he had joined this critical chorus: Edwards and Chauncy, he writes, ‘conducted their great debate with practically no reference to any theory of society or any function of the state.’ (But before long the typical Miller signals are there. ‘In Edwards, social theory *seems* conspicuous by its absence,” and ‘Edwards’ attitude toward society, *it has been generally concluded*, was detachment or downright indifference.’) (Alexis, 1966:329).

Alexis’ own view is that “except for the occasional piece, like a funeral sermon for a magistrate, Edwards writes as though almost totally preoccupied with ‘things of religion,’ civil matters neither constituting a real problem nor possessing vital interest” (Alexis, 1966:329).

But it would be untrue to suggest that Edwards has no theory of the social. Caleb Henry (2011:401-420) points out that Edwards did in fact develop a theory of human society based on his interactions with John Locke. He maintains that,

Edwards’ relational ontology gave Edwards a solid foundation for his political thought. Man’s instincts drive men toward society and politics, while his relational nature provides (or at least points toward) the natural laws that should guide the society and regime more specifically. Edwards believed that providence could resolve the tension between the communal demands of natural law and the individual’s self-interested natural right to property (Henry, 2011:402).

But this “theory of the social” seems to be advanced in the interest, not of a true social ethic, but more as a theoretical answer to Locke’s epistemology. It does seem to address the tension between communal and individual rights, but offers little that would set it in opposition to Calvin’s pragmatic and exegetical reflections on civil government.

In fact, Edwards’ exegesis of Romans 13 in the Blank Bible (Vol. 24) is instructive at this point. Edwards spends more time in discussing his understanding of original revelation

and affirming that civil government is a natural law, including the idea that it was taught of God in antiquity as part of the original revelation and given even to the “heathen” nations. But, while the focus in Edwards shifts from pragmatic exposition to the conception of civil government within a redemption-historical context, Edwards does not stray from Calvin’s pragmatic conclusions. Civil government is still “ordained of God” and the requirement to honor civil government remains intact in Edwards’ thought. Edwards does not, however, develop his theory of government and so avoids questions like submission to tyrannical regimes. However, Edwards’ exegesis does, like Calvin’s, support submission to authority. Thus, it would be difficult to imagine Edwards’ views on the relationship of private persons to civil government as diverging significantly from Calvin’s.

But what Edwards lacks in pragmatics he makes up in theological innovation. Edwards places his hierarchical view of government into conversation with his view of divine monarchy. When it is considered that Edwards held that the created order and divinely ordained institutions reflected the nature of God, his views of divine monarchy bring into view the extent of civil authority as a divinely appointed institution. Thus, the sovereignty of God within the divine monarchy becomes conflated with the sovereignty of government in the carnal world, again with reference to God’s reflected order in God’s creation.

This links directly to a secondary topic. While Edwards has no theory or ethics of revolution, most scholars believe he would be opposed to it on the basis of his views of order outlined above. But he does develop a theory of passive submission within his concept of the divine monarchy, where the sovereign is owed complete submission, and rebellion is a sin. By extension, revolution against God’s ordained governmental powers would be viewed as rebellion against God and God’s order. Thus, it is highly unlikely that Edwards would have supported civil rebellion or revolution and certainly not on the basis of class or race revolt. (For discussion of Edwards’ view of divine monarchy see Gerstner, 1992, II:44).

So, what does this say about Edwards’ theological grammar of civil authority when applied directly to the question of racial equality? First, Edwards so trivializes the question in relation to religious matters that he risks minimizing the theological significance of any question of political import, including racial, ethnic or class inequality. This issue will be discussed in more detail below. Secondly, Edwards carries forward Calvin’s hierarchical and submissive views of civil society and strengthens it theologically through his understanding

of divine monarchy and the sovereignty of God. Thus, the idea of submission to governmental authority becomes intimately connected to the theology of divine sovereignty and elevated to divine truth. This responsibility of dual submission to God and to human superiors further creates the possibility for codifying submission within race-based systems.

#### 3.3.2.4 Edwards' philosophy of knowledge

Edwards' chief epistemological pronouncement is that there is no thought "without external ideas immediately impressed by God" (Edwards, 1714d). He argues that knowledge comes from revelation and that humanity without this revelation would exist in a state of barbarism (Edwards, 1722:350). In fact, all those who lack the knowledge of God dwell in a state of barbarism that is inferior to those who have the revelation of God.

From this doctrine of knowledge Edwards proposes two imaginative, and highly negative, views on the existence and distinctions of races. His first theory, already mentioned above, is that proximity to revelation in place and time determines the degree of barbarism in a people and nation.

I am of the mind that mankind would have been like a parcel of beasts with respect to their knowledge of all important truths, if there never had been any such thing as revelation in the world, and that they never would have rose out of their brutality. We see that those that live at the greatest distance from revelation as to time and place, are far more the brutish. The heathen in America and in some (of) the utmost parts of Asia and Africa are far more barbarous than those that live at Rome, Greece, Egypt, Syria and Chaldea formerly; their traditions are more worn out, and they are more distant from places enlightened with revelation. (Edwards, 1722:350).

He also saw China as more civilized because they were descendent from a people taught by Noah.

Edwards' second imaginative theory of racial diversity is that prior to the time of Christ in the Roman empire the devil held power over the people of the known world, but at Christ's ascension the devil fled the Roman world with his followers and went north, including the northern uninhabitable regions and the Americas. Edwards equates Native Americans with this satanic exodus because he says, "some of the Americans gave this account when the Europeans first came hither, that their god had led them hither" (Edwards, 1731b:815).



While Edwards' speculative theories would never be incorporated into contemporary theological discourse, these theories do exhibit some basic patterns of racist grammar that have and could be continued. First, the relationship between Christian "civilization" and "heathen" cultural "barbarism" continued in one form or another in early Western missionary movements where salvation was often associated with civilizing. Second, Edwards' theories evidence the kind of racial categorization that prevailed well into the modernist period. Edwards' belief that Native Americans, Africans, and Asians are more "barbarian" than European and Chinese is reminiscent of the elaborate theories of racial superiority and classification that emerged in the fifteenth century (Jennings, 2010) and that characterize the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the US and Europe (Carter, 2008 and West, 2002).

The intellectual, cultural and spiritual privileging of Christian "civilization," identified in Edwards' era as primarily a white euro-colonial enterprise, and the comparative ethnography of racial inferiority evidenced in Edwards' writings, seem to represent a racist grammar that positions English colonialists in a superior position over indigenous Native Americans and Africans. But in Edwards these tendencies are embedded in his doctrine of revelation, philosophy of knowledge, and his doctrine of redemptive history, tying a racist logic to theological doctrine and allowing the racist grammar to function as proof of the theological doctrine.

### 3.3.2.5 Eschatological manifest destiny

C. C. Goen (195:38) speculates, at the end of a convincing article that addresses Edwards' eschatological millennialism,

At all events, he (Edwards) gained the distinction of being America's first major postmillennial thinker. As such, he may be said to have furnished the religious philosophy for responding to the challenge of 'manifest destiny.' The importance of the religious background of the idea of progress can never be disparaged; and though direct evidence may be lacking, it is difficult to believe that Edwards' historicizing of the millennium did not furnish strong impetus to utopianism in America.

While Goen's article firmly establishes Edwards' belief in an imminent, historical millennial reign brought on by the church, it fails to examine the racial undertones inherent in Edwards' perceptions. Edwards did see the millennium as heralded by the evangelization of both the Native Americans and the nations abroad. Goen sees in Edwards an embodiment of manifest

destiny but fails to comment on the inherent British superiority that undergirds Edwards' claims. This in spite of the fact that Goen directly quotes Edwards as saying, "the most barbarous nations shall become as bright and polite as England."

Goen is correct that Edwards' vision is ultimately a benevolent one in which "ignorant and heathen lands shall bask in the brightest light of gospel truth, men shall live as brothers in a world of love" (Goen, 1959:28). (Note that the quote is Goen's paraphrase, not Edwards' actual words). But Goen's work lacks a critical analysis of power which underlies Edwards' views about the salvation of the Native Americans and other nations.

Edwards views the subduing of the nations as part of the providential will of God for the English church in America. "All things are subordinated to the redemption and happiness of the saints," Edwards in fact insists, "that not (only) is their Redeemer set over all things, but they are set over all things and shall reign over all things in and with him. They shall reign over all things as sitting with Christ on his throne" (Edwards, 1731c:702)

Edwards' language of subordinating and subduing the nations is a central part of his discourse on evangelization. But he also sees political advantages in the Native American mission that ties missionary endeavor directly to the project of colonization. Edwards makes this political angle clear in a letter to Joseph Paice:

The English have not only greatly failed of their duty in so neglecting there the instruction of the Indians but we have been extremely impolitic and by our negligence in this matter have brought the whole British America into very difficult and dangerous circumstances. . . . While we have been asleep, our most dangerous and inveterate enemies, the French, have been aware; they have discerned and taken advantages which we have overlooked (Edwards, 1751/52: 141)

When one considers the overt colonial political agenda along with a program of evangelism that characterizes those without the gospel as not only intellectually lacking in spiritual truth but also in proper 'civilized' behavior, and then combines this with a triumphal millennialism, one gets a picture of white colonial dominance and the subordination of nations.

Setting aside whether Edwards' views on evangelism are biblically and theologically correct (this after all is the work of Chapter Five) what seems to emerge is a direct agenda of subjugation, acculturation, and inferiority based on racial categorization that is itself deeply dependent on Edwards' doctrines of revelation, redemption history, providence and

eschatology. This creates a racialized argument that is dependent on a theological doctrinal grammar that also has the potential to fuel racist logics and embeds racist objectives in theological truth claims.

### 3.3.2.6 Aesthetics, beauty, and benevolence

While there are many great studies of Edwards' ethics based largely on interpretations of *The Nature of True Virtue* and *Charity and its Fruits*, they all lack the kind of critical analysis of power or racial implications envisioned in this study. (See, for example, Delattre, 1991; Holbrook, 1967; and Denaher, 2007.) Thus, what follows will examine those elements of Edwards' philosophy of beauty and virtue that have been overlooked by these scholars, while also attempting not to stray too far from the standard interpretation of the broader issues.

Edwards offers an early example of the emerging Enlightenment focus on aesthetics which Cornel West (2002) relates directly to modern racist logics. While Edwards never applies this directly to racialized discourse, the implications of his reasoning seem to point directly to potential racist applications.

Edwards' very densely reasoned philosophical treatise, *The Nature of True Virtue*, argues that true virtue consists in the love of God and God's creation—what Edwards calls “benevolence to being in general” (Edwards, 1980:3). Virtue, according to Edwards (1980:2-3), consists in beauty. But not just any beauty—a beauty of heart that can only be described as a benevolent disposition.

What Edwards hopes to achieve might be described as a hierarchy of benevolence. Within this hierarchy the most virtuous act is benevolence toward God, who is supreme being, and his created order. Ultimately Edwards' goal is to demonstrate that all virtuous acts begin and end in a benevolent disposition toward God.

The problem, however, is not Edwards' primary thesis but his ancillary arguments. In trying to place God at the top of a hierarchy of benevolence he cannot help but create a hierarchy of goodwill within humanity as well. As Edwards turns from a discussion of benevolence to God to benevolence to particular being, by which he means both humanity and the created order, he advocates for benevolence according to a superiority and inferiority of being:

One being may have more existence than another, as he may be greater than another. That which is great has more existence and is further from nothing, than that which is little. One being may have everything positive belonging to it, or everything which goes to its positive existence (in opposition to defect) in a higher degree than another: a great capacity and power, greater understanding, every faculty and every positive quality in a higher degree (Edwards, 1980:9).

Edwards goes even further to clarify the degree to which benevolence is owed “particular beings in greater and lesser degree, according to the reason for their existence and beauty which they are possessed of” (Edwards, 1980:23). Edwards not only establishes a hierarchy of benevolence based on degree of being and virtue but also on beauty.

When Edwards speaks of degrees of being he is advancing the idea that those things have a higher degree of being that work toward their “appointed ends” or are fit “to answer the design for which it was made.” “Therefore,” according to Edwards “they are good moral agents, whose temper of mind or propensity of heart is agreeable to the ends of which God made moral agents.” Add to this the degree to which particular beings possess capacity, power, and understanding and what seems to be meant by “according to the degree of its being” and “according to the reason of existence” comes into view. Those beings who serve diligently the purpose for which God created them and with respect to the greatness of their capacity, power and understanding are to be accorded more benevolence than those working contrary to their purpose and place and those of lesser capacity, power and understanding. Degrees of virtue, on the other hand, are determined by the degree to which a particular being possesses benevolence to being in general, or, put another way, to which a particular being loves God.

Finally, Edwards develops an aesthetic theory to account for what is meant by “beauty which they are possessed of” (Edwards, 1980:23). Edwards describes ideas of natural beauty as “secondary” or “inferior” in relation to the beauty of being in general, but he sees natural beauty as an important distinguisher in his hierarchy of benevolence. Edwards argues that God created natural law that has embedded in the mind of humanity an appreciation for those things which are beautiful. Conversely, humanity has a distaste for those things that are not beautiful (Edwards, 1980:32).

Edwards’ understanding of beauty rests both in the correct usefulness of the object in question, as above, and in its symmetry, form and harmony. This he applies to the human body. “So a man,” insists Edwards, “may be affected and pleased with a beautiful proportion

of the features in a face” (Edwards, 1980:33). Edwards again makes the argument that physical beauty is secondary to spiritual beauty but insists that we could not know inward beauty apart from an innate understanding of physical beauty.

But how exactly does this argument affect an assessment of racist grammar? First, it provides a hierarchy of benevolence that further positions those in power, those with intellect and those with material means over those who lack these things. It heightens the focus within Edwards’ theology on superiority and inferiority and ascribes a greater degree of goodwill to those in power.

Second, it assigns a place of greater benevolence to believers. And third, it advances an understanding of aesthetic beauty that makes what “men” view as beauty something that is inscribed on their hearts by God’s natural law. Thus, he opens the door to codifying what White Euro-Americans accept as the standards of beauty, symmetry, and form as that which is sanctioned by God. Thus, what humanity sees as physically ugly and deformed God sees in the same way. The further ascription of this aesthetic to the human body only heightens the potential for its use as a component of racist logic. Thus, an argument intended by Edwards to affirm the love of God as the only true virtue ends up becoming a logic with racist implications.

### 3.3.2.7 The priority of the spiritual

There have been several instances above where it has been mentioned that Edwards’ views on the priority of the spiritual over the material affects his understanding or focus on a particular issue. Edwards sums up his views on the priority of the spiritual in his notes on natural philosophy:

It follows that those beings which have knowledge and consciousness are the only proper and real and substantial beings, inasmuch as the being of other things is only these, from hence we may see the gross mistake of those who think material things the most substantial beings, and spirits more like shadow; whereas spirits only are properly substance (Edwards, 1714d).

Edwards likewise insists that those with “true religion have their hearts loosed from things of this world and have their hearts in heaven” (Edwards, 1751b:976); that their time in this world is short (Edwards, 1745d:74); and that the existence of the spiritual world, i.e., heaven

and hell, is the only just resolution to the problem of the suffering of the good and the blessings of evil persons in this world (Edwards, 1750/51a:979).

Few scholars, if any, would deny the degree to which Edwards elevates spiritual concerns over material and worldly concerns, and in fact a growing consensus among scholars of Edwards' biblical hermeneutic seems to be that Edwards either tended to favor the spiritual interpretation of texts (Stein, 1979:99-113) or that he favored a redemption history interpretation (Barshinger, 2009:811-29). The latter view does not seem to depart from the former given the degree to which redemption-historical interpretation in Edwards still tends to prioritize the spiritual over the literal interpretation. Edwards is consistent in his application of the spiritual over the material both in his exegetical method and in his philosophical views.

Edwards also directly maintains a dichotomy in his treatment of racial groups based on two separate views of their temporal and their spiritual existence. As regards their temporal state, it has already been demonstrated the degree to which Edwards engages in racist categorization and the extent to which he affirms English superiority over Native inferiority. But as regards the spiritual state of those Native Americans who embrace Christ there is evident in Edwards' rhetoric at least the implication of equality before God. It is this aspect of Edwards' views toward Native Americans that allows both Wheeler (2003:736-65) and Armstrong (2005:19-31) to assess Edwards as ahead of his time in terms of his views on Native Americans. But in doing so Wheeler and Armstrong almost totally overlook both Edwards' temporal rhetoric and the pragmatic, racist implications of his thought beyond a future or internal state. In this way Edwards does not move beyond Calvin and in fact may have exceeded him by giving a specific race-based dimension to this spiritual/material split.

It should be noted that Edwards also maintained a tendency to either spiritualize or completely ignore passages of Scripture dealing explicitly with freedom and liberation. The Blank Bible notes on Galatians 5 are a prime example (Edwards, 1730). In these notes Edwards omits any mention of either verse 1 "for freedom Christ has made us free" or verse 13a "you were called to freedom." His exegesis focuses instead on a lengthy discussion of the redeemed spirit and "the flesh" as references to the unregenerate nature. This seems to suggest, and most of the scholarly literature would concur, that any conception of freedom

and liberty beyond freedom from sin was not a primary concern for Edwards. This resulted in an absence of the concept in his theology.

Thus, it is the case that Edwards spiritualized texts to minimize freedom and liberty; that he held to a dichotomy between this world and the next that created pragmatic problems for marginalized groups and suggested a sharp divide between spiritual liberty and worldly subjugation; and he fully applied these ideas to a racist rhetoric aimed at Native Americans that could sound at once highly offensive and, when shifting to spiritual matters, liberative. But in the end as regards this world, like Calvin, Edwards is careful to preserve standards of superiority and inferiority, and he, unlike Calvin, does so in relation to race.

### 3.3.2.8 Conclusion to racist grammar

If the analysis above is accepted unmolested, it seems to suggest the possibility or even probability of a racist grammar inherent in Edwards' theology. This grammar is formed by connecting theological doctrine with racist/racialized argumentation. Edwards' views of providence, authority and civil government, although different, still evidence the same issues as Calvin and raise their own unique concerns. Edwards adds to this, two theories of race and diversity, grounded in an epistemology focused on the primacy of revelation, which affirms the religious and cultural superiority of Europeans and the inferiority of Native Americans, Africans and Asians. Further, he evidences an eschatological manifest destiny that weds evangelistic effort with colonial political power and undergirds them with an eschatological triumphalism. In doing so he positions White European Americans as the triumphant conquerors/redeemers and Native Americans as the conquered/rescued heathens.

Additionally, Edwards' philosophical reflections on true virtue create a hierarchy of benevolence which gives deference to those with power and suggests a God-ordained notion of aesthetic beauty that deifies Euro-American ideas of aesthetic beauty. This is made all the more problematic because Edwards also inscribes this notion of aesthetic beauty on human bodies.

Finally, Edwards prioritizes the spiritual over the material in ways that favor the passive submission of the oppressed, deemphasize or ignore biblical themes of freedom and liberation, and deprioritize social ethics in relation to personal morality. The arguments above, if accepted, seem to suggest that Edwards evidences what would easily fit Goldberg's

definition of racist grammar. By combining racist and primitive racist logic with theological doctrinal prescription Edwards has elevated racial conclusion to the level of truth claims.

### 3.3.3 Racist narrative and performance

As racist narrative, Edwards' two theories on racial diversity mentioned above would seem to meet the definition. To this might also be added his correspondence that characterized Native Americans as savage, bloodthirsty, unclean, drunkards, stupid, lazy, wild, immoral, and lacking in character. Both of these types of writings either utilize or are utilized in racist vocabulary and argumentation that is directly a part of theological and philosophical reflection.

Beyond this characterization of Native Americans, Edwards' one extant piece of writing on slavery might also be considered. The document is labeled as a letter in the WJE Online archive but it is uncertain who the recipient was or even that it was intended to be a letter. It is also very difficult to decipher in places. But the argument in the document seems to be offered *reductio ad absurdum*. Edwards seems to be suggesting that it is absurd to consider it a sin for a pastor to own slaves when those making the argument are purchasing goods generated by the slave trade. While portions of the document seem to suggest the negative nature of slave labor it is ultimately leveraged toward the conclusion that it is not a problem, moral or otherwise, for ministers to own slaves (see Minkema, 2002:24). Thus, the document is a narrative justification for slave ownership.

Given the race-based nature of slavery in the American colonies during Edwards' lifetime, his defense of the institution, along with other remarks about the differences in European and Africans cited above, it could be suggested that this document forms the basis of a racist narrative and defense by Edwards. But it is not necessary that this document be accepted as evidence of Edwards' explicit support of slavery, because Edwards himself was a slave owner. Among Edwards' documents is a bill of sale for a 14-year-old slave girl named Venus, sold to Edwards by Richard Perkins in 1731. So, in both the narrative sense and in the performative sense Edwards seems to demonstrate racist tendencies.



### 3.3.4 Conclusions on racist logic in Jonathan Edwards

To return to the primary question, the study above would seem to suggest that Edwards does show evidence of at least the early development of a racist logic. He maintains a vocabulary of hierarchy, exclusion, and negative characterization that is dependent on racial identity and assessment that are totalizing in their application to an entire group and in Edwards' mind derived from hereditary connections.

He also engages in logical arguments that seem to advance a racist grammar focused on racial categorization, aesthetics, colonial-political and religious triumphalism, a hierarchy of benevolence, acculturation and societal order inclusive of authority and subjugation. These arguments emerge and can be directly tied to theological arguments related to redemption, providence, the glory of God, creation, the nature of God, and eschatological millennialism. This direct connection between racist arguments and primitive racist concepts with theological doctrine frame the conclusions as theological truth claims. They also demonstrate a continuity of thought and an expansion of similar discourse in Calvin.

Finally, Edwards maintains a narrative discourse that is racially focused and provides a defense for the negative characterization of Native Americans, Africans and other groups. He also defends the race-based institution of slavery in the American colonies. All of these assessments are predicated on racial inferiority and European-American superiority. Additionally, Edwards participated in the institution of slavery as a slave holder. While this study is preliminary, it does seem to suggest that there is enough evidence in the primary and secondary literature to see Edwards as exhibiting at least an early, perhaps not fully developed, racist logic. That conclusion is certainly on firmer ground than any similar conclusion related to Calvin. That there are observably racist ideals embedded in Edwards' theology seems likely and so he does succumb to Cone's claims of embedded racism.

### 3.4 Racist logic in Charles Hodge

Charles Hodge, in a critique of the progressive theology in J. W. Neander's *History of the Planting of the Christian Church*, expresses his preference for orthodox, Reformed theology:

The system of the Reformers was not only a great advance upon that which it superseded, but was vastly superior to that which would now displace it. The same service which was rendered to Luther and Calvin by Augustine, may be rendered to

Neander and Twisten by Luther and Calvin. Though we would not swear by the names of these masters, we would, if the question were inevitable, prefer the system of any one of them, as a whole, to that of the work under review (Hodge 2001:115).

Hodge stands firmly in the Reformed, Calvinist tradition, even more firmly than Edwards. But, like Edwards, he was also an Enlightenment theologian shaped in part by the arguments and controversies of his era. Hodge is particularly shaped by debates on science, slavery and nineteenth-century American politics. Because of this he represents the first of the theologians studied here to deal with the question of race, fully engaged in the modernist debate and engaging it fully from a social, moral, and (pseudo)scientific basis.

Hodge, as a topic of recent academic study, has been largely confined to Reformed evangelical circles and to those interested in the history of North American fundamentalism (see Hoffecker, 2011; Noll, 2001; and Marsden, 2006). These studies have tended primarily toward biography and historiography as opposed to historical theological assessment. From a sociological perspective there have been studies that focus primarily on Hodge's "moderate defense of slavery" (see Torbett, 2000; Torbett, 2005; and Moorhead, 2012). There have been a handful of other works that address eschatology and hermeneutics.

Hodge therefore presents a problem that is somewhat different from the study of Calvin and Edwards. There is less secondary literature available to guide the current project. That said, the secondary literature on Hodge is far more directed and instructive on the question of race than is the literature on either Calvin or Edwards.

Beyond the secondary literature, Hodge's own writing is far more directly pointed at the questions under consideration here. Among the primary literature to be consider here is Hodge's systematic theology, a series of articles that he wrote on the topic of slavery and the unity of the human race, as well as his commentary on Romans. These works succinctly lay out Hodge's position on race and white supremacy in a way that is not contested by his other works. This study will focus primarily on the primary literature but will also reference secondary texts where it is valid to do so. As with the other theologians above, Goldberg's categories will also be in view.

### 3.4.1 Vocabulary

Hodge shows evidence, like Calvin and Edwards, of a vocabulary of hierarchy, exclusion and negative characterization. Like Edwards, he also filters this through the lens of a racial hereditary inferiority.

#### 3.4.1.1 Hierarchy

Hodge maintains a hierarchical vocabulary that, like both Edwards and Calvin, breaks down human social interaction into distinctions between superior and inferior persons. Any attempt to frame Hodge as an Enlightenment egalitarian would be questioned by Hodge scholars. Torbett sums up the attitude of the entire school of Princeton theology of which Hodge was a chief architect:

Politically, the Princeton theologians are not radical egalitarians, they were patriotic citizens of the American republic, but their patriotism was the patrician federalist, not the plebeian Democratic variety. They believed that a free republic could only flourish within limits. They balanced a qualified social egalitarianism with a similarly qualified elitism, a high regard for the authority of those who possessed merit, experience, education, and wealth. They balanced a qualified love of personal liberty with a similarly qualified regard for formal authority, the rule of law, strong government institutions, and strong Protestant churches (Torbett, 2005:127).

But Torbett's view that there was a "balance" will be challenged below, particularly as it relates to Blacks, both free and slaves. When it came to racial distinctions and their subsequent impact on social status Hodge clearly distinguishes between Whites and Blacks:

It would be folly to deny that the blacks are as a race inferior to whites. This is a fact which the history of the world would place beyond dispute. Whether under a process of culture extending through generations, they might rise to equality with their favored brethren, is a question which we need not discuss. It is probable in their highest development they would retain their distinctive characteristics (Hodge, 2001: loc 7675-7677).

It is of note that while Hodge will affirm, contra Calvin, the ability of racial groups to grow and improve, he does not see a real possibility of improvement in Blacks that would ever make them superior or equal to Whites. He concludes that even with much work and time "they would retain their distinctive characteristics."

There are hierarchical distinctions in class which are tied up in discussions on race in Hodge as well. He sees a real distinction and separation between wealthy and poor Whites,

suggesting that the latter harbor jealousy and as a result, poor judgement (Hodge, 2017: loc 7673). But there is, according to Hodge, more class animosity between poor Whites and Black slaves, that Hodge sees as caused by the fear held by poor Whites of losing their class status if Blacks are elevated by freedom. Hodge, moreover, sees Blacks, both as a class and a racial group, as an undesirable burden on society and says that these poor Whites are to be preferred to either slaves or “free blacks” (Hodge, 2017: loc 7825).

What is evident from the examples above, and is borne out in Hodge’s larger body of work, is that Hodge conceives of the world in a hierarchical fashion both in relation to race and class. Wealthy Whites are superior to poor Whites, and Black men and women, whether free or slave, are inferior to all Whites, including poor Whites. Thus, according to Hodge, race becomes a clearly defined marker of social status that demarcates “superiors” defined by their whiteness from “inferiors” defined by their blackness.

#### 3.4.1.2 Exclusion

Hodge’s vocabulary of exclusion also has a strong racial component. As part of what can only be described as an early argument for the doctrine of separate but equal, Hodge suggests that “all experience shows that the only chance for any race radically distinct from another to arrive at general prosperity, is that it must be kept separate and placed in circumstances favorable to its development” (Hodge, 2017: loc 7804). Hodge also opposed “intermixing” of races. His argument:

The effect of the amalgamation of distinct races is seen in the physically, intellectually and socially degraded mongrel inhabitants of Mexico and South America. In these cases the chief elements were the Spanish and Indians, elements less widely separated than the Anglo Saxon and the Negro. The amalgamation of these races must inevitably lead to the deterioration of both. It would fill the country with a feeble and degraded population, which must ultimately perish. For it is a well ascertained fact that the mulatto is far more frail than either the White or the negro (Hodge, 2017: loc. 7810).

Hodge adds that “amalgamation is contrary to the will of God.” Hodge also supports the repatriation of Black slaves back to Africa, believing that White Americans will be better off without either slaves or free Blacks.

Thus, Hodge supports what is again a vocabulary of exclusion that insists on the separation of the races, while he also affirms the dangers of amalgamation. Goldberg's (1994:98) definition, which sees racist behaviors as those that "express desired, intended or actual inclusions and exclusions, entitlements or restrictions" based on race is clearly applicable to Hodge's exclusionary language.

#### 3.4.1.3 Negative characterization

Hodge sees a hereditary continuance of race-based characteristics within "the black race" and engages in race-based negative characterization and classification of persons of African descent. Hodge sees these inferior characteristics as inherent in the race, through environmental and social factors. "The Caucasian and the Negro have existed with their present distinguishing characteristics for several thousand years," according to Hodge (1979:80). In addition to asserting general inferiority to Whites, Hodge also asserts that as a race Blacks are "ignorant, generally indolent and content to live in the poorest conditions" (Hodge, 2017: loc. 7731). Moreover, he insists that Black slaves are physically, intellectually and morally "incompetent to exercise the rights of freemen" (Hodge, 2017: loc. 7737).

He also considers African slaves to be the "weaker race" and affirms that even adult slaves have the characteristics and legal standing of minor children. In fact, he believes that because they are to be viewed as children they may be "disposed of without consent in any way consistent with benevolence and justice" (Hodge, 2017: loc 7837). Ultimately, Hodge equates these negative characteristics to the inferiority of Blacks as a race and as a warrant for White supremacy.

#### 3.4.1.4 Conclusions related to vocabulary

Hodge, more than either of the theologians considered thus far, evidences what is undeniably a racist vocabulary. Not only does he utilize categories of hierarchy, exclusion, and negative characterization, but his use is grounded in race-based language that suggests a hereditary inferiority and requires exclusion from participation in White society for the protection of the White community and the preservation of community order and White superiority. There

is nothing in Hodge's logic, as outlined so far, which would suggest that he does not comply fully with Goldberg's (1994:98) definition of "racist."

### 3.4.2 Grammar

While Hodge's theology is consistent in many ways with Calvin and Edwards, he departs from them primarily in his interactions with social questions that broaden, but rarely fully depart from, the orthodox Reformed tradition. Hodge's theological reflection interacts with racial discourse at some of the same points evident in Calvin and Edwards, including providence, authority, civil government and spiritualization. He defers from both in his views on revolution. He can also be said to expand on the Reformed Calvinist tradition. He differs from Edwards and Calvin in regard to his doctrines of justice, eschatology, and his development of the doctrine of human unity. All of these theological doctrines intersect with his arguments on race and race-based slavery, and form what has been identified above as a racist grammar.

#### 3.4.2.1 Providence

Hodge's views on providence are laid out in his systematic theology. He also addresses providence specifically in relationship to race and race-based slavery in articles in the *Biblical Repository and Princeton Review*.

Hodge differs slightly in his views on providence from Calvin in that he ascribes more to secondary causes than does Calvin and he also defines the operation of natural law with a slightly different focus. Hodge affirms a sharper distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. He ascribes the acts of God's providence to the latter and the acts of God's grace to the former. Acts of God's grace are extraordinary acts to be likened to "prophecy, inspiration, and miracles;" in these cases God's providence effects something that cannot be affected by secondary causes. On the other hand, Hodge asserts that in regard to God's providential intervention in the ordinary events of human life, particularly the lives of the wicked, "nothing is effected that transcends the efficiency of second causes." He also makes a point of suggesting that while God's grace is infused without the actions of human agents, "the ordinary acts of men, and especially their wicked acts, are determined by their own

natural inclinations and feelings. God does not awaken, or infuse those feelings or dispositions in order to determine sinners to act wickedly (Hodge, 1993:1:615).

He sees the human will operating according to what he calls the law of the mind, which he sees as analogous to the law of nature. In both cases God has prescribed the actions and placed them in motion at creation. These actions then operate within these laws, but without the need for continued guidance on God's part. God has decreed what is possible and necessary and has absolute control over the laws of nature and the laws of the mind, but they are designed to operate according to God's will without direct intervention by God. So, humanity, especially wicked humanity, can be said to function independently but also remain fully a part of the providence of God (Hodge, 1993:1:615).

Hodge is trying to distance himself from the critique of Calvin which sees the Reformer's views of providence as making God culpable for evil and making God the author of evil acts. Hodge insists as it applies to providence that:

We should be equally on our guard against the extreme which merges all efficiency in God, and which in denying all second causes, destroys human liberty and responsibility, and makes God not only the author of sin, but in reality the only Being in the universe; and the opposite extreme which banishes God from the world which He has made, and which, by denying that he governs all his creatures and all their actions, destroys the foundation of all religion and dries up the fountains of piety (Hodge, 1993:1:616).

Setting the efficacy of Hodge's claims about secondary causes aside, what seems possible, given his internal logic, is that Hodge could have postulated that race-based slavery was at the very least an evil human invention, operating from evil causes within the providence of God but as a result of the evil intent of humanity, thus making slavery an evil secondary cause for which God was not culpable and humanity was fully responsible. But Hodge refuses to see slavery or slave-holding as a sin (Moorhead, 2012:280) much less as a secondary cause. He, in all cases, sees the institution of slavery as fully within the providential will of God.

He argues that those born in slavery are not born slaves as an "accident of birth;" according to Scripture they are there by the divine will of God (Hodge, 1844:562) In fact, in a rhetorical move reminiscent of Edwards' use of history as a revelation of God's providence, Hodge speculates that "the designs of providence are already so far unfolded as to be deciphered with no small confidence. God seems to have brought the Negros to our land that,

after sustaining a state of pupillage in the house of bondage they may return as to the promised land” (Hodge, 2017: loc. 7830).

It should also be noted that Hodge holds to a belief in the potential for human improvement. Individuals and groups of people can, through effort and time, change their position within the providence of God. Torbett summarizes this position in this way:

Flexibility allowed the Princeton theologians to accommodate and excuse a degree of racial discrimination, but it also precluded their absolutizing racial differences. The Princetonians depicted individual human beings and whole peoples as fluid entities, susceptible to change for good or ill. Conceivably a race of people could be so damaged by environmental influences that they could be unfit for freedom or social equality with other races, even for a long time. In such cases, a degree of racial discrimination would be proper. This condition of inferiority need not and should not be permanent (Torbett, 2005:129).

While Torbett is not wrong about Hodge’s views on improvement, he is wrong to suggest that Hodge held out any hope of improvement in the case of the “Black race” especially in their relationship to the Whites. It has already been noted that Hodge, when reflecting on the final state of the “Black race,” even after generations of improvement, remained convinced that they would exhibit the same “inferior” character, especially in relation to the development of the “White race.” Hodge is reluctant to draw any conclusions that would suggest a shift, even hypothetically, in the balance of power between Blacks and Whites.

So, while Hodge advances a theory of providence that could have removed race-based slavery to the realm of secondary evil causes and out of the direct providence of God, he chooses instead to maintain Calvin’s views on slavery as wholly within the providence and divine will of God. Likewise, his views on the possibility for human improvement do not allow, in the case of the “Black race,” for any level of improvement that might shift the balance of power between Blacks and Whites. Thus, his arguments are directed toward the maintenance of White superiority. So, providence is used by Hodge as an explicit defense for racial discrimination of an entire people. Thus, Hodge’s views on race are drawn close to his engagement with the doctrine of providence and presented as indisputable truth claims.

#### 3.4.2.2 Authority

Hodge holds strikingly similar views to Calvin and Edwards on the doctrine of authority. This can be ascertained from both his commentary on Romans and articles on race-based



slavery in *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*. Authority for Hodge rests on divine decree and divine appointment and therefore failure to submit is a violation against God. But Hodge also modifies his position somewhat by suggesting that those in authority only hold the authority of the position to which they are appointed. So, the husband cannot exercise the authority of a king over his wife. He can only exercise that authority given to a husband. However, he does not specify what the difference in power is, and from a practical standpoint, given the requirements for submission, Hodge's distinction seems to make very little difference in the degree of power those in authority have. When it comes to submission the only exception that Hodge makes is when the person in authority requires something that God forbids. In that case Hodge says that "disobedience becomes a duty" (Hodge, 2020:405-6).

Hodge also applies his understanding of authority directly to the institution of race-based slavery. Slaves have an absolute requirement to obey and submit to their masters. This requirement is ordained of God as part of God's natural order of society (Hodge, 2020:408). In this Hodge stays close to Calvin and Edwards. Additionally, Hodge also affirms Calvin's idea of the master owing a "duty" of benevolence to the slave, which is reciprocated by a "duty" of submission on the part of the slave (Hodge, 2018: Loc. 5204). In admonishing masters to care for their slaves, Hodge recognizes their power to do as they please but *suggests*, "what men have the power to do, in virtue of the relation which they stand to others, and what they have a right to do in virtue of that relation, are two very different things" (Hodge, 1844:557).

But it also has to be noted that the injustice of the master does not alleviate the obligation of the slave to submit. This is because Hodge shares Calvin's views on the absolute requirement for submission to all authority, "whether their authority be legitimate or usurped, whether they are just or unjust" (Hodge, 2020:406). Hodge makes this point absolutely clear as it relates to slaves when he requires them to be obedient even in the face of unjust physical injury, asking the slave to consider Christ who patiently endured physical injury on the cross (Hodge, 1844:568).

Authority functions in Hodge in much the same way it does in Calvin. But the question of authority receives a more focused treatment in Hodge related to master/slave relationships. It also has to be remembered that Hodge has in mind the direct connection of

the biblical text with the institution of slavery as practiced in the United States during his era. Thus, the theology becomes embedded in specific discussions of race-based slavery in academic articles and is in view in his other theological works when he discusses the question of authority. This intermixing of theology and racial commentary, paired with specific discussions of authority, creates an identifiably racist grammar per Goldberg's understanding.

#### 3.4.2.3 Civil government

Hodge's views of civil government parallel the discussion of authority above, primarily because they are both derived from his commentary on Romans 13, which closely parallels Calvin's commentary on the same book. According to Hodge, government is ordained of God (Hodge, 2020:406), but God does not require a particular form of government (Hodge, 1851:132). If government exists it must be obeyed (Hodge 1851:133). Submission to government is also required whether it is good or bad (Hodge, 2020:4005). And finally, disobedience to civil authority will be punished by God because it is disobedience to God (Hodge, 2020:407, 414).

But Hodge's views about the purpose of government and the obligation of obedience to government differ slightly from Calvin's. For Hodge, government exists to secure civil and religious liberty (Hodge, 1851:182). Calvin has no perception of government's role in securing liberty. Whereas Calvin emphasizes the government's role in maintaining order, for Hodge it exists to promote the advantages of the ruled (Hodge 2020:414). While in Calvin obedience is absolute, in Hodge there is a sense in which obedience is limited to the degree that governmental power is also limited (Hodge, 2020:407).

But while the obligations of submission to governmental authority extend to slaves, the duties are not mutual. The government's responsibility to secure liberty and promote the advantages of the ruled only extend to citizens. Slaves are not citizens, nor do they possess the capacity to become citizens.

While Hodge's view weakens, slightly, the authority of the civil government by making that authority limited and contingent while also supposing that government exists for the good of the ruled, it does not adjust anything in relation to slavery and racial discrimination. Neither slaves nor free Blacks were citizens and these government duties and

supposed limitations did not extend to them. Thus, Hodge's doctrine of civil government advances the responsibility of human liberty while simultaneously denying liberty to Blacks on the basis of their inferior status, which made them ill fitted for citizenship. Again, there is a direct relationship between this doctrine and racialized grammars. But what about Hodge's view of revolution? Might a slave rebel?

#### 3.4.2.4 Revolution

While neither Calvin nor Edwards allowed for revolution in their theologies, Hodge did. Hodge's views on revolution are important to understand in relation to racial discrimination and slavery. They will also play a part in the constructive work of Chapter Five.

As regards revolution, Hodge believed, along with Calvin and Edwards, that any power that is currently wielded is wielded by the will of God (Hodge, 1851:134). But the power wielded by government is not unlimited, not absolute, and not indefinite (Hodge, 1851:143). In fact, according to Hodge, the Bible repudiates the divine right of kings and the doctrine of absolute power (Hodge, 1851:135).

As a result, Hodge allows for two responses to unjust laws and bad government. These include individual civil disobedience and the right of the group to revolt and overthrow the government. As regards the right to civil disobedience, the individual is free to ignore a bad law but must be submissive in yielding to the consequences of their actions. Hodge's condition under which civil disobedience is allowed is only one: when obedience to civil government requires disobedience to God, the individual is allowed to ignore the commands of government (Hodge, 2020:406).

Revolution, according to Hodge, must be the action of a group and should be exceedingly rare because disorder is far worse than bad government. But if government is failing irreparably in its duties to those it rules, then the ruled can rise up and replace either the ruler or the governmental system (Hodge, 2020:414). Hodge does demur, however, that often it is better to tolerate an evil ruler than to rebel and end up with worse (Hodge, 1844:580).

Given Hodge's views, both softening governmental authority and opening the door to rebellion, could he be creating an opening for an anti-racist theology that offers the chance

for racial minorities to fight White supremacy and structural racism? The answer, when the logic of his argument is removed from his context, is possibly, and Chapter Five will return to Hodge's argument. But since how the doctrine operates in Hodge's context is what is in view here it is important to consider Hodge's doctrine vis-à-vis Hodge's specific use of it.

As a reminder, Hodge was a federalist or classical Republican. Therefore, he believed in limited democracy and rule by an educated elite (Torbett, 2006:66-67). Thus, for Hodge, even within White society only a small class of elites would be considered competent to make a determination that revolution was the proper course of action. Since in Hodge's estimation the majority of Whites were left out of this particular right to revolt, both slaves and free Blacks would be totally beyond the ability to participate. Again, Hodge emphasizes this when he makes the point that slaves are not "competent to exercise the privileges of liberty."

It has to be noted that both the notion of liberty given to an elite group and the rights of citizenship withheld on the basis of race meet Goldberg's definition of racism (Goldberg, 1994:98), and its embeddedness in theological discourse raises it to the level of racist grammar also prescribed by Goldberg (1994:52) where there is a set of rules, in this case theological, that create a distinction between truth and falsity.

#### 3.4.2.5 Spiritualization of liberation

One might expect, given Hodge's strong advocacy of verbal inspiration and the inerrancy of the biblical text, that he might be more likely to see the Scriptures' advocacy of freedom and liberty as justification for the freeing of slaves (see White, 2009:63-87 and Sandeen, 1962:307-321). This is not, however, the case. Hodge followed the same practice as Calvin and Edwards in reading these terms in the biblical text as references to spiritual, not temporal, freedom and liberty.

One example might suffice to illustrate this point. Hodge reads Jesus' proclamation in Luke 4 that He had come to "preach deliverance to the captives" and "he must deliver his people from bondage" not as a call to liberation in this life but as freedom from "condemnation, the law, the devil, sin, or subjection to the influence of man" (Hodge, 2011:83-84). Hodge interprets the passage as spiritual deliverance and negates the literal, potentially liberationist interpretation of the text.

But this passage is also not interpreted free from any direct consideration of slavery, but is spiritualized in direct relationship to slavery. Hodge continues, “so a slave may be truly and perfectly free. He is the Lord’s freeman. And this is the reason Paul exhorts slaves to regard their bonds as if of little account” (Hodge, 2011:184).

Thus, for the first time in this study, the spiritualization of liberty and freedom is applied directly to race-based slavery with the result that slaves are told to be happy in their spiritual freedom while also content with their worldly lot. Spiritualization thus becomes a theological practice that minimizes temporal liberation and focuses on spiritual states while enforcing racial discrimination and slavery.

#### 3.4.2.6 Justice

In his systematic theology Hodge explicates God’s justice in ways that are important for the current study. While not directly tied to a racial discourse, his views still limit the possibility of using the notion of an equitable justice in God as a reason for the abolition of slavery.

Hodge views justice as judicial and distributive (administration of reward and punishment). However, Hodge’s discussion focuses almost entirely on law and punishment (Hodge, 1993:416-417). He has a lengthy discussion of the difference between God’s punishment of the wicked and his chastisement of the righteous and draws a sharp divide between the two (Hodge, 1993:419). What is important to note is that Hodge says nothing, other than a brief etymological note, about the element of equality in the concept of justice.

Hodge also wants to make two points clear. First, that humanity’s happiness is not the highest end of justice. The highest end of justice is the exercise of God’s holiness. Second, justice is never to be comingled with benevolence. The discussion of Carl Henry below will revisit this concept, but for now it is important to know that the mercy of God and the justice of God in the theology of Hodge must be completely differentiated (Hodge, 1993:419-20).

It must also be stated that in his discussion on God’s love, Hodge invokes the same idea: that human happiness is not the reason for God’s love but the love of God is a matter of God’s own delight. Hodge also insists that for God’s mercy and love to be manifest then misery is also required. He offers the latter as his answer to the problem of theodicy (Hodge, 1993:420).

While it has to be admitted that race and slavery are not a direct part of this discourse, it is not difficult to imagine how Hodge's views on justice and love, as attributes of God, might influence his views on slavery and racial discrimination. Per Hodge, the happiness or misery of the slave would never be a consideration when discussing the justice of God, nor would love and mercy, because God's love and mercy are a product of God's own will and have nothing to do with human happiness. In fact, if pushed, the misery of slavery might be seen as a necessary counterbalance to understanding God's love and blessing for others.

While these connections must be offered tentatively, they do at least seem to be logical extensions of Hodge's reasoning. Certainly, there has to be a reason that Hodge deemphasized equality in the justice of God, and given how much slavery was at the forefront of his ethical debates it seems at least to be as reasonable a conjecture as any other.

#### 3.4.2.7 Eschatology

Hodge shared Edwards' belief in a postmillennial eschatology (see Coker, 1998). He also shared Edwards' belief that the millennium would see the salvation of the Jews, the nations and a reign of peace on earth. While Hodge's eschatology lacked the Edwardsean colonial triumphalism, it retained, and perhaps heightened, the idea of human progress. What Hodge also lacked, that Edwards had, was a sense that the millennium was imminent.

This might explain, beyond the more commonplace political and denominational theories, Hodge's belief in gradualism. His belief in human progress is well documented. But progress and improvement require time and effort and must be pursued gradually or calamity may ensue. The emancipation of slaves seemed a necessary future occurrence to Hodge and certainly the millennium required it; it would be a natural step in God's redemptive history. But it had to be pursued with care and hard labor. There is no sense of immediate expectation in Hodge's view of gradualism. Hodge certainly does not have the same sense of urgency about the evangelism and training of slaves that Edwards had about the evangelism and civilization of Native Americans.

While no certain connection can be drawn between gradualism and a distinct millennial vision in Hodge, certainly it might be said that gradualism would be inconsistent with the immediate expectation of a near millennial reign. It must be noted that Hodge does link, as cited above, the Christianization and training of slaves and their return as Christians

to Africa as a part of the providence of God. To this extent it might be possible to suggest that Hodge did, after all, envision his plan of gradual emancipation and recolonization as inherent in an eschatological call to bring the good news to the nations. If this is the case then there is reason to suspect a connection between Hodge's eschatology and his racist views on gradualism.

#### 3.4.2.8 Human unity

David Torbett (2005:119-136) makes much of Hodge's defense of the doctrine of the unity of the human race. Torbett says that "despite the fact that many conservative protestants have accommodated and even encouraged racial inequalities, evangelical Christianity contains in its essence an idea that militates against racism, the doctrine of human unity. . . . A basic belief in the essential similarity and equality of all people."

But Torbett's application of the doctrine, as correct as it may be, is not the application made by Hodge. This is a fact that Torbett is aware of but seriously downplays in his argument. Hodge defines the unity of all humanity against the emerging (pseudo)scientific belief in a polygenetic origin of humanity. This theory posited multiple creations resulting in multiple species which explained the evident differences in the human race. The theory was also used extensively to defend slavery and to portray Africans as not human.

Hodge argued that multiple origins are inconsistent with biblical truth and, using a synthesis of (pseudo)science and theology, he maintained a single origin of man in Adam. Differences in races was not the result of different parental lineages. Torbett believes that this doctrinal realization pushed Hodge and the other Princeton theologians toward a view that at least was willing to acknowledge the possibility of racial equality.

There are several problems with Torbett's theory. First, Hodge does not argue against racial differences or the inferiority of the Black race; he simply finds the cause in environmental, social and moral factors. Secondly, Hodge's point in arguing a single origin for humanity is not to build a case for human equality but to defend the truth of Scripture against the challenge of polygenetic origins. Finally, as has been demonstrated above, Hodge held a consistent belief in the inferiority of Blacks and the superiority of Whites. He was arguing for a genetic link, not a means to a racially unifying theological anthropology.

In his essay in defense of a single origin Hodge makes it very clear he is not arguing for the equality of races:

There is a marked difference physically, intellectually and socially, between the Caucasian and the Malay. They are indeed one blood. They are the children of the same blood. They are the children of the same parents. They are brethren having the same nature in all its essential attributes, but separation and protracted operation of physical and moral causes, have given each its peculiar and indelible type. While therefore we joyfully admit the negro race to be bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, to be brethren of the same great family to which we ourselves belong, it would be folly to deny that the blacks are as a race inferior to whites (Hodge, 2017: loc. 7676-7677).

Ultimately Torbett's claims cannot be substantiated. Though he may be right about the inherent usefulness of the doctrine to forge racial unity, in Hodge's hands it becomes a further platform for suggesting divergence and Black inferiority in spite of common ancestry. Thus, Hodge embeds racial logic into the theological grammar of creation and anthropology.

#### 3.4.2.9 Conclusions on racist grammar

If the assessment above is correct, Hodge exhibits a racial grammar constructed by wedding theological arguments with racial and racist discourse. He marshals the doctrines of providence, authority, civil government and revelation, scriptural interpretation, justice, eschatology, and anthropology toward specific racist purposes. His arguments use both doctrine to defend racist outcomes and racist outcomes as evidence in support of doctrine. This discourse is inclusive of efforts to infer inferiority, deny privilege, and enforce discrimination on the basis of racial characterization, while at the same time explicitly affirming White supremacy. Therefore, Hodge seems to evidence a clearly racist grammar that creates a theological rationale for racist practices that are embedded in divine truth claims.

#### 3.4.3 Narrative and performance

Hodge is the first of the theologians in this study who evidences a clearly articulated racial narrative. This narrative is primarily focused on the defense of slave holding and slave holders.



It is important to note that a narrative that supports slavery, as disturbing as it might be to contemporary society, is not in and of itself a racial narrative. Slavery, as an institution, could be based on class, warfare, or criminal punishment and function purely outside of racial considerations.

What is argued here is that Hodge's understanding of slavery was race-based and that he held similar opinions of free Blacks as he did of African slaves. It has already been mentioned that Hodge viewed slavery as a necessary evil—necessary because the ignorance and dependence of Black slaves required the continuation of the institution. It has also been shown that Hodge viewed even adult slaves as equivalent to children and therefore perpetually minors in the eyes of Whites and under the law. Both slaves and free Blacks were, likewise, inferior to even the lowest class of Whites. Ultimately Whites must train Blacks over several generations to ensure their capacity to care for themselves. Even then their ability to thrive as a race required that they be removed to Africa and segregated from White society, whose superiority would stifle their long-term progress. This analysis, along with the racist vocabulary referenced above, leaves little doubt that for Hodge any discussion of slaves was also a discussion of the Black race. Therefore, the slave narrative as found in Hodge is clearly a race-based and racist narrative. These are important points in understanding Hodge's racist narrative, but it is also important to consider his views on gradual emancipation and his assertion that slave-holding was not a sin.

Hodge, in describing his own views on slavery and that of most Old School Presbyterians, notes that "emancipation was to be gradual, and attended with the expatriation of slaves." Scholars debate the motivation behind Hodge's support of the gradual freeing of the slaves (see Torbett, 2006:56-8). What seems clear from Hodge's view is that slaves could not be released from slavery because their inferior state made it impossible for them to function outside of bondage (Hodge, 1844:579). Thus, time was needed to educate slaves both intellectually and morally. By time, Hodge means generations, not years.

Hodge's gradualism tries to both preserve the possibility of improvement "of the race" while also preserving the inferiority of a racial group, in this case Blacks, and preserving the power of another, in this case Whites. Gradualist arguments have persisted beyond slavery in the United States and formed some of the logic for segregation in the Southern US and for apartheid in South Africa. As a mechanism for preserving White

supremacy, it holds up the promise of liberation and equality but always at an ambiguous future date controlled by those in power. It also attempts to disguise racist motives in a paternalistic language of compassion and uplift. This is very much the language used by Hodge in defending the institution of slavery in his day while calling for education and gradual emancipation.

Additionally, Hodge argues that the institution is not morally wrong and therefore cannot be sinful. While he requires a higher level of benevolence in the treatment of slaves and argues vehemently that slavery should not be a perpetual institution (Hodge, 1844:580), he refuses to call it a sin and he disagrees with abolitionists who were calling for the excommunication of slave holders. He argues:

It will of course be admitted that what God has at any time sanctioned cannot be evil in its own nature. If therefore it can be shown that God did permit his people under the old dispensation to be slave holders, slaveholding in itself cannot be a heinous crime. It will further be admitted that anything permitted under the old economy, and which the apostles continued to permit to those whom they received into the church, cannot be a crime justifying exclusion from Christian communion (Hodge, 1844:554-55).

Hodge's view of the morality of slavery is based on his view of the authority of Scripture. Since the Bible, as the revelation of God, allows and does not condemn slavery, slaveholding is for all times allowed and cannot be condemned. Therefore, both slavery and slaveholding are justified by God, but with the understanding that God also requires the proper treatment of slaves. Hodge holds that the duty of the slave holder "is to instruct, to civilize, to evangelize the slaves, to make them as far as can, intelligent, moral and religious, good husbands, good fathers, as well as good servants" (Hodge, 1844:580).

Thus, Hodge's narrative perpetuates notions of racial inferiority and maintains White power embedded within a disguised hope. It also gives the inherently racist institution of slavery a moral justification based on the authority of the Word of God.

It should also be noted that Hodge additionally offers justification for separatist racial unity. "Within this vast brotherhood of man there are more intimate bonds of relations. The people of one race, one nation, of the same tribe, of the same household are bound by peculiar ties and have the general obligation of love modified and strengthened by the special relationship" (Hodge, 2011:267). He, in fact, implies that this greater love for one's own race is a kind of natural law.

It is easy to see from the analysis above that Hodge has an explicitly racist narrative that is supported by an equally racist vocabulary and doctrinal grammar. Blacks are inferior to Whites, slavery is morally justifiable and slave owners, because of the inferiority of the slaves, are justified in continuing the institution. This inferiority is hereditary and is not only biological but includes the perpetuation of character traits. Thus, humanity, although unified through a common parentage, exhibits distinct classifications of races and economic classes that are characterized by relationships of superiority and inferiority, with race being the primary category of distinction.

Given that Hodge evidences a racist logic at the level of vocabulary, grammar and narrative, the question remains: does he also demonstrate a non-discursive performance? The answer is, yes. Hodge owned slaves (Torbett, 2006:70-1) and given all that he believed it is likely that he carried his views of racial superiority into his daily interactions with these slaves.

#### **3.4.4 Conclusions on racist logic in Charles Hodge**

The analysis above suggests that on every level Hodge's theology shows evidence of racist logic. Hodge has a vocabulary that supports strong elements of hierarchy, exclusion, and negative characterization that are undergirded with an explicit language of racial superiority and inferiority. He maintains a doctrinal grammar that includes the doctrine of providence, civil government and revolution, authority, spiritualization, eschatology, justice, and anthropology that weds theological reflection with race-based argumentation.

He advances his vocabulary and grammar to defend slavery on the basis of the inferiority of Africans as a racial group. He also favors a view that environmental factors shaped African inferiority while simultaneously maintaining a view of the unity of the species. For Hodge these are not only biological distinctives but they also encompass intellectual and moral differences that characterize the race. Hodge's narrative also introduces a logic of gradualism that will remain a part of racist logics beyond the slave period in the United States and globally. As a slave owner his non-discursive practice matched his discursive performance. The final conclusion is that Hodge has embedded in his theological discourse a decidedly racist logic. Thus, as regards Hodge, Cone's theological intuition is correct. But what of Carl F. H. Henry?

### 3.5 Racist logics in Carl F. H. Henry

Carl F. H. Henry is a late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century evangelical theologian and is the only theologian in this study whose career was contemporaneous with James Cone's. The height of his writing coincides with the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the United States and with the emergence of a socially conscious but theologically conservative neo-evangelicalism, of which Henry is seen by some as the principal architect. So, it should not be a surprise to find that Henry's language, or what has been referenced above as vocabulary, lacks anything approaching the explicitly racist language or even the kind of class distinctions evident in Calvin. In fact, Henry's writings make reference to the need for "racial equality," the "Black man as our brother," and the need for racial reconciliation. But despite this there is still evidence of lingering, perhaps latent, elements of racist logic in Henry's theology and social ethics that might be categorized as, for lack of a better designation, racially insensitive.

The central thesis that will emerge regarding Henry is that if Calvin evidenced a primitive form of racist development and Edwards and Hodge evidenced an explicit racism, Henry, in comparison, can be characterized as advocating a social ethic that minimizes race and creates barriers for the confrontation of white supremacy and racial segregation. By this it is meant that Henry evidences a vocabulary and grammar that in their non-discursive applications would tend toward the perpetuation of White supremacy and the advancement of racial inequality. So, while Henry's discursive works will use language more typical of anti-racist dialogue, the outworking of his theology in practical contexts has a limiting effect on racial advancement. This is true at the level of vocabulary, grammar, narrative and performance.

Engaging Henry's work at this level could be daunting. His writings are voluminous and most deal in some way with social issues. These include specifically ethical works and his six-volume magnum opus *God, Revelation and Authority*. Fortunately, he has very lengthy, consistent and clear discussions of the topics covered below so the primary literature is easy to access. This study will be primarily concerned with his systematic treatments in *God, Revelation and Authority*, and his ethical treatments in *Evangelicalism at the Brink*, *The God Who Shows Himself*, and *Social Ethics*. There will also be some reference to various

addresses made by Henry, particularly his keynote address to the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin. In order to allow Henry to provide his own assessment on the question of race, his autobiography will also be consulted.

The secondary literature is less extensive and limited primarily to confessional, conservative evangelical scholarship. That said, it will be necessary below to interact with the important work of Russell Moore (2012:877-97), James Patterson (2006:807-20), Curtis Evans (2009:245-373) and Augustus Cerillo and Murray Dempster (1991:365-79).

### 3.5.1 Vocabulary

It is important to keep in mind that Goldberg's definition of what is being called here vocabulary, but what Goldberg calls primitive terms, is not exclusively limited to the categories of exclusion, hierarchy, and negative characterization. The categories are anything, that while not inherently directed at race, operate as subcategories or latent concepts within the idea of race. This is important to realize in the case of Henry, who does not engage explicitly in any of these three categories that are so evident in Calvin, Edwards and Hodge. Henry, in fact, employs the language of racial equality, but he also uses language that seems to contradict these statements. Henry's language includes a Western, Euro-American worldview, a coded racism, a tendency to limit racial progress, and a redirected latent logic.

Henry's Western-centric worldview is connected primarily to his evangelical missionary spirit. For Henry, this Euro-American, evangelical missionary triumphalism envisioned a White missionary saving the souls of Africans and Asians. A passage from *The God Who Shows Himself* illustrates this point:

To the Congo, missionaries came preaching, teaching and healing—as did the early disciples—and as they penetrated the African bush they built churches, schools, and hospitals seeking the redemption of the whole man. In those jungles dark with fear, treachery, and witchcraft, they summoned their new neighbors in need to the high prospect of a redeemed soul, informed mind, and consecrated body—in short to renewal in the image of God (Henry, 1966:33).

The image of jungles that were “dark with fear, treachery, and witchcraft” in a passage meant to emphasize holistic ministry also implies a rhetoric reminiscent of Edwards' assessment of Native Americans and is at best ethnocentric, hyperbolic speech.

Henry also justifies the early missionary practice of a “double conversion”—one to Western culture and the other to Christianity. In doing so he advances the idea that Western European and American culture is closer to Christianity than non-Western cultures. He argues, “Western culture, unlike that of Asia or Africa, contained many Christian elements; it was therefore easier to identify Christianity with American and European than with Asian and African cultures” (Henry, 1982:5:395) In directly identifying Christianity as more inherent in Euro-American culture than African and Asian cultures he is suggesting that these cultures lack the ethical, moral and spiritual connection to New Testament Christianity that is evident in their Western counterparts. Henry never thinks to ask, as Cone does, whether perhaps there might be cultural experiences inherent in African and Asian cultures that are closer to that of the culture of the New Testament than any Western culture and that perhaps this might imply a closer connection to the central message of Christianity. He also never asks whether Western Christianity may have distorted the Christian message in ways that made it unfit for transmission to other cultures. Certainly, Henry has the requisite familiarity with hermeneutic theory to have corrected his own assumptions at this point.

But to be fair, Henry’s priorities were not focused on the question of missiological method. His primary thrust was to challenge the modernist Western tradition and present Western evangelicalism as a positive alternative. Carillo and Dempster highlight this focus:

Appalled that the Biblical world-life view no longer shaped modern (Western) cultural, intellectual, and political thought, Henry in 1946 wrote *Remaking the Modern Mind* to confront the naturalistic and humanistic assumptions underlying much of modern life. He incisively and brilliantly laid bare the philosophic and practical inadequacies of modern belief in the ultimate reality of nature, man’s inherent goodness and the inevitability of progress (Carillo and Dempster, 1991:367).

Henry’s total immersion in the Western philosophical and intellectual traditions, and a lifetime of engagement with them, seems to have made him at best insensitive to non-Western traditions or led him to value Western thought and the Western philosophical tradition as superior even in the midst of his own critique of that position.

For example, Henry’s observations and Western bias go beyond his reflections on missiology. Henry views Western logic and patterns of thought and rules of argumentation as the “universal” form in which thoughtful and reasoned debate takes place. Henry says they represent a “universal” set “of valid logical rules” that all cultures must learn and follow if

they are to “present their own alternatives logically” (Henry, 1984:198). Henry embeds this argument in a negative assessment of liberation theology.

Henry’s views are similar to Edwards’ views of the evangelization of Native Americans and Edwards’ understanding of eschatological manifest destiny. White Euro-Americans are characterized as both saviors of Africans and Asians living in ignorance and darkness and the conveyors of the universal rules of logic to which all cultures must submit their own patterns of reasoning and ways of thinking in order to think properly. While Henry would likely object to this characterization, there seems latent in these reflections a suggestion of an intellectual and moral White Euro-American supremacy, or perhaps an unevaluated White ethnocentrism.

The politics of race in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century in the United States featured a propensity toward race coding; that is, politicians who were increasingly scrutinized for using racist language shifted instead to talking about “the poor” or “getting tough on crime.” Negative comments about “the poor,” welfare and poverty in the United States replaced negative comments about Black men and women (Gilens, 1996:593-604). Blacks in the United States continued to be the face of poverty in North America and thus any negative comments about the poor were often by extension disguised references not to class but to race. Thus, race coding was introduced into American political rhetoric.

White theologians of the era, including Henry, were not beyond the use of race coding in their own work. Henry asserts that “the Christian view of life can help lift above perpetual poverty and defeatism those whose surrender to drunkenness, gambling, prostitution, and other weaknesses robs them of the basic necessities of life. Some people tend all too readily to ‘hook themselves’ on poverty as a way of life” (Henry, 1982:5:549) This association of poverty with vices suggests character defects and ignores systemic root causes of poverty, and also characterizes the poor as morally flawed.

Henry’s stereotyping goes further: “For many of the impoverished, a television set or some other luxury represents the first material necessity after shelter, food and clothing. Others splurge their first savings on expensive additional wardrobes. One may smile at such overreactions; something can be done, however, by way of guidance” (Henry, 1982:5:549). Here Henry adds to his assessment of the poor’s negative moral character a negative assessment of their judgement and intelligence. His analysis might also be said to tend toward

paternalism, not unlike Hodge's attitude toward slaves. This seems evident in his suggestion that "one may smile at such overreactions," which sounds oddly like the reaction of a parent seeing their child "play dress up" for the first time. But there is even clearer paternalistic sentiment in his suggestion that the poor need "guidance." In another passage he also implies a paternalistic dependency of the poor on the wealthy when he suggests that the poor need and desire a "viable prospect of rescue for the whole man" (Henry, 1982:5:545).

Thus, Henry characterizes the poor as morally and intellectually deficient and existing in a state of dependency that requires rescue. But Henry's negative assessments do not stop there. He also explicitly calls the poor, who are utilizing the welfare system, "idle and lazy" (Henry, 1982:5:552). While the objection might be raised that his language is more classist than racist, the degree to which poverty is synonymous with race in the imagination of White Americans should suggest otherwise, as would Gilens' work cited earlier. Thus, Henry's characterization of "the poor" can be viewed as a form of race coding. If there is any doubt that the categories of race and poverty are synonymous concepts for Henry, an early passage more directly directed at race may be illuminating:

The problem of racial discrimination can be permanently met only by Christian behavior that faces up to the ugliness of bias, the evils of immorality and delinquency, and the whole social range of problems that surrounds race feelings. The predilection for public issues over personal holiness in liberal social ethics is all the more disconcerting in view of this fact. Although liberal churchmen will throw their energies behind a public health program, they tend to remain silent about many of the personal vices; such concerns are left to the 'purity nuts' (Henry, 1966:65).

This passage describes racial discrimination as both the problem of Blacks and Whites. On the one side is the "ugliness of bias" and on the other is "immorality and delinquency" and "personal vices." Henry is not here implying that White racists are immoral and delinquent or practicing personal vices; he intends those characterizations to fall on Black Americans. This is the identical argument he makes in regard to "the poor" in his later works.

In addition to Henry's bent toward Western ethnocentrism and his use of race coding he also uses arguments that limit Black action. Henry accuses those fighting for racial justice of engaging in the "selfish exploitation of constitutional government" and not being interested in the "public good" (Henry, 1983:6:443).

Evans, in an analysis of evangelicals and civil rights, includes Henry in his assessment of the editors of *Christianity Today*'s views on the civil rights movement:



*Christianity Today* was commenced under the auspices of men (including Henry) who were not sympathetic to the civil rights movement as it had developed up to that point. From 1956 to 1960, *Christianity Today*'s editorials and articles on race took a "moderate" position. The editors called upon Christians to confront their racial biases and cease discriminating against individual blacks. Voluntary segregation was seen as a middle path between the "extremists" of the segregationist right and the integrationists left. This position placed them in opposition to civil rights legislation and the proposals of militant segregationists. However, the magazine's harsher criticisms were directed more pointedly toward integrationists than toward segregationists. The possibility of interracial marriages was deeply feared and always lurked in the background as the principal reason for the editors' desire to halt rapid social relations between blacks and whites (Evans 2009:263).

This "moderate" position, as Evans points out, worked against the interests of the civil rights movement.

Henry affirms racial justice but has a negative assessment of efforts by racial groups to effect change that benefits the groups. He is adamant that racial groups should not attempt to use legislation to prevent practices deemed as racist. He limits race-based legislation to those laws that ensure "equal rights," by which he means equal access to all racial groups. But he opposes laws that punish individuals or institutions for specific behaviors deemed by minority groups to be discriminatory. He insists that "minorities should not simply impose legal restrictions governing whatever practice they find ethically objectionable" (Henry, 1983:6:449).

Thus, Henry allows for equal access but limits both the enforcement and scope of laws intended to eliminate racial injustice. In this way he limits racial progress and preserves/protects institutional racism.

He also removes an important ally in the fight for racial justice. Henry insists that while individual evangelicals must "identify themselves conspicuously and publicly with Negroes and others in their struggle for equality before the law" he also asserts that "it is not the task of the institutional church to promote legislation" (Henry, 1967a:71-72).

Henry, therefore, limits movements toward racial equality by limiting equality to access, by limiting the actions of racial groups in regard to their advocacy, and by removing the institutional church from direct legislative advocacy. He also shows evidence of advancing previous racist logics into his thinking in regard to his approach to sexual minorities.

Henry advances the arguments of Wayne Grudem in favor of decriminalizing homosexuality but he affirms the belief that all homosexuals have character defects that should negatively affect their eligibility for employment. Setting aside the debate about the distinction in discrimination based on race and sexual orientation, this argument is similar to early racist assumptions that all Blacks were morally deficient by virtue of being Black (Henry, 1983:6:449).

In the final assessment, Henry's vocabulary of racial justice lives in tension with his Western-centric philosophy, his use of race coding, his limiting of direct actions for racial justice, and his continuation of latent racist logics. Henry, therefore, seems to advance primitive racist vocabulary even while avoiding/deprioritizing explicit conversations on hierarchy and exclusion. His vocabulary is far more subtle than either Edwards' or Hodge's. But it is not latent or precursory in the same way as Calvin's. Race continues to exist as an issue for Henry and is, therefore, evident even when not explicit.

### **3.5.2 Grammar**

It will be demonstrated below that Henry perpetuates a theological discourse that has racist potentialities. This is observable in the way his theological battles weaken his vocabulary of racial equality, in the way he continues previous racial logics, and in the way his own discursive output has the potential to strengthen racist logics.

#### **3.5.2.1 Theological battles**

Henry is fighting two primary theological battles that tend toward a weakened social ethic and, as a result, a weakened perspective on racial equity. These battles include his fight against Social Gospel utopianism and naturalism.

Henry's battle against the Social Gospel is not as much directed at liberal Protestantism *per se* but at fundamentalist isolationism which used the Social Gospel as an excuse for their social and political isolation (Henry, 2003). Henry stands at the center of these two polar extremes: isolationism with its withdrawal from the social on one end and the Social Gospel with its efforts to impose new social structures on society on the other. As an aside and a point of sharper clarification, Moore (2012:378) is correct in insisting that

Henry was not assuming a position between the Social Gospel and isolationist fundamentalism. Henry did not view the Social Gospel as part of an acceptable spectrum but considered it to be wholly outside reasonable Christian debate. For that reason, Henry would be far closer to fundamentalism than he would the Social Gospel. If a spectrum has to be drawn, Henry would be to the right of the center on this issue.

Thus, with both groups in mind, Henry critiques the lack of evangelical social action. “Evangelical Christianity,” he says, “reacted against liberal Protestantism’s concentration of effort in this area of concern by non-involvement and this withdrawal yielded the field to the speculative theories of liberal churchmen and largely deprived evangelicals of an ethical witness in the mainstream of public life” (Henry, 1966:55). This suggests the need for social action. But on the other hand, he can also argue that:

The stance of non-evangelical Protestantism had now become so anti-metaphysical and anti-intellectual that truth was subordinated to unity, theology was widely viewed as a matter of subjective preference, and in place of an absolute dogma stood an approved program of social action which—as the liberals saw it—was now the real test of genuine Christian commitment. Instead of personal evangelism and the spiritual regeneration of individuals they advocated changing the social structures by the church’s direct engagement in political controversy (Henry, 1967a:56, 57).

Thus, he suggests that both fundamentalist isolationism and liberal Protestantism’s Social Gospel are incorrect.

Henry suggests an alternative view of social involvement. This view will be shown below to exhibit a passive view of social action leading to a weak ecclesiology. There are two primary reasons that support the characterization that Henry’s position weakens his stance on racial equity and works in favor of racist logic. The first is a consequence of his direct attack on the Social Gospel. Henry insists that “evangelical withdrawal from the arena of public life came mainly in reaction to the liberal Protestant attempts to achieve the kingdom of God on earth through political and economic changes” (Henry, 1966:55). Thus, if Henry is going to build an evangelical view of social involvement, he must first dismantle the Social Gospel.

Henry’s main point of disagreement is with the Social Gospel’s replacement of personal salvation with social concern. Henry argues that, for the proponents of the Social Gospel, “direct ecclesiastical engagement in political campaigns, in civil rights demonstrations, endorsement of legislation, and advocacy of government welfare programs

become preferred means of fulfilling the church's mission in the world" (Henry, 1967a:75). Henry sees this as more insidious than just a shift in focus. Henry is concerned that the Social Gospel "substitutes the notion of corporate salvation for individual salvation" (Henry, 1967a:74).

Dismantling the Social Gospel is important to Henry's theological discourse. His strategy is both rhetorical and theological. Rhetorically, Henry identifies the Social Gospel with socialist politics (Henry, 1967a:58). Writing at the height of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, his label created an effective means of "demonizing" Social Gospel theology for a large portion of North American Evangelicals. While Europeans might distinguish between socialism and Soviet-style communism, these distinctions are never clear in American popular discourse or even the contemporary American imagination. This creates several problems not just for the Social Gospel but also for Christian social action in general. First, for those unfamiliar with the deeper theological underpinnings of the Social Gospel, it is an easy step to view all faith-based social action as part of the Social Gospel. Thus, any social engagement, including that which Henry proposes, falls subject to the accusation of being nothing more than socialist political rhetoric disguised as theological discourse. Second, this "demonization" works not only at the level of theory but is extended to method. Henry directly connects the Social Gospel to "ecclesiastical engagement in political campaigns, in civil rights demonstrations, endorsement of legislation, and advocacy of government welfare programs." The methods, therefore, in spite of the motivation or theology driving them, become deeply entrenched in Henry's rhetoric of socialism. It is of note here that "civil rights demonstrations" are among those methodologies that are singled out. Labeling becomes potentially destructive because it is akin to "dropping a bomb on a house to kill a fly". The fly is dead but the house also becomes uninhabitable.

Henry's discourse on the Social Gospel is not limited to rhetorical moves, but also includes arguments that are more theological in nature. Henry, for example, blames "the Social Gospel theologians" for deleting "the wrath of God" and "dissolving God's righteousness into benevolence of love" (Henry, 1966:55). Thus, Henry develops a sharp distinction between justice and love that affects several points in his theology and is reminiscent of Hodge. As a result, he limits definitions of justice to equal treatment under the law and tends toward the application of justice as equal punishment rather than the pursuit of equal degrees of human flourishing. His treatment of love is frequently negative

throughout his works. While justice will be treated in detail below, for now it is important to note that Henry's attempts to argue against the Social Gospel result in a crime and punishment view of justice that diminishes any use of the concept in his own perception of evangelical social engagement, and it particularly weakens any positive statements he might make on racial social equity. Thus, it preserves privilege and power, and normalizes racial, class and gender distinctions by making justice a matter of crime and punishment while discounting the work of justice in the creation of opportunities for basic human flourishing.

Henry also argues in relation to ecclesiology that the Social Gospel's "socio-political platform raises more fundamental doubts about the authenticity and uniqueness of the Church than about the social aberrations against which she protests" (Henry, 1966:70). The church, in Henry's view, loses its redemptive distinctiveness when it focuses on social action and becomes less a church and more a political party. The primary problem with Henry's argument is that it really depends on degrees. Isolationists could use the same argument against Henry's call for social involvement, arguing that any social engagement at all made the church a political party or a social service organization.

It must be noted that Moore (2012:389-96) makes an argument for a clear ecclesiology in Henry's thought. Moore insists that Henry joins the idea of an inaugurated eschatology with redemptive soteriology and discipleship to create an evangelical idea of church. But Moore also admits that this view, grounded in the "plastic" parachurch nature of the North American evangelical movement, is still a weak theology requiring an expression from within various confessional denominational traditions.

Evans (2009:265) views Henry's doctrine of the church through the latter's pragmatic pronouncements. "Put another way," Evans summarizes, "the church as a corporate body or social institution should not become involved in political and social issues. The church should, however, expound God's revealed will for the political order no less than it does for other spheres of life. Yet, the church must not seek to achieve a Christian society through political action." Evans' word seems true to the social implications of Henry's otherwise weak ecclesiology.

Finally, Henry insists that the primary role of Christianity in the world is to create "a new race of men, new creatures in Christ" (Henry, 1966:71). This redemptive work is primary, while social involvement is secondary and flows out of the work of redemption.

Henry suggests that the work of social and racial justice is incidental to the work of redemption. This incidental nature of social justice limits its impact at the level of individual engagement and relationships, pragmatically limiting its capacity, or perhaps scale, in changing oppressive systems. Evans (2009:250) is far more pointed in his assessment of how this belief was actually applied to the question of race:

Although there is much to be said about evangelical individualism, I am not convinced that it is (by itself) a sufficient explanation of their approach to race. Evangelicals have selectively applied an individualistic ethic primarily to social practices with which they disagreed. A close analysis of evangelical thought in its historical evolution indicates that evangelicals invoked a “spiritual solution” or personal conversion (in general) to social problems when solutions to these were being promoted by interest groups where values differed from their own and when it appeared that government support of such positions would challenge evangelical conceptions of the proper social order. Hence their endless refrain that legislation could not change a person’s heart precisely when others were supporting legislation to deal with legal discrimination of African Americans.

Evans’ assessment, supported as it is by his larger body of work, seems appropriately applied to Henry.

Thus, both Henry’s rhetoric and his theological discourse, as they relate directly to his attack on the Social Gospel, show evidence of racial motivation or at least a reticence to favor moves toward full equality. His connection of the Social Gospel and most forms of social action to socialism demonizes both. This demonization makes social action untenable and creates a status quo mentality that favors racist systems of power and privilege by positing inactivity as the preferable option. His focus on wrath over love furthers a social critique that is limited to equal punishment at the expense of equal quality of life, which perpetuates racial and class disparity. His insistence that the church must remain distinct in its mission from programs of social justice isolates the church from larger partnerships and prevents the church from engaging in direct social action. Thus, the church, as the church, is minimized in its ability to effect change in racist structures. Finally, his insistence on the secondary or incidental nature of social action limits any potential for directly confronting racist structures beyond individual redemptive engagement removed largely from social purpose and intention. In each case Henry, in pragmatic ways, attacks efforts at racial justice and in doing so enforces the existing White system of power.

While Henry’s attack on the Social Gospel can be seen as limiting racial advance and protecting White power, the plan he offers as an alternative has similar limitations. Henry’s

plan and the consequences of its implementation points Christian social action away from any practical program to alleviate either racial inequality or White supremacy.

Henry's plan for the church's involvement in the "social crisis" can be described as ecclesial, spiritual, moral, individualistic, apologetic, and passive. The ecclesial role is at the center of his argument. Henry begins by asking a very important question:

In an hour of widespread revolution, when political forces are reshaping the larger frontiers of modern life, the church's concern with the problem of social justice is especially imperative. But how this social involvement is properly carried out—whether by the institutional church acting in a political way, or by individual Christians conscientiously fulfilling their civic duties—is a very important question (Henry, 1964:10).

He answers his question by affirming individual conscience while limiting the role of the church. Richard Mouw (2010) summarizes Henry's views on the limited role of the church:

The institutional church has no mandate, jurisdiction, or competence to endorse political legislation or military tactics or economic specifics in the name of Christ.... The Bible limits the proper activity of both government and church for divinely stipulated objectives—the former, for the preservation of justice and order, and the latter, for the moral-spiritual task of evangelizing the earth.

Thus, the church, as the church, has no direct role in social action and furthermore its work is limited, by God, to moral and spiritual matters.

When Henry speaks of the church's role in social justice, he speaks in almost Hauerwasian terms. For Henry, "The church approximates God's kingdom in miniature, mirroring to each generation the power and joy of the appropriated reality of divine revelation" (Henry, 1982:5:542) and "its task is not to force new structures upon society at large, but to be the new society, to exemplify in its own ranks the way and will of God" (Henry, 1984:191). The church exhibits in its own fellowship the kingdom of God as a witness or mirror of righteousness to the world. This is the case because the world is fallen and can never approximate the kingdom of God and because the church must represent in its regenerated nature something that is unique and separated from the world (Henry, 1967a:73).

The church, however, is not wholly devoid of responsibility. Henry sees a role for the church in morally educating the social conscience of its members and in, perhaps, excommunicating those without a social conscience.

Henry affirms that individual Christians do not have an innate moral social conscience and that “sanctification therein does not come about automatically without pulpit instruction in sound Scriptural principles” (Henry, 1966:60, 61). Furthermore, “Christ’s church cannot signal hope to those whose destitution and deprivation annul the dignity and meaningfulness of human survival if it uncritically condones as members those who profess devotion to Christ while they consciously support socially oppressive powers, policies and programs” (Henry, 1984:194). So, while the church is not to participate in direct action it may in its programs discipline members who show a disregard to social conscience and it may provide a program of moral training that instills an effective social conscience in its individual members.

Henry sees this allowance for individual social action as key to the revitalization of Christian involvement in the social order. Christians with a morally developed social consciousness and a sense of civic duty will work for social justice. However, even individual Christians are limited in their social action both in terms of programmatic content and method.

Henry argues that, “to the evangelical Christian, the best alternative to the ‘welfare’ state is the just state, and the best alternative to political demonstration is civil obedience. The evangelical champions and strives for just legislation, and for obedience to law and respect for judicial process rather than for directly coerced action” (Henry 1966:64). Henry, as will be shown below, views government as limited to the degree that it has no benevolent role to play in the material lives of its citizens. The Christian is, therefore, not allowed to advocate for state-sponsored “welfare.” Furthermore, Christians are bound by the laws of the state in the way they are able to seek social justice. They should avoid both violent and nonviolent demonstrations, as well as direct acts of civil disobedience. They are limited to what they are afforded by the judicial process in challenging unjust treatment. Thus, the path to redress of racial inequality is limited to a citizen’s right to vote, influencing elected officials and successfully litigating against inequality. However, Henry fails to consider the degree to which this is possible if the judicial and legislative processes themselves are corrupt and racially biased.

Henry also encourages the participation of individual Christians in government vocations. His hope is that by placing Christians within the government, they will utilize their



religiously influenced moral conscience, and the government will lean toward the practice of justice. Henry believes that evangelical Christians “can and ought to use every platform of social involvement to promulgate the revealed moral principles that sustain a healthy society and that indict an unhealthy one. More than this, the evangelical Christian should be represented in his personal convictions on the frontiers of government and in the corporate process of society” (Henry, 1966:65). Thus, Henry believes that individual Christians who are embedded within governmental systems will have a positive leavening effect on the society as a whole.

Likewise, Henry not only makes social transformation an individual task with limited objectives and limited methods, he also insists that at the core of social transformation is a spiritual agenda (see Evans’ comments above). Social action, according to Henry, cannot replace evangelistic effort as the primary witness of the church (Henry, 1966:66). Additionally, the battle for social justice is a spiritual battle whereby “the emancipating Redeemer grants new life to them and enlists them as a committed community, as the new society, to his ongoing victorious combat over evil” (Henry, 1982:542). The battle for social justice is a battle against the prevalence of Satan and sin in the world. It is only through triumph over sin that real liberty, life and love are possible (Henry, 1982:543). The total work of social transformation is enveloped within a spiritual reality (Henry, 1966:57, 58), and it is only through spiritual regeneration that a “good” society is possible.

Not only is the spiritual the driving motivational factor for social action but spiritual outcomes are to be prioritized over material outcomes in the work of social justice. “The dissatisfactions of unregenerate man lack a spiritual quality, as do his satisfactions,” Henry states. He continues:

Complaints against the emptiness of life are often obscure, and easily given false labels. The African protesting the ‘white man’s domination’ may really want material betterment, however he sees it. The wealthy African is not beyond exploiting the poor African and greater differences actually exist within the race than between the races. The Gospel must not be tapered to unscriptural aspirations whereby religion is made a mere instrument of personal or social gratification (Henry, 1966:27).

Thus, the gospel for Henry is about spiritual regeneration and not about material uplift.

Making clear the spiritual principles that underlie the social good, and championing these principles and values, are at the heart of social action. For Henry these efforts are largely an apologetic task. The church’s role is to reveal the theological underpinnings of a moral

society. Thus, in Henry's mind there are several things that are at the core of this message. These include the following principles: First, "the church's theological existence involves an inescapable political dimension." Second, "the church has a joyful good word to speak to the sphere of politics—that God is the true king." Third, "that God's faithful and gracious action toward man puts his seal on the dignity of the individual." Fourth, "that the coming kingdom is not merely a future possibility but is already in some sense actual." And finally, "that even in the political arena God's main concern is not ideology, isms or ideas, but rather persons and their relationship to God and one another" (Henry 1984:191). Thus, the role of the church is to remind government of government's role and its dependence on the providential will of God, as well as its responsibility to operate within the parameters outlined by God. The church should also be working to undergird civil society with "scriptural standards and moral power" (Henry, 1964:9, 10).

"When evangelicals manifest social concern," Henry clarifies, "they do so first by proclaiming the supernatural revelation of God and the historical resurrection of Jesus Christ." So social concern is manifest first and foremost in a Christian apologetic witness which emphasizes "the transcendent basis of justice and the divine basis of the Gospel. (It) declares both the standard by which almighty God will judge the human race and the redemption from sin unto holiness that is to be found in Jesus Christ. (It) affirms God's institution of civil government to preserve justice and order" (Henry, 1966:67). The church's social engagement is meant to speak to government and society about the spiritual realities that create social unrest and injustice and the moral and spiritual requirements necessary to correct them, supposedly in the hope that secular society will embrace these moral principles.

All of this leads to what can only be described as a largely passive process. The church is limited to the role of evangelism and moral instruction. Social action is the purview of individual Christians, but they are constrained to action that can be taken within the established judicial and civic processes. Civil disobedience is disallowed. Additionally, individual Christians may pursue vocations within government and work for change within the confines of their duties, but they are further constrained to prioritize an apologetic witness that both demonstrates the theological principles at work in society and urges civil society toward the adoption of Christian moral principles and standards. This limiting vision has a substantive impact on Henry's theology to address racial injustice and White supremacy.

First, it weakens his ecclesiology, leaving the church, as a corporate body, with only an indirect role in challenging racist structures. The church loses the power of numbers and organized response to social change not only on questions of race but also on all other social issues. The church has no direct voice in racial justice and is left to trust only in individual conscience and the power of spiritual regeneration to affect racial inequality at the individual and systemic level. Beyond the purely theoretical, there is no admission by Henry that the church has in fact failed in the past to appropriately address racism. His suggestions of church discipline, though a step in the right direction, also exhibit a certain naiveté. Identifying racism in mostly homogeneous church bodies seems unlikely except in the most extreme of cases.

Second, in limiting efforts to correct racial injustice to individuals Henry overlooks the role of social systems in creating and perpetuating racism. He sees racism as primarily a failing of individual morality. While it is true that he encourages participation in the processes of civil government, he limits government to the point that its function is almost entirely judicial. Racism is framed by Henry as a moral problem that is the result of a moral lapse in the racist but also the fault of moral failings in persons of color as well. His argument seems to be that the racist is wrong in making judgements based on race, but persons of color are in some way responsible for furthering these stereotypes. Henry is insistent that racial inequality is not the result of environmental or social factors but primarily the result of individual moral and intellectual failures on the part of poor persons of color (Henry, 1966:69, 70). This suggests that Black poverty, for Henry, is primarily the result of characteristics inherent in the Black poor, not the result of systemic societal racism. He both condemns racism and blames those who are the objects of it. Thus, Henry is able to simultaneously oppose and strengthen racist logics.

Third, his insistence that efforts at social transformation be limited to existing legal processes fails to address adequately the potential for systemic racism. Henry, by insisting on change within the bounds of law, fails to account for instances when the civil processes are themselves racist or engineered for racist outcomes. Thus, segregation laws in the Southern United States during Henry's lifetime were designed to prevent access to civil redress by persons of color. As a result, had Henry's advice been followed, there would have been no means of redress for Blacks in Southern states because the process would have been left to those who benefited from and in fact established the laws. Furthermore, even if one

assumed a neutral system of redress, Henry's atomization of social change within the bounds of the established judicial and governmental system makes the likelihood of success minimal. It also fails to account for civil processes that do not allow for individual participation but vest power in a small ruling group or single individual and denies the rights of participation while engaging in discriminatory practices against minority groups. It will be demonstrated below that Henry affirms individual submission to even autocratic and tyrannical governmental systems. This view taken as a whole works to strengthen those in power and limit those who are subject to their rules and systems.

Finally, Henry opposes extra-judicial means even when they have a likelihood of producing positive social outcomes. Henry opposes demonstrations, protests, and civil disobedience whether violent or nonviolent. This limits opportunities for those with few or no options for civil participation to effect change. This is not a theoretical exercise for Henry but was applied directly to the civil rights movement under Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Henry directly attacks King's civil rights protests as not Christian. These direct attacks on extra-judicial methods limit in Henry's theology the possibility of redress for persons of color and thus have a tendency to support, even if only latently, White supremacist systems.

Not only is Henry fighting the Social Gospel, but he is also engaging in direct debates against the naturalist tendency in modernist thought. In this way Henry continues the old modernist-fundamentalist debates over faith and science. But Henry's participation in this discourse is directed toward a recovery and prioritization of the supernatural and the spiritual over the natural and is not primarily an attempt to discredit scientific reasoning.

Henry objects to the "replacement of interest in supernatural spiritual dynamisms by secular sociological dynamisms" and "the loss of Biblical orientation to the need of personal faith in the redemptive work of Christ as the sole means of deliverance from the wrath of God" (Henry, 1967a:76). Henry is advocating for both a supernatural explanation of civil processes and outcomes, and personal spiritual regeneration as the primary method of social reform.

In an address to the World Congress on Evangelism in 1966 Henry lays out his primary concerns both with secularist and liberal Protestant solutions to world problems:

For good reason we repudiate the inversion of the New Testament by current emphasis on the revolutionizing of social structures rather than on the regeneration of individuals; we deplore the emphasis on material more than on spiritual betterment;

and we renounce speculation about universal salvation that cancels new life in Christ as the precondition of present blessings and eternal blessing (Henry, 1967b:16).

But why would Henry's concerns with the decline in supernaturalism affect an assessment of racist grammar? His insistence on the spiritual over the material and on individual salvation over social uplift calls to mind earlier racist logics that maintained that spiritual equality before God should be enough for those lacking material and social equality in this world. Henry's logic divides the spiritual from the material and suggests that spiritual uplift is to be disconnected from material concerns in ways that are strikingly similar to early racist grammars.

So, it has been demonstrated here that Henry's primary theological battles against racism, and his disagreements with both the Social Gospel and naturalism, have the potential to support racist outcomes. But it is also important to note the ways in which Henry perpetuates Calvin's potentially racist grammar and the more explicitly racist grammars of Edwards and Hodge in his own work.

### 3.5.2.2 Continuation of previous racist grammars

Henry does carry forward and preserve the racist logical grammar of Calvin, Edwards and Hodge at several points, including his views on authority, providence, civil government, revolution, spiritualization, and the criteria of competence. Thus, there remains latent in Henry's discourse an underlying racist grammar.

#### 3.5.2.2.1 Authority

Again, it should be noted that Henry's language differs from that of Calvin, Edwards and Hodge. When discussing authority Henry uses the language of "mutual subordination" instead of the language of mutual but unequal duty. But the way he uses it merely serves as a rhetorical device in support of the maintenance of hierarchical roles. His argument is worth quoting at length:

In the new society, every human participant holds an important role as a moral agent. Unlike the stoic practice of giving priority to the dominate class in the exposition of social ethics, the New Testament in its "household tables" lists the subordinate person first when speaking of wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters,

and thus emphasizes their indispensable ethical role in society. By this pattern the New Testament also calls the dominant partner to subordination in the interest of new and honorable reciprocal relationships. What confers fresh meaning on this mutual subordination is the Christological dimension. Nothing less than the self-humbling of Jesus Christ, whose self-abasement becomes the ground of our redemption and is the larger backdrop for this subordination. In the light of his example the subordination of his followers is fitting and definitive . . . by willing and meaningful acceptance, the gospel message of emancipation was not to become an occasion for “insubordination.” Even though Christ’s liberation has freed him from enslavement to the alienating powers of this world, the Christian is to subordinate himself to the institution of human government (Henry, 1982:531).

Henry’s view of “mutual submission” seems to be an advancement on Calvin’s, Edwards’ and Hodge’s call for “mutual duty.” But while it does move one step closer to egalitarianism, what is clear from Henry’s total argument is that he is advocating a kind of complementarianism that perpetuates the racist grammar of the political doctrine of “separate but equal.”

Henry suggests that Paul mentions the subordinate half of the pair first to emphasize the important roles they play in society. But this does little more than advance previous arguments that emphasized the importance of everyone remaining in their place and the value of the work of slaves. It elevates subordination, now carried by Henry into a contemporary context, to the level of praise because it is valuable for society. Henry does say that husbands, parents and masters are called to subordinate themselves to those they are in authority over, but he makes clear how this subordination does not substantially change the relationship. In the end the authority, power, and hierarchy remain firmly in place and Henry includes no language of progress or deliverance for the primary subordinate in the relationship.

Henry also spiritualizes the language of emancipation and implies that emancipation is not to be desired and that it never intended to support the right of “insubordination.” But what is most telling is that Henry’s entire argument is meant to maintain and elevate a theology of subordination. He grounds this subordination, like all of the other theologians considered here, in the doctrine of Christ’s kenosis, which is an example that should be followed by Christ’s followers. Thus, he provides a divine mandate for the practice of submission. The similarities with earlier racist rhetoric, that asked slaves to accept their lot as Christ accepted his suffering on the Cross, is striking.

The racist potential of the arguments should be clear. While Henry upholds a call to mutual subordination, he preserves separate roles and the imbalance of power in human

relationships. In emphasizing subordination over social emancipation, he evidences a logic that has the potential to preserve systems of White power and the subordination of persons of color. It is a status quo argument that makes impotent any attempt at social transformation and that preserves the prevailing structures of power and privilege inside a doctrine of “separate but equal.”

### 3.5.2.2.2 Providence

Henry advances a view of providence that is consistent with Calvin, Edwards, and Hodge but is absent in Hodge’s discussion of secondary causes. For Henry, providence reaches beyond the purely general notion of God’s role in maintaining an ordered cosmos. He asserts:

The biblical view of providence is dramatically specific; it unqualifiedly affirms particular divine providence, that is, that God works out his purposes not merely in life’s generalities but in the details and minutiae of life as well. The Bible relates to divine providence not only general and universal structures but also personal experiences; nothing falls outside of God’s will and concern (Henry, 1983:6:459).

Henry’s views include the notion that even the vilest acts are part of the providence of God. In fact, he goes as far as to argue in an article on the Holocaust that it was providential because it allowed for the creation of Israel as a nation state (Henry, 1983:6:485-491).

His view is also absent of any notion of “fixity” which is so evident in Calvin’s thought. Henry would argue that a person could raise above their place, but that a person’s status and privilege in the world was a direct result of the providence of God (Henry, 1983:6:459).

Thus, Henry perpetuates a theological grammar that has been shown above to support racist arguments in Edwards and Hodge. Henry’s formulation of the doctrine of providence requires that White supremacy and racism exist within the providential will of God as assuredly as did Auschwitz and Dachau. All four theologians would object to any direct culpability on God’s part for evil, but it remains difficult to miss the direct divine implication of God preserving these systems of evil toward God’s own plans. Thus, they become a powerful tool for those who would use the providence of God to support the continuation of White power and privilege and the subjugation of persons of color.

### 3.5.2.2.3 Civil government

Henry's view of civil government is also in line with Calvin, Edwards and Hodge. Government is a divinely ordained institution to which citizens owe their committed obedience and subordination. To Henry, "man possesses no rights against government" (Henry, 1967a:61).

His vision of a good government is a limited government. Henry's political stance can best be described as conservative libertarianism. He restricts the role of government to the impartial administration of justice, which he narrowly defines as the maintenance of order and the administration of punishment. While everyone should be treated equally under the law, not everyone should be equal as to wealth, power and privilege (Henry, 1967a:61, 72). While he believes that the very existence of government puts a cap on power and privilege, he does not consider that unchecked power and privilege can reside in government itself even if government checks the power and privilege of private citizens. Equally problematic is the possibility that government might function to exercise power and privilege on behalf of certain private citizens or groups of citizens (Henry, 1983:6:436).

He also opposes governmental efforts to impose benevolence programs even when those programs might eliminate racial disparity. "Just as in his theological view of God the liberal dissolves righteousness into love, so in the political order he dilutes social justice into compassion." He elaborates further, "this kind of merger not only destroys the Biblical view of God on the one hand but also produces the welfare state on the other." According to Henry, this confounding of justice and love also "confuses what God expects of government with what God expects of the church" (Henry, 1966:55, 60).

Thus, Henry opposes the role of government in ending racial material disparity. It is also worth noting that Henry offers no view of church benevolence that is focused on closing the racial economic gaps. His view of benevolence is to care for "those we meet on the way," but has no specific call to large-scale social concern and action. His view of civil government then continues to evidence a rhetoric of equality under the law but a practical application that offers nothing in the way of eliminating racial disparities.

### 3.5.2.2.4 Revolution



Henry is also in agreement with both Calvin and Edwards on the question of revolution. “Evangelical Christians,” he asserts, “repudiate this attempt to confer Christian sanction on secular and often anti-Biblical ends, and they reject revolution as an approved means of achieving social change” (Henry, 1967a:58). He allows for resistance and civil disobedience only when “government requires what God forbids” (Henry, 1983:6:451).

He also insists that those biblical instances that seem to imply “revolutionary” action should “preserve a Biblical vocabulary and meaning by speaking of regeneration rather than revolution” (Henry, 1967a:59). In this way he spiritualizes passages whose literal meaning might provide justification for liberation and revolution.

Given that it has already been shown that Henry opposes civil disobedience, it should be no surprise that he opposes revolution as well. This is one further example of Henry limiting the means to overturning racial disparity and displacing White power and privilege.

#### 3.5.2.2.5 Spiritualization

It is only necessary here to reference the discussion above. Like Calvin, Edwards and Hodge, Henry spiritualizes passages that support a literal interpretation of liberation and is explicit about how this interpretation affects liberation theologies. It has also been pointed out that he prioritizes spiritual existence over material need. And as Evans suggests, applies a spiritual/redemptive solution strategically to avoid support of direct social action on issues of racial inequality.

#### 3.5.2.2. The competence argument

Henry also perpetuates Hodge’s competence argument. He argues that “Christians as individuals do indeed have a duty, *to the limit of their competence and ability*, of engaging directly in the determination of public issues as they seek in good conscience to particularize the principles of social righteousness in terms of various political options” (Henry,

1967a:71). While Henry's views are not as elitist as Hodge's, he is very clear that only those with the requisite "competence and ability" should participate in shaping political outcomes.

The result of this view is a logic of exclusion that requires specific educational ability, vocational access, and innate political skills that Henry would not ascribe to every citizen. Thus, his requirement of competence continues a long pattern of exclusion that can be used within racist logics to exclude individuals on the basis of arbitrary determinations of ability similar to Hodge's suggestions that slaves lacked the ability to participate in free society.

### 3.5.2.3. Conclusions on the continuance of racist grammar

It can, therefore, be said that Henry carries forward those theological arguments that have been shown in Edwards and Hodge to have the potential for racist use. But in Henry's case the theological discourse is marshalled in a way that employs an anti-racist rhetoric while simultaneously creating a theological logic that limits participation in efforts for racial justice. Henry also, as will be seen below, moves beyond any of the other theologians, other than Hodge, in advancing a view of justice that becomes a specific theological discourse which has the potential to strengthen racist logics.

### 3.5.2.4 Additional argument: justice

Henry works hard to make a distinction between justice and love. For Henry, "justice is concerned with what is man's right and due; Charity goes beyond such claims" (Henry, 1983:6:408). He also makes a sharp distinction between justice as impartiality and justice as need, affirming the former and rejecting the latter (Henry, 1983:6:408-409).

But not only is justice viewed by Henry as impartiality, he also wants to define it by focusing on the distinction between the love of God as characteristic of the compassion exhibited by the church and the wrath of God as characteristic of the justice exhibited by civil government. "In the Bible," he says, "retributive justice is an intrinsic aspect of the wrath of God." He also embraces Hodge's definition of justice as "rectoral, or that which is concerned in the imposition of righteous laws and in their impartial execution," and that justice is "manifest in the righteous distribution of rewards and punishments" (Henry, 1983:6:402).

Thus, for Henry justice represents impartiality, wrath, punishment, reward, and law in opposition to mercy, love, forgiveness, grace and liberty. He argues for the distinctiveness of love and justice in the Godhead contra Barth's claims that the simplicity of God means that there are no divisions of the attributes in the Godhead.

Henry argues that Barth's theology of God subsumes justice into love in a way that loses justice entirely. He believes instead that "the unity of the divine being, which Christian theology affirms, must not be made a basis for minimizing the equal ultimacy in God's nature of divine righteousness or justice, and of divine love and mercy" (Henry, 1983:6:411-412). In this way he preserves justice as distinct from God's love.

Moreover, Henry says that "the source, content, and sanction of justice exist exclusively and uniquely in the nature and will of God" (Henry, 1983:6:420). He is claiming that civil government is both the result of God's justice and that any understanding of justice must be modeled on the justice of God. Therefore, evangelicals must accept "that not an ethic of grace but rather an ethic of justice should govern social structures" (Henry, 1966:54).

This sharp separation of love and justice in Henry's thought means that any reference in Henry to social justice must be read as focused entirely on impartiality and not at all on the rectification of racial disparity. The use of benevolent means is entirely outside the purview of civil government. This is a departure from Calvin, Edwards and Hodge, who saw some benevolent role for government. Thus, when Henry argues for equal treatment of persons of color he is not arguing for the total equality of persons of color.

So, to recap, Henry evidences a theological discourse that voices the need for equality while limiting its practical implementation. He does so in his theological battles, in his perpetuation of previous racist grammars, and in his sharp separation of love from justice in the context of civil government. The question now is: does he also evidence a racist narrative and performance?

### **3.5.3 Narrative and performance**

Henry does maintain a focus on a rhetoric of equality that is unsupported by his practical social ethic. As stated above, he opposes the methodologies of the civil rights movement and the work of King and openly opposes the Black Power Movement not just on the basis of

methodology but philosophically as well. While Henry maintains an anti-racist rhetoric, he is critical of movements for racial justice, he defines the “poor” in coded racial language as responsible for their circumstances through poor judgement and immorality, and he views the “race problem” as a two-sided issue with Blacks being equally at fault. These themes are consistent and prevalent throughout all of Henry’s writings.

As regards racist performance, it should be noted that Henry lived during the civil rights movement and that his actions are consistent with his theology. He did not participate in any direct actions related to racial justice. Henry engaged in few extended discussions of race in his theological work or in his role of editor at *Christianity Today*. He describes his treatment of the issue in his 1986 autobiography. Henry recounts his unrealized intention to carry a series of articles on “the race problem” in which Henry intended to include an editorial by Nelson Bell. The sentiments of the editorial are summed up in a letter to Henry:

“It (the editorial) represents my own feelings on the matter. It is hard for you men in the North to realize,” Nelson wrote me, “that our problem is in many parts of the South, one of ratio, not of race. Also, in many areas of the deep South, Negro children are so filthy, infected with disease and immoral, that white parents will not send their children to school with them. This is not true in the North, generally speaking, or in the West, where the Negroes are of much higher economic status and also have much better educational backgrounds . . . the matter will not be solved by a cold recourse to law” (Henry, 1986:158).

Henry, as late as 1986, is able to recount this story without offering any rebuff to either Bell’s blatantly racist narrative or to his own intentions to publish it. The edition was not, however, released, and Henry, tellingly, indicates why both he and *Christianity Today* were not at the forefront of coverage on racial issues: “We saw the race problem—rightly, I think—as one dimension of a more comprehensive problem, and not the cutting edge of a dramatic social reformation” (Henry, 1986:159).

The fact that as late as 1986 Henry was unapologetic about Bell’s language, and his assessment that race was a small part of a larger problem is important. Henry’s knowledge of the true impact of racial disparity is extremely limited and extremely superficial, which may be why his calls for racial justice function at a rhetorical, not at a deeper theological level. He discounts both the importance of racial disparity and the necessity of doing anything in the way of direct action to resolve it. Race for Henry is subsumed under a larger spiritual problem that makes race a tertiary issue. His lack of involvement and lack of concern

supports and perhaps undergirds an assessment that his anti-racist language functions as a rhetorical cover for a social ethic that suggested a passive response to racial disparity.

### **3.5.4 Conclusion on Carl Henry and racist logic**

Carl F. H. Henry evidences a logic that consists of a “pragmatically” racist vocabulary, grammar, narrative and performance. All of these areas work together to form a potentially racist logic that is consistent with that of Calvin, Edwards, and Hodge. Thus, Henry’s continuance of a passive racial ethic also succumbs to Cone’s insistence on the embeddedness of racism in all White theology. Henry, in deploying an anti-racist rhetoric while presenting a pragmatic racist logic, may serve as the best example of the latent operability of racist logics within ongoing theological traditions. It only remains then to offer a general conclusion on the embeddedness of racism in the evangelical tradition.

## **3.6 Conclusions and general observations**

This study has attempted to ascertain to what degree Cone’s claim that racism is embedded in all White theology is true of a particular strand of North American evangelical theology extending from John Calvin to Jonathan Edwards to Charles Hodge and to Carl Henry. Its conclusion is that racism is in fact evident to some degree in each of these theologians and by extension in the theological trajectory they represent. It is important, however, to clarify the limits that delineate this conclusion.

First it is important to recognize the problem imposed by Western historicism since Kant. The relativization of historical interpretation by Western Kantian history is a critical issue for any study that suggests a theological coherence that unifies traditions across time and cultures. This study has chosen to ignore that particular problem and embrace more recent innovations including genetic history and actor network theory that claim that everything, including discursive material, is connected forward and backward in time. While this methodology is too complex and too lengthy for a full application within the current study, the author does believe that the connections made above are substantial enough to warrant their limited use in this study. A fuller account that builds out all the actual historical, geographical and intellectual links awaits an entirely different study.

This is borne out by the fact that this study did not need to prove, nor did it intend to prove, that each of these theologians had specific racist objectives in mind when they composed their theology. Nor did it intend to prove that each theologian in turn specifically borrowed from those theologians who proceeded them, nor that the theology was used for specifically racist purposes. It was enough for the current work to demonstrate that each of the theologians had components within their theology that could either be appropriated for use in racist logic or that specifically evidenced racist logic. This was demonstrated in the case of each theologian.

There was also an effort to show a connection, but not necessarily collusion, on the part of each theologian that could place their reasoning within a shared theological tradition and also show that each advanced that tradition. This was done specifically with the question of race in mind. The approach of moving chronologically from Calvin, to Edwards, to Hodge, to Henry had the advantage of showing development and continuity within the tradition. It also showed the way in which more explicitly racist theologians, in this case Edwards and Hodge, used the more precursive theology within their tradition, in this case Calvin's, to develop explicitly racist theological logics, while it also provided an opportunity to see how contemporary theology, in this case Henry's, is able to retain elements of racist logic even while exhibiting tendencies toward anti-racist rhetoric.

This work needs to be considered with the following limitation in mind. As a historical study conducted in the interest of constructive theology, the focus on theological continuity and its applications for contemporary theological reflection needs to be seen as primarily theological, not historical. While the study does not wander from what would be considered reasonable historical interpretations and uses of the primary source literature, and while it is supported by the historical secondary text literature as well, the theological conclusions are offered in the interest not of a reworked historiography but a theological conclusion toward a contemporary theological formulation. While this may be problematic for pure historians, it is necessary to advance the use of historical analysis for constructive theological work. The continuity and diversity in traditions has to be analyzed if it is to be faithfully engaged by constructive, contemporary theologians.

Second, the study itself sets a very specific goal and answers a very specific question: is there evidence of embedded racism within the particular strand of White, North American

evangelical theology represented by Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry? The study also clearly delineates what it means by racist components through the use of Goldberg's philosophical definition of racism, including Goldberg's suggestion that there might be elements of logic and reason that are primitive forms of racism that—for the purposes of this study—would suggest the potential of connections to other more explicitly racist grammars and narratives. In this case those theologies were viewed as precursory to racist logic and contributing to its use at later stages in the development of the tradition. With that in mind, this study does not suggest that Cone's theory is true of all White theologians, only of the tradition that was considered here. Nor does it suggest that embedded racism is the totality of the tradition or of any one of the theologians considered individually.

There may be elements in each of the individual theologians and in the tradition that seem on the surface contradictory or that alter the racist or precursory racist components in each theology. There are in fact portions of the theology of each theologian and the broader tradition that can be leveraged in constructive ways toward an anti-racist theology of power and privilege. Because that is the work of Chapter Five, these theological insights within the tradition will be considered then.

Finally, the reader must keep in mind the very narrow function of this chapter. It needed to demonstrate that there were components within the theological tradition, that as Cone said, represent elements of embedded racism. If no elements of racist logic were discovered and if there was no demonstrable continuity of racist logic in the tradition, then the study would have ended here with the conclusion that the tradition does not have racist components and does not need further examination toward an anti-racist theology. This did not require that racism be the dominate feature of the tradition or the intentional focus of the tradition. The only result needed to continue this study was enough evidence of racist logic within the tradition to suggest a need to further examine it and suggest corrections.

With those limitations in mind, there seems to be at least enough evidence to reach the following conclusions. First, that there is a White North American evangelical tradition that runs from Calvin, to Edwards, to Hodge, to Henry. Second, each of these theologians in some way evidenced components within their theological system that support racist logics. Calvin's theology shows signs of precursory argumentation that is evidenced in later racist discourse. Edwards and Hodge both exhibit explicit racist logics. Henry, while maintaining

an anti-racist rhetoric, creates a “pragmatically” racist social ethic. Third, the specific racial logic can be said to be connected with the tradition. When looking retrospectively at the explicitly racist logic of Edwards and Hodge, the precursory language in Calvin and the continuance of its pragmatic implications in Henry can be more readily observed. Finally, there seems to be enough evidence to suggest that there are components of contemporary evangelical thought that continue these racist logics and that must be evaluated as part of any constructive theological work as it applies both to race in general and Cone’s claims specifically.

Thus, the conclusion is that this work should proceed to a constructive examination of those areas of White theology critiqued by Cone and those areas identified as connected to racist logics in this chapter. Before proceeding directly to a discussion of doctrine, though, any evangelical theology must consider first the biblical text and its proper interpretation and theological application as it relates to any subject under consideration. An examination of specific texts suggested as controversial by Cone or by the theologians examined here will be the work of the next chapter.



## **4.0 Textual Analysis (Movements Two and Three)**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Having completed an empathetic-analytical analysis of Cone this project has attempted to delineate the importance of Cone for understanding the way in which White theology generally may be out of sync with emerging forms of Black liberation theology and how the latter might suggest a problem with White theology (particularly White evangelical theology) as it regards its engagement, or lack thereof, with the intersections of race, white supremacy, power and privilege. It has also been suggested that White theology, particularly White evangelical theology, has failed to fully understand Cone in context and that a more empathetic reading of Cone might suggest points of convergence, if not outright agreement, with Cone.

Expanding on this understanding, Cone's assertions, as they relate to White evangelical theology, were considered, particularly Cone's insistence that racism is embedded in the theological traditions of all White theologians. Chapter Three focused on determining whether Cone's assessment of the embeddedness of racism was true of a specific strain of North American evangelicalism extending from Calvin, to Edwards, to Hodge and culminating in Henry. This chapter concluded that there was enough evidence of racism within this tradition to suggest that Cone's theological intuition was correct and that a deeper evaluation of evangelical theology on the question of race, power, and privilege is in fact warranted.

Chapter Four therefore begins that constructive theological work. The particular strain of evangelicalism under consideration here is insistent that theology be grounded in the biblical text and that the biblical text is central to its constructive appraisal of doctrine. Cone (1997a, 1997b) is not far from this position in his earlier writings. Therefore, the work below will attempt to analyze a select sample of texts that are critical to the understanding of questions of race, power and privilege and that are suggested by the study in Chapter Three of the evangelical tradition and the work on Cone in Chapter Two.

#### 4.1.1 Method

For a specific breakdown of the methodology employed below the reader is referred to 1.3.1 above. However, a word regarding the particular reasoning behind the methodology might be in order here.

Movements Two and Three below envision, first an analysis of a specific text that is both central to Cone and interpreted differently by the evangelical theological tradition under review here; second, a critical assessment of that text's theology, and third, its theological implications. Additionally, it will be considered in relation to other passages that would mitigate against Cone's reading. The latter is important because Cone himself does not treat texts that would oppose his interpretation. The intent here is not a new or novel approach to the text, unless the preliminary exegesis suggests it, but an evaluation of the various means of understanding the text by way of the existing critical work of biblical scholars. It attempts to arrive at a meaningful interpretation that is then able to be integrated into the constructive work of doctrinal analysis. With this in mind it is important to note that what follows is a broader approach than is common among some theologians who utilize insights from biblical scholarship as proof of their theological conclusions rather than as a source of their theological conclusions. Cone's exegetical insertions are a prime example of this. He uses the work of Gerhard von Rad and Bernhard W. Anderson almost exclusively without further elaboration or engagement with opposing biblical interpretations. (see Cone, 1997b:57-76)

The ability for scholars to engage the central arguments of this project are critical to its success. Therefore, the exegetical reasoning that undergirds the biblical conclusions of this work are central to methodological success. The reader should be able to at the least follow the coherent logic of the exegetical arguments and their theological applications even if they disagree with some of the exegetical choices. Also, in the context of using Scripture in constructive theology it is important to understand the central debates and conclusions of biblical scholarship as a means to biblically norming theological discussion but it is less critical to engage in creative engagement with the text. This of course means that the theological work must then be reevaluated as the biblical work on which it is postulated advances and changes. This creates a constant dialogue between biblical scholars, theologians and their readers that makes it a necessity for theologians to "show their work" when basing theological conclusions on biblical texts. Therefore, what is envisioned here is an interaction with the biblical text and biblical scholarship that is more comprehensive than

would otherwise be the norm in many constructive theological works, but is focused on theological work, not on the advancement of the field of biblical scholarship, so it may be less comprehensive than would be the case of specialist studies in biblical exegesis. With that in mind, what follows is a working out of the methodology outlined in 1.3.1, beginning with the question of text selection.

#### **4.1.2 Text selection (Movement Two, Step One)**

While the texts that could have been selected for consideration in relation to questions of power and privilege are numerous, the space afforded by this project is limited and does not provide the opportunity to complete an exhaustive biblical theology of power and privilege. That does not mean that there are not certain key texts, on which critical doctrinal interpretations have been made, that so inform the evangelical tradition that their examination will go a long way in suggesting the acceptability of certain doctrinal formulations and positions within the North American evangelical tradition under consideration here. What will be offered below is limited in scope to the questions of race, power, and privilege that seem central to either Cone or the evangelical tradition under consideration above, and that have implications for contemporary discussions of doctrine.

With this in mind, there is one text that is being singled out for detailed analysis below. That text is Luke 4:16-30. Given the degree to which the readings of Romans 13 and the household codes by Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry seem to contradict the liberationist interpretation of Luke 4 by Cone, those passages will also be examined as alternative perspectives that may challenge literalist interpretations of Luke 4. They are considered here as part of the overall assessment of Luke 4, not as isolated texts, so they will not be given as full an exegetical treatment as the primary Lukan text under consideration.

Luke 4:16-30 is suggested by Cone (1997b:69) as the text that most exemplifies Jesus' mission as a liberator of the oppressed. The text is largely spiritualized or ignored by the other four theologians considered in Chapter Three. "Spiritualized" here connotes the abandonment of a strictly literalistic reading of the text in favor of a more typological or metaphorical reading. So, an assessment that "the poor" in Luke 4 were not the actual, literal poor, but those who lacked a right understanding of God, would be a spiritualization of the text. With that in mind, the importance of the text for Cone's Black liberation theology and the difference in interpretation of the text between Cone, on the one hand, and Calvin et al.

on the other suggests that it is a good starting point for an assessment of the literal versus spiritual interpretation of liberation texts. It should also be noted that this study is giving priority to the Luke passage over Cone's extensive treatment of the Exodus passages (Cone, 1997b:57-63) for two reasons. First, Cone's extensive dependence on a Barthian Christological priority suggests that his argument would rise or fall not on his demonstration of liberation in the Old Testament canon but on his demonstration of liberation as central to the life and work of Jesus. The Luke text allows for a consideration of this aspect of Cone's theology in a way that the Exodus narratives do not. Second, the degree to which the evangelical theologians considered above deny or ignore the literal interpretation of this passage in relation to Christ's mission provides opportunity to engage the ways in which their theology may rise or fall on specific interpretive choices that may not be in evidence in the text itself. The connection of the text to the work of Christ creates a better point of interrogation for the evangelical tradition than does the Exodus narrative, which the tradition also tends to spiritualize or interpret typologically.

Further, as suggested above, Romans 13 is central to the four evangelical theologians in creating biblical support for theologies of authority (all four), hierarchy (Calvin, Edwards, Hodge), order (all four), governmental power (all four), nonresistance to governmental authority (Calvin, Edwards, and Henry), and understandings of power and privilege. The degrees to which interpretations of Romans 13 are central to racist logics within the evangelical tradition have already been suggested in 3.2.2.4 (Calvin), 3.3.2.3 (Edwards), 3.4.2.3 (Hodge), and 3.5.2.2.3 (Henry). It is a necessary text in interrogating or supporting evangelical theology's view of government, providence, authority, power, hierarchy, divine order, and resistance to evil. No study of evangelical theologies of power and privilege can ignore it without greatly biasing its conclusions.

The same is true of the household codes in the Pauline corpus. All of the issues arising from analysis of Romans 13 are in evidence in the household codes and because of the discussions of slavery have been applied to specific racist logics in parts of the evangelical tradition, especially in the work of Hodge (3.4.2.2). We will consider primarily interpretative strategies for understanding the codes in both Colossians and Ephesians.

The approach to the text will be to engage in a full exegesis of Luke 4:14-30 as central to any liberationist understanding that might inform evangelical doctrine. The household codes and Romans will be treated in Movement 3 Step 2 as texts that are problematic for a

liberationist understanding of the text in Luke. The three passages taken together will then potentially help illuminate questions around authority, power, privilege, and other critical areas of intersection with evangelical doctrine, thus allowing for constructive theological work that engages with, and is dependent on, the biblical text. With this in mind it is now possible to move to an exegetical analysis of Luke 4:14-30.

#### **4.2 Luke 4:14-30 (Movement Two, Step Two)**

The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles are seen primarily as a unity by scholars such as Green (1997:6-10), Marshall (2005:157-176), Jeffery (2012:6-8) and Levine/Witherington (2019: 10). But there remains an ongoing debate among biblical scholars about the primary focus of Luke-Acts. Scholars like Jennings (2017) view Acts, and the story of Luke subsumed within it, in primarily political terms. For Jennings, Luke-Acts navigates empire and diaspora, hierarchy and ethnicity, and creates a new political reality within the people of God. (See also Skinner, 2018:23-28.) Jennings' focus is in contravention of that ascribed to the classic work of Conzelmann (1961) who sees in Luke-Acts a singular focus on salvation history. This is highlighted by the differences in political interpretations of Luke between Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III throughout the commentary on Luke they wrote together (Levine and Witherington, 2019). But the majority of scholars affirm positions that are variations on the centrist position of Joel Green (1997:24-25):

Throughout, the Lukan narrative focuses attention on a pervasive, coordinating theme: salvation. Salvation is neither ethereal nor merely future, but embraces life in the present, restoring the integrity of human life, revitalizing human communities, setting the cosmos in order, and commissioning the community of God's people to put God's grace into practice among themselves and toward ever-widening circles of others. The Third Evangelist knows nothing of such dichotomies as those sometimes drawn between social and spiritual or individual and communal. Salvation embraces the totality of embodied life, including its social, economic, and political concerns.

This moderated position is also borne out in the more recent work of Rowe (2010) who sees both salvation history and political/social implications in the text of Luke and Acts. This compromising tendency bears witness to the fact that Luke-Acts has a myriad of ways in which it might be read and an extensive reception history which reads the text either spiritually or politically or some combination of the two. With that in mind the analysis of the text below will focus on understanding Luke 4:16-30 in light of the possibilities for

reading the text both from literalist/socio-political and salvation-historical perspectives and will also attempt to determine which reading has the most textual support.

#### **4.2.1 Textual analysis**

This section will examine both the primary points of interest in the text and the difficulties that scholars face in interpreting it. This section will attempt to interpret the pericope on its own merits and reserve questions of its place within the larger narrative to a later point in the study.

##### *4.2.1.1 Points of interest*

Luke 4:16-30 forms a pericope that introduces Jesus' Galilean ministry. The text is defined by an inclusio that begins at 4:16a and ends with 30b; "he came," "he went" (Green, 1997:208). The text is also devisable into three primary parts: Jesus' reading and teaching of Isaiah 68:1, 2 and Isaiah 58:6 in the synagogue at Nazareth found in Luke 4:16-22; Jesus' condemnation of the congregation in 4:23-27; and the reaction of the congregation in 4:28-30. Green (1997:208) also draws attention to the back-and-forth interaction between Jesus and the congregation and makes much of this as a "structural" element of the text. It seems more likely that it is simply incidental to the story.

There seems to be widespread acceptance by scholars of the idea that 4:16-20 forms a chiasmic structure that centers attention on Jesus' reading of Isaiah in verses 18 and 19 (see Nolland, 1989:191 and Siker, 1992:77). Bock (1994:399, 405) is a notable exception. The chiasm is built on some very mundane elements of the text: "stood up to read," "handed the book," "opened the book" in verses 16 and 17 followed by "closed the book," "gave it back," "sat down," in verse 20. Regardless of whether the majority opinion or that of Bock is accepted, there seems to be scholarly agreement that the content of verses 18 and 19 is central to the pericope and programmatic for Jesus' ministry in Luke-Acts as a whole (Marshall, 1978:177-178; Bock, 1994:394; Green, 1997:207; Nolland, 1989:195).

As Green (1997:210) notes, verses 18 and 19 also have a distinct structure. The first three phrases of the passage end with "me" and each "me" phrase has a corresponding subordinate infinitive phrase. It is also important to note the parallelism of the word "release." Green's literal translation of these verses (with his emphasis) is instructive:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon *me*  
 For he has anointed *me*;  
 To preach good news to the poor he has sent *me*  
 To proclaim for the captives *release*,  
 And to the blind sight;  
 To send forth the oppressed in *release*;  
 To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The text's emphasis on "me" is echoed in verse 21 where Jesus proclaims that "today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." This emphasizes that the claims of the text—the good news preached to the poor, release granted to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and liberty for the oppressed—are fulfilled in the person of Jesus. The implication is that Jesus is not simply prophesying about their coming but indicating that they have been fulfilled or are being fulfilled in him (see Green, 1997:214; Bock, 1994:412-413, 417, 418). As Green (1997:214) implies, "the fulfilment of which Jesus speaks must be rooted in his person" (see Marshall, 1978:185 for a slight disagreement).

Verses 18 and 19 also contain two notable omissions/textual variants. While some manuscripts include the phrase "to heal the brokenhearted" both Omansen (2007:114) and Metzger (2005:114) suggest that the manuscript evidence is strongest for not including the phrase. They cite the likelihood that copyists inserted the phrase to make the passage sound less literal. Levine and Witherington (2018:115) note also that the Isaiah text read by Jesus and quoted as verses 18 and 19 ends prior to the pronouncement of the "day of vengeance" in the Isaiah passage. This has important implications for the interpretation of the passage that will be taken up below.

Additionally, two words are important to an understanding of verses 18 and 19. First, the word ῥησις, translated "deliverance, freedom" (Hendricksen, 1978:260) or more literally "release," holds together Jesus' composite reading of Isaiah 62:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6. Kimball (1994:185) suggests that this joining of the two passages with this single word is indicative of a first-century midrashic tradition and therefore the verses should be read as a part of Jesus' sermon, not as an actual textual reading. Most scholars have not followed Kimball's midrashic explanation, but many find the use of the two words to connect the two passages of Isaiah as exegetically significant (e.g., Bock, 1994:404; Nolland, 1989:193). Green (1997:211-212) also highlights the semantic range of "release" within the New Testament.

Release can relate to forgiveness, an unbinding from satanic control, or the cancellation of debt that is characteristic of the Jubilee.

Commentators also allude to the possible reference in verses 18 and 19 and Isaiah 61:1-2 and 58:6 to Jubilee but the degree to which they believe it is operable in Luke 4:18-19 is variable. Ringe (1985:1-16) gives more credence to Jubilee symbolism and it forms a large part in her liberationist readings of the Gospel, but she does not suggest that Jesus intended the institution of an actual Jubilee year. Levine and Witherington (2018:117), while admitting the connection to Jubilee, say that the “allusion is faint”. They prefer instead to connect “the acceptable year of the Lord” language in the text to the more general call to repentance and its ethical response already evident in John the Baptist’s teaching earlier in the passage. They suggest that Jesus is exhorting the people like John to “avoid overcharging, to share food and clothing, and to be satisfied with one’s wages.” In the end Ringe, Levine and Witherington are not so far apart. Neither claims that Jesus intends to initiate a literal Jubilee and both see the statements as referential and signaling an ethical response to Jesus’ work. Jubilee will be taken up and further elaborated below.

The second term that is critical to any interpretation of verses 18 and 19 is πτωγός, the poor. It is worth granting more attention to this term given that both sociological and religious interpretations can be ascribed to it. Are the poor, in the context of Luke 4:18, literally the economically disadvantaged or a metaphor for those who humble themselves in ways similar to what Matthew 5:3 might mean by “the poor in spirit”? There are at least five arguments that would suggest that the category is primarily sociological but does not exclude entirely a religious reading as it is employed in the Gospel of Luke and specifically in Luke 4:18.

First, there is evidence for a broader semantic range for “the poor” in both the Old and New Testaments, but this range tends to focus primarily on sociological uses. Pleins’ (1995:402-414) and Hanks’ (1995:414-424) articles on “Poor, Poverty” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* suggest a broad semantic range and a number of different words and roots for “poor” and “poverty” in both Hebrew and Greek. Of particular interest for the interpretation of Luke 4:18 is the exclusive use of the Hebrew term ‘anî which refers to those who suffer the “injustice of oppression” (Pleins, 1995: 408) in Isaiah 40-66. Levine and Witherington (2018:115) recognize this distinction, affirming that “the Hebrew of Isa. 61.1 is better



translated ‘good news to the oppressed’ whereas the Greek, which Luke follows, proclaims ‘good news to the poor.’” As Pleins (195:408) notes, it is important that the writer of Isaiah 40-66 is applying the term to those who struggle under exile in Babylon and not just to the economically depressed. It includes the ideas of political and social subjugation. Carried over into Luke’s Gospel, “the poor” are not likely then to be seen as merely the beggarly poor. The term also carries with it the sense of “the oppressed”. This broader semantic range means that “the poor” in Luke 4, at the very least, should be considered as consisting of more than the economically disadvantaged and inclusive of those who were in some ways social, religious, and/or political outcasts. This will become more apparent below.

Second, it is important to examine the use of “the poor” in Luke 4:18 and its relationship to Luke 4:26-27. Luke 4:18 must be read as part of the broader pericope that includes Jesus’ examples in verses 26-27. In these passages Jesus foreshadows Gentile inclusion by evoking the illustration of Elijah’s ministry to the Sidonian widow instead of the many widows in Israel, and Elisha’s care for Naaman the Syrian leper when there were many lepers in Israel. While this passage is meant primarily to signal why Jesus would not heal in Nazareth, it is also important to note that Jesus connects important elements of his mission that will become apparent in other parts of Luke-Acts—his care and his inclusion of social and religious outcasts and his inclusion of Gentiles. Thus, a connection between the poor, the lame, and the oppressed in verses 18 and 19 and the Gentiles who were doubly outcast from both the social and the religious systems of Israel expands the category of the poor to include multiple groups of socially and religiously disenfranchised people. This would suggest that “the poor” are seen not as a metaphor for all those sinners but as a particular sociological group of individuals who have been socially, politically, and religiously disenfranchised and who now become a special object of Jesus’ mission. The good news is Jesus’ inclusion in spite of the ongoing exclusion they experience from the social, political, and religious powers. This trope is further expanded in Luke 6:20 when it is the excluded poor who are blessed with inclusion in the kingdom of God and the rich, powerful and privileged who are excluded. Reversal in Luke will be discussed in more length below.

Third, it is important to distinguish the context and use of “poor” in Matthew 5:3 and Luke 4:18. The beatitude in Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven” (NAS), is an example of an ethical pronouncement that implies a

consequence following from ethical practice. The Beatitudes in Matthew talk about individual virtues. Luke 4:18 is referring not to ethical practices at all, but to a particular group that has become the object of inclusion in Jesus' mission. There is no pronouncement related to the virtue of a group but an announcement of Jesus' intention to include them within his mission. Even the seemingly twin passages of Matthew 5:3 and Luke 6:20 are different when viewed in context. Matthew is affirming character traits whereas Luke is making a prophetic pronouncement about who will or will not inherit the kingdom (see Green, 1997:266-267 for a discussion of the prophetic nature of Luke 6:20). The distinctions between Matthew and Luke are important. They are in fact talking about two different things. Matthew affirms that the character trait of humility is central to those who will inherit the kingdom. Luke proclaims Jesus' inclusion of the social, political, and religious outcast in the salvific plan of God. Neither Matthew nor Luke intends that either everyone who is humble or everyone who is outcast will be saved, only that among the saved humility is a trait and that of those who will be saved and included in God's kingdom the outcast will be among them and the rich, powerful and privileged who assume their place will in fact be excluded. What this means is that Mathew 5:3 is so different from Luke 4:18 that one cannot be used to interpret the other.

Fourth, the reception history of "the poor" in Luke seems to play a role in its interpretation as a metaphor or as particular reference to a religious sect who adopted poverty as a way of life within the Christian community. Roth (1997:29-33) outlines the early history of interpretations of the "poor" in Luke. Roth demonstrates that the early source criticism and history of religions movement marginalized discussions of the poor in Luke by subscribing to an outside influence on Luke's text that was peripheral to Luke's theology. The subscription of a cultic group committed to poverty at the time of Luke's writing found its way incidentally into Luke's source material but did not constitute an intentional theological focus on Luke's part. Form critics like Bultmann and Dibelius picked up this line of reasoning and continued to posit an unimportant outside influence on Luke's use of the "poor". This in turn finds its way into Conzelmann's redaction-critical work and his *Theology of St. Luke*. The influence that Conzelmann's work has had on subsequent scholarship should not be underestimated. While it is unlikely that contemporary scholars working within literary-critical methodologies would engage in this kind of disregard, it does seem at least possible that contemporary ascription to metaphorical interpretations of the poor may be

backgrounded by the early reception history suggested by Roth. This is not to say that textual reasons for suggesting metaphor might not exist but simply suggests that a resort to metaphor in opposition to more literal readings of the text owes something to a reception history that sought definitions of “the poor” beyond the text in more speculative source criticism. A good example of the *a priori* way “the poor” is deemed as metaphorical, universal, and individualistic is Bock’s (1994: 400-403) assessment that the poor are primarily those who sense a need for God and the rich are those who do not. While he affirms that this is inclusive of the poor and the blind it is broader than the poor and the blind. What is more telling is that Bock does not engage in any direct textual arguments, preferring to interact with one liberation text that is focused not on Luke 4:18 but on Luke 2:14. His reason for assuming a spiritual interpretation is that the church’s primary goal is to change individual lives. While this may well be true it is hardly an adequate defense for a spiritual reading of Luke 4:18 and seems to have much in common with a long reception history of dismissing the sociological in the definition of the “poor” in Luke.

Finally, it is important to understand the way social stratification in the first century would govern the categorization of “the poor.” Both Green (1997:59, 211) and Malina and Rohrbaugh (2003:243-244) point to the importance of honor and shame in Luke’s world for an understanding of the use of terms. Green addresses this most directly. He says that Luke does not define the world primarily in economic terms but in terms of “status and social stratification.” Specifically, according to Green, “Luke’s social world was defined around power and privilege, and is measured by a complex of phenomena—religious purity, family heritage, land ownership, vocation, ethnicity, gender, education and age.” Later in his commentary he applies this social understanding to Luke’s use of the “poor” in Luke 4:18. “Who are the poor? Numerous attempts have been made to find here a referent to the ‘spiritually poor’ or, more recently, reflecting the concerns of a materialist-oriented interpretative method.” But Green demurs, “Both of these definitions of the ‘poor’ are inadequately grounded in ancient Mediterranean culture and the social world of Luke-Acts. In that culture, one’s status in a community was not so much a function of economic realities, but depended on a number of elements.” He then cites the elements listed above. This understanding of the broader range by which individuals and groups could be excluded from political, social and religious participation advances the argument that “the poor” is not a

metaphor for individual spiritual depravity but the focus of greater inclusion within the people of God as central to the mission of Jesus.

To summarize, there are five basic reasons for understanding “the poor” as a politically, religiously and socially excluded sociological group that was the object of Jesus’ missional efforts at inclusion. The semantic range of “the poor” is better understood within the context of the oppressed and is broader than the “beggarly” poor based on word study. The connection of the poor in Luke 4:18 with the foreshadowing of the Gentile mission in Luke 4:26 and 27 suggests that the poor are an excluded group that Jesus intends to include in his salvific work that will include marginalized Hebrews and Gentiles. The contextual difference between Matthew 5:3, Luke 4:18 and Luke 6:20 makes Matthew 5:3 not useful as an exegetical device for interpreting the use of “the poor” in Luke. Finally, the complexity of the honor/shame system suggests that “the poor” is referential to more than just economic disadvantage. This means that in the final analysis “the poor” of Luke 4:18 is referring to a group of truly marginalized people and suggests that God had real intentions within God’s providence to include those who had been excluded from the social, political and religious life of Israel. In that regard it cannot be appropriated as a metaphorical device that signals those who are open to individual salvation; this is to particularize a broader theological meaning focused on God’s plan for the new covenant people. But likewise, the intent of the passage makes it clear that the intended “good news” was their inclusion into God’s people, not, as many radical liberation interpretations would suggest, a social and political uprising that changed the temporal status of the oppressed. That is not to say, though, that in the context of the first century’s integration of religious belonging and social standing inclusion did not have radical, affirming social benefits for the marginalized.

Proceeding further in the pericope, the challenges related to the proverbial saying in verse 23, the turn to anger evidenced between the congregation’s admiration in verse 22 and its wrath in verse 28, as well as Jesus’ escape in verse 30, will be dealt with below. The connections between verses 17 and 18 have already been referenced above but it is important to consider Jesus’ exposition on Elijah and Elisha and its prefiguring of Gentile inclusion that will be further expanded in Luke and Acts. To highlight differences, in scholarly opinion on the meaning of these verses, the work of Hendricksen and Evans might stand as examples. Hendricksen (1978:257) views the passage as emphasizing God’s divine sovereignty in determining the distribution of miracles, while Evans (1987:78, 79) insists that in this passage

Luke is trying to define what election looks like in the new covenant. All interpretations are more a matter of degree than disagreement. The interpreters only vary as to their assessment of whether Luke is merely foreshadowing Gentile inclusion or whether he is making it explicit. Siker (1992:74) concedes a consensus on the former while emphasizing the latter: “I propose” he asserts, “that Luke does more in this passage than just *hint* at Gentile inclusion in Acts, the position of most interpreters. Rather, Luke uses this inaugural sermon of Jesus exactly to proclaim Gentile inclusion as *part* of the gospel message.” More will be said on Gentile inclusion below, but it is important to see the connections, muted or otherwise, between the messianic promises of verse 18 and 19 and the partiality shown to Gentiles in the Elijah/Elisha illustrations.

Thus, it is possible, at least as a preliminary assessment, that Jesus’ reading and sermon, combined with his rebuke of the congregation in the Elijah/Elisha section of the passage, support a reading of the text that sees the preaching of good news to the poor as an inclusion of the socially, politically and religiously marginalized in the providential salvific plan of God, and the Elijah and Elisha passages further foreshadow the inclusion of the Gentiles. Attempts to read the passage in light of individual salvation should be discouraged at this point. The passage’s reference is to the larger providential plan of God in creating his new covenant people. This is not to suggest that individual salvation as expressed by Paul may not be in the background of this passage; it is simply to state that Luke has in mind the larger picture of God’s mission in the world.

#### *4.2.1.2 Contested points of interpretation*

There are three primary points of contention in the text. These are the misquotation of Isaiah 62:1, 2 to include wording from Isaiah 58:6, the turn to anger at the end of the passage, and Jesus’ miraculous escape in v. 30. Each of these are important to an interpretation of the passage although perhaps not to the final assessment of the passage’s primary thrust and interpretation.

It has already been noted that Kimball (1994:185) justifies the misquotation by ascribing the verses not to the textual reading but to Jesus’ midrashic sermon on the text. Most scholars, however, simply note the disparity between the quote and a reading of a single

text (i.e., Bock, 1994:411). Since there is no way of determining an established Jewish lectionary as early as the first century AD it is as likely that Jesus selected to read both texts in this form and that doing so may not have diverged from common practice. There is simply no way to know for sure. Also, it should be noted that the final-form exegetical process that is being followed in this project excludes any extensive engagement with potential form- or source-critical arguments. The actual reconstruction of the reading by Luke to create a distinct Lukan theology is not in view here, nor are discussions about how Luke might have drawn on varying sources and Jesus traditions that remembered the reading incorrectly either intentionally or mistakenly. Regardless, there is no provable necessity that required Jesus to read only from Isaiah 62:1, 2 so Jesus' insertion of 5:8 into the reading as a natural occurrence of synagogue worship remains a possibility. Also, in a final-form analysis, how the two texts came to be intermingled is less important than what the meaning of Luke 4:18, 19 is given the intermingling of the texts. Thus, none of this discussion serves the interpretation of the text envisioned here.

What has been identified as the "turn to anger" in the passage, which begins with the awe of Jesus by the congregation in verse 22 and progresses to their homicidal rage in verses 28 and 29, is a disputed element of the pericope. The differences between Nolland (1989:192), Bock (1994:414), Green (1997:216), and Siker (1992:81) demonstrate the diversity of opinion on this issue.

Nolland (1989:192) sees the disparity but chooses not to reconcile it, preferring instead to see it as poor source editing by Luke. He suggests that "it seems unlikely that Luke is mainly dependent on a simple unified account. The difficulties in the thought sequence, especially v. 22 to v. 25, v. 23 to v. 24, and v. 24 to vv. 25-26, strongly suggest that various traditions have been welded together here."

Bock (1994:414 note 3) prefers to locate discontinuity earlier in the text, preferring to see a disconnect between the awe of the congregation in 22a and their contempt of Jesus as "Joseph's son" in 22b. Bock refuses to see the congregation's anger as located in Jesus' message but instead prefers to see it as located in Jesus' person. "The issue," says Bock, "is not what Jesus said, but who Jesus claims to be. How could 'this neighbor' be the fulfillment?" (Bock, 1994:415, 419-20).

Green (1997:216) agrees that the turn occurs with the congregation's statement about Jesus' humble birth, but Green also believes that who Jesus was is not the ultimate point of their anger. The anger according to Green arises from how Jesus further clarifies his mission in the Elijah/Elisha section. Green maintains that "Jesus addresses the parochial vision of the townspeople directly, countering their assumptions that, as Joseph's son, he will be especially for them a source of God's favor" (Green, 1997:217).

Siker (1992:81) concurs with Green, insisting that the anger was a result of Jesus refusing to make good on his promises by fulfilling them in his hometown of Nazareth. The one dissenting voice is Jeremias, who chooses to see verse 22a as an expression of the congregation's anger, not of their awe. Jeremias draws attention to the fact that αὐτῷ can be either a dative of advantage or a dative of disadvantage. In the case of the former the phrase would be translated "to bear witness *on behalf of*" and in the case of the latter it would be translated "to bear witness *against*". Jeremias prefers the latter translation because it resolves the tension in the passage. (For a full summary of Jeremias' interpretation see Anderson, 1964).

While the controversy will continue because of the ambiguity of the text, Green's (1997:217) and Siker's (1992:81) assessments are preferred here for four reasons. First, Jeremias' view rests on a translation that he himself admits could go either way and his preferred translation that "bore witness against" does not seem to reconcile well with the Nazareth congregation's amazement "at his gracious words" (NIV). Second, Bock's (1994:414) suggestion that the congregation is angry because of who Jesus is, not what he says, does not seem to fit with his reception as a reader or the congregation's amazement in verse 22a. Third, as has already been mentioned above, Nolland's suggestions that the text is a poorly edited version of two separate sources is inconsistent with the final-form textual methodology of this study which does not see more speculative source-critical analysis as valid. Finally, the chronology of the passage has to be taken into consideration. There is no suggestion in the text that the congregation is angry at Jesus prior to his introduction of the Elijah/Elisha analogies. This suggests, as Green and Siker contend, that the anger was driven by Jesus' discussions of God's favor to the Gentiles over Israel.

Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that the congregation's turn to anger is indicative of their objections over Jesus' suggestion that the fulfillment of the promise of Luke 4:18, 19

is to be given to those whom they see as outside the blessings of the promises of Isaiah 62:1, 2 and 58:6. This interpretation of the congregation's anger highlights the aspects of inclusion, particularly Gentile inclusion. The congregation's anger is a direct response to Jesus' inclusion of those on the margins of Jewish religious society or wholly outside it. This is so offensive to the congregation at Nazareth that they attempt to kill Jesus for it. Thus, this further emphasizes the literal interpretation of Jesus' mission as primarily to the marginalized and those outside the community of God as it was understood by first-century Judaism.

Finally, the text ends with verse 30, where Jesus simply passes through the murderous crowd. Longenecker (2012:37) summarizes the various suggestions as "(1) the athletic dodge; (2) Jesus the magical mystery man; (3) Jesus gets assistance from sympathizers, and (4) the rewritten ending." But Longenecker makes the best case when he surmises that the escape, like those in Acts, is a miraculous intervention of God on Jesus' behalf. This supernatural divine intervention seems an important feature within the entirety of Luke-Acts and suggests that the supernatural is never far from view in the theology of Luke-Acts. This will play an important role in any interpretation of the Lukan texts. Luke attempts to show the supernatural intervention of God and God's active role in advancing his providential plan. This miraculous rescue is indicative of the paradigmatic nature of Luke 4:16-30 for the rest of Luke and Acts. Thus, it is important to look to the place of Luke 4:16-30 within the entirety of Luke-Acts.

#### *4.2.1.3 Luke 4:16-30 within the unity of Luke-Acts*

It has already been noted that most biblical scholars see Luke 4:16-30 as programmatic of all of Luke and Acts. Marshall (1978:177-178) summarizes the prevalent view: "The narrative is placed here, then, for its programmatic significance, and it contains many of the main themes of Lk.-Acts *in nuce*." Nolland (1989:193) draws attention to the fact that Luke 4:18-19 is directly connected to Jesus' statement in Luke 7:33 that the disciples of John should bear witness to what they have seen and heard of the ministry of Jesus, "that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the gospel preached to them" (NKJV). What Jesus pronounces in Luke 4:18-19 has in fact been brought to literal fulfilment as a mark that Jesus is in fact "the coming one."

While the programmatic nature of the text is evident from surface level-narrative connections, what is lacking is the clear connection of Luke 4:16-30 to more overarching and



apparent themes that join Luke and Acts into a single narrative account. Understanding Luke 4:16-30 in the context of Luke-Acts requires a constructive analysis that brings together research on the conceptual unity of Luke-Acts with expansion of the underlying theme and application of this theme to Luke 4:16-30. What follows will explore the importance of covenant as a unifying theme within Luke-Acts as it regards Luke's writing of a continuing history of providence that includes the fulfillment of the Old Covenant in Christ and the institution through Christ of the New Covenant of inclusion. The author will draw original conclusions following from the work of Frank Kovacs et al. (2013:1-9), Philip La G. Du Toit (2020:1-28), Richard Bauckham (2008:325-370) and Scott Hahn (2009:217-237).

The theme of Covenant as an overarching category forming a unified biblical theology will be addressed at a later point in this chapter. What is of interest at this juncture is an understanding of the role of covenant as a unifying element in Luke-Acts and its implications for Luke 4:16-30.

Kovaks (2013:1-9) engages in a highly technical structural-critical analysis of Luke-Acts in an effort to find the narrative flow and narrative connectors of the two books. While it is beyond the scope of this study to engage the technical details of Kovacs' work, his conclusions are of value. Kovaks (2013:1-2) points out that as narrative Luke-Acts forms a unified story with a unified plot, which also means it carries certain internal structural markers that signal the overarching unified message of Luke-Acts. Kovaks (2013:3) breaks the narrative down into three primary topics; the initial sequence, topical sequence, and final sequence. These sequences, Kovaks asserts, point to a primary mandate within the text that guides the whole of the narrative. Kovacs' (2013:8) conclusion is that Luke-Acts presents an initial disruption which is represented in Israel's breaking of its central covenant relationship with God. Kovaks (2013:6) places this disruption in Israel's "denial of justice, lack of love for God and obstruction of proper leadership for the benefit of the people." Throughout the central narrative Jesus works to restore the covenant relationship both by the restoration of Israel and the expansion of the covenant to include Gentiles and others who were previously outside the covenant. Kovaks sees inclusion as the primary act by which the narrative shows the transformation from the initial disruption to the final primary mandate of the narrative. Kovaks (2013:5) also insists that, "Lukan salvation is inclusive because Luke applies Isaianic passages on eschatological reversal to Jewish society, critiquing accepted norms and then extending the application to include the gentiles.... The servant's mission, Luke shows from

Isaiah, is to proclaim this inclusive salvation.” Kovaks notes that the societal changes that are envisioned in Luke-Acts are primarily changes to the Jewish religious system and to what it meant to be part of the people of God. This is an important distinction. For Kovaks the primary mandate of the narrative of Luke-Acts is the establishment of a new covenant that repairs the inherent brokenness of the old covenant relationship and carries with it a newly imagined expanded community that likewise has the same ethical responsibilities to care for one another and to love God as was evident in the old covenant. This covenant that highlights fulfilment, restoration and advance is central to a coherent reading of Luke-Acts. Kovacs’ work is noteworthy because it grounds its conclusions not in tropes or themes but in a structural literary analysis that highlights a central unifying plot and primary moves and objectives within that plot. This approach lends critical assistance to the textual approach envisioned in the current study.

Two scholars, Richard Bauckham (2008:325-370) and Philip La G. Du Toit (2021: 1-27), while not attempting the kind of overarching structural analysis suggested by Kovaks, do echo Kovacs’ assertions of the importance of the covenant restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts. Both Bauckham and Du Toit offer novel but differing views about the restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts. For Bauckham (2008:369) the restoration of Israel is a future act “left ambiguous” in the text of Luke-Acts, predicated on their acceptance of the new covenant. Bauckham (2008:370) views the Gentile mission as a missionary tactic whereby Gentile inclusion was a strategy on behalf of God and Paul “to provoke Israel to jealousy and thereby accomplish Israel’s salvation (Rom 11:11, 14), a notion that has its basis in the Torah’s classic prophecy of restoration (Deut 32:21, quoted in Rom 10:19).” Alternatively, Du Toit (2021:1-27) suggests that the restoration of Israel is presented as a completed act in Luke-Acts. Du Toit (2021:5) bases his argument on both close textual analysis and Second Temple literature that suggests that “Israel” was a term reserved for preexilic and exilic Israel and not for their contemporary first-century descendants. He concludes that the restoration of Israel is one part of the covenant emphasis of Luke-Acts that envisions the salvation of past Israel through the first advent of Christ and his resurrection while their descendants fall under the new covenant (Du Toit, 2021:19-20). Du Toit (2021:20) also includes the caveat that this conclusion does not suggest the exclusive salvation of ancient Israel or an “over-realized eschatology that excludes future fulfilment or a future resurrection.” While the debate regarding the application of the restoration of Israel in Luke-Acts will require further

scholarly engagement in the future. Both Bauckham and Du Toit seem to share the opinion that “Israel’s salvation or restoration is a prominent motif in both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles” (Du Toit, 2021:1) and that the motif of Israel’s salvation or restoration is more prominent in the Gospel of Luke than in any of the other gospels” (Du Toit, 2021:2). This highlights and further supports Kovacs’ assumptions that the need to restore Israel’s covenant relationship with God was at the center of the problem addressed in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus in Luke and the sending of the Holy Spirit and missional work of the church in Acts.

Taking a more traditional biblical theological approach to the text of Luke-Acts, Scott Hahn’s (2009:217-237) work is significant for the primary role he gives to the Davidic Covenant in Luke-Acts and the extensive textual support he offers to prove this claim. A key example from among more than 30 textual references in Hahn’s chapter is his claim that “Gabriel’s description of Jesus to Mary in Luke 1:32-33 is taken point-for-point from the key Davidic covenant text, 2 Samuel 7” (Hahn, 2009:218). Hahn reminds his readers also that references to Davidic kingdom restoration are in fact references to covenant because the promises of the Davidic kingdom are in fact covenant promises and the Davidic covenant as utilized in Luke-Acts is also specifically tied to the Abrahamic covenant through the Benedictus of Luke 1:68-79 (Hahn, 2009:234-236). Hahn (2009:237) draws a different conclusion on the restoration of Israel than either Du Toit or Bauckham, preferring what amounts to a far more secessionist view that reconceives of the *ekklesia* as the restored Israel. Again, the outworking of restoration remains a debated and debatable point. What is important here is that Hahn’s work further demonstrates the prevalence of covenant restoration in Luke-Acts.

If the assertion above, that the work of Kovaks, Du Toit, Bauckham and Hahn does in fact demonstrate the prevalence of covenant restoration in Luke-Acts, is accepted and the specific claim of Kovaks that the plot structure of Luke-Acts flows from an interest in renewal of Israel’s broken covenant is also affirmed, then covenant renewal becomes viable as the central organizing principle guiding other aspects of Luke-Acts. What this means is that it becomes important to read the programmatic nature of Luke 4:16-30 in light of covenant renewal. Since none of the authors referenced above do so, it will be necessary to draw general conclusions from their work and suggest a constructive way of reading Luke 4 in light of this covenantal perspective. While emphasis on other themes such as reversal,

poverty, and mission might suggest a different interpretive focus, for the sake of this work the research suggesting covenant as a central organizing theme in Luke-Acts seems compelling enough and inclusive enough of other identifiable theological themes in Luke-Acts to use it as a guide to interpretation.

It is now possible to suggest at least six possible ways of reading Luke 4:16-30 in light of the totality of Luke-Acts. First, it might be suggested that Jesus intends the inclusion of the socially, politically, and religiously marginalized into full participation in the people of God under the new covenant. The poor, as understood above, within their broader semantic range as the marginalized, along with the Gentiles are not simply symbolic placeholders but actual social groups to which the mission of God and the kingdom of God are extended.

Second, it is important to understand this first conclusion in light of the work of Shellbers (2012) on the intersection of the physical and spiritual nature of exclusion in the New Testament world. Marginalization based on stigmatization is equitable with both social ostracization and religious exclusion. Physical infirmity equated to uncleanness and carried with it both physical and spiritual meaning. Physical deformity carried with it the connotation of God's curse and was likewise a sign of physical and spiritual difference; non-Jewish ethnicity also carried the connotation of unclean and precipitated exclusion from participation within the elect of God. Thus, it is never fully adequate to suggest that the marginalization suggested in Luke-Acts is merely spiritual or merely social and political because in fact it was both.

Third, it is also important to note that what is in view is the restoration of a broken religious system, not the political overthrow of Rome. The reorganization of the people of God under the new covenant and the restoration of Israel in this new covenant are central to the message of Luke-Acts. But this has more direct socio-political implications than might at first appear to be the case. The religious hierarchy and the religious system within first-century Judaism exercised great social, political and legal power over individual lives in ways that went beyond purely religious pronouncements. The integration of the religious and social in the first-century world meant that exclusion from the religious life of the community meant exclusion from its social life as well. This had real financial and quality of life issues for the excluded. Moreover, the Jewish religious aristocracy, under Roman rule, exercised some policing powers and a limited rule over its own adherents. This is directly evident in the

stoning of Stephen in Acts and Paul's persecution of the Christians prior to his conversion. It is also evident in the influence the Jewish leaders had over Pilate in the crucifixion of Jesus. So, the institution by Jesus of a new inclusive religious system that has at its base the inclusion of the marginalized and Gentiles had real consequences in limiting the power of the religious establishment by stripping them of their ability to use exclusion as a means to direct power. The implementation of this new system also meant the inclusion of the marginalized in ways that had real power to improve their lives. This becomes evident in the reversal motif in Luke-Acts that will be discussed more below.

Fourth, it is also important to note that an interpretation that leans away from a purely symbolic representation of Luke 4:18, 19 as sinners broadly speaking, and toward an interpretation that recognizes the literal sense of the marginalized in the text as a special group singled out for missional engagement with socio-political and spiritual implications, does not of necessity imply a reading that suggests the absence of individual salvation in Luke-Acts or the text of Luke 4. Bauckham (2008:370) points out that even if it was not intended by Luke, our canonical traditions clearly imply the reading of the Pauline doctrines of grace as latent in the text of Luke-Acts. While this is true, neither the Gospel nor Acts is focused on delineating a clearly articulated, detailed soteriology. Or perhaps said better, Luke-Acts assumes and therefore does not make explicit a detailed soteriology. It seems better to speak of Pauline soteriology as resting in the background of Luke-Acts and by implication Luke 4. What is most explicit, as stated above, is the extension of the story of God's providential work and its working out in the new covenant through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and the establishment of the church in the coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke-Acts can be said to work out the broader socio-historical implications of God's providential work that are the outgrowth of the salvation to be had in Christ. This accounts for the singling out of groups who are the objects of God's inclusion under the new covenant rather than a clear exposition, with a few notable exceptions, of the means for individual embrace of the faith. But it must be made clear that underneath the missional call to the marginalized and the Gentiles (as distinct groups, not symbolic representations) lies a Pauline soteriology that makes individual inclusion the result of the outworking of the doctrines of grace, not the mere fact of a particular social, economic, class, or ethnic identity.

Fifth, in expanding the discussion of the fourth point above, it must also be noted that Luke 4 does not speak to the universal salvation of all the poor by virtue of their poverty.

Luke makes clear that there are those who are excluded from the eternal blessings of God and who receive eternal punishment by way of the judgement of God. It is true that in Luke most of those excluded are the powerful and wealthy, including the rich man in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich young ruler, and the rich as a class in the beatitudes to the poor and the woes to the rich in the sermon on the plain. While Zacchaeus is certainly a person of means who avoids the fate of the rich in Luke's Gospel it is also important to note that Zacchaeus, as a tax collector, would be regarded as a social and religious outcast by both the Jewish religious aristocracy and common Judeans. So, he fits the pattern of the inclusion of the marginalized. It is also important to keep in mind that Jesus said that he came to "*preach* good news to the poor." Luke 4 does not say that all those poor to whom the good news of their inclusion is preached will receive eternal life. The incident of the rich young ruler (Lk 18:18-30) does seem to suggest, however, that the kingdom of God will include more of the marginalized than the rich and powerful. The suggestion appears to be that the requirement to surrender status and power in the interest of the poor and marginalized is too difficult for the rich. But again, there is no necessity for reading universal salvation into Luke 4 simply because the group in view in Luke 4 is a socio-economic grouping singled out for missional activity any more than it is necessary to see this group as symbolic of all that will accept. They are merely an expression of the boarder expansion of the gospel and inclusion of new groups within the new covenant community envisioned in Luke-Acts.

Finally, both the nature of Luke-Acts as a theological history of God's providential acts in forming a new inclusive covenant community in Christ and Christ's identification and call for the inclusion of the socially, politically, economically, ethnically and religiously marginalized seem to suggest that the providential message of Luke-Acts includes a call to a particular form of ethical living in community that requires a unique form of social reversal and contains a social ethic. If the doctrines of grace lay latent or semi-latent beneath the surface of Luke-Acts the ethical demands and implications are slightly more explicit as an ongoing expression of the church's life in the world. This is particularly true if the covenantal nature of Luke-Acts is accepted, because covenants by definition involve both the establishment of a new relationship, in this case between God and God's new covenant people, and the establishment of a new way of existing as God's new covenant community. Covenant requires action and relationship. While inclusion in the covenant, understood in light of a broader New Testament soteriology, is the free gift of God, inclusion in the

community brings with it new ways of acting in relation to the world at large and the other members of that community. In the context of Luke 4, Jesus is foreshadowing just what that community looks like and the kind of social reversals required to be a part of it. The marginalized and the Gentiles will be included, the power to deny inclusion is taken away from the religious elite, and the rich are asked to surrender power, status and physical possessions in order to exist as part of a community of commonality with those they had formerly seen as “less than.” The inclusion Jesus suggests he has come to inaugurate requires real adjustment and is a real challenge to the status quo power structures of the first-century Mediterranean world. The ethics of living in diverse communities is a reality of both covenant relationship and Jesus and the church’s radical mission of inclusion.

This interpretation of Luke 4 within the context of Luke-Acts as a whole is offered as preliminary and is the constructive work of the author following the scholarly literature on the importance of covenant to the narrative structure of Luke-Acts outlined above. The suggested interpretation of Luke 4:16-30, understood within the totality of the narrative of Luke-Acts, can be summarized as follows. The text is focused on the providential history of God understood as being fulfilled in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and the establishment of the church through the sending of the Holy Spirit. This providential history is framed within the narrative context of the covenant offenses of ancient Israel and covenant renewal in Jesus understood to include the marginalized and Gentiles in the new covenant people. Underlying this providential history is a latent or semi-latent soteriology that assumes the doctrines of grace. Emerging from these providential acts is a more explicit social ethic inherent in the nature of inclusion and social reversal within the new covenant community. In this way, salvation, renewal, and inclusion are seen to have real social, political and religious consequences that cannot be confused with God’s free gift of salvation but cannot be separated from it either. Salvation and its social ethical consequences can be said to cohere in much the same way the command to love God and to love neighbor can be said to cohere in the Mosaic covenant and the two tables of the Decalogue. With this in mind it is now possible to discuss the relationship of Luke-Acts to the other Gospels.

#### *4.2.1.4 Relationship of Luke-Acts to the other Gospels*

Many scholars discuss Luke-Acts in terms of redactional issues and the questions raised by source criticism. Carey (2013:303) says that “many commentators, assessing the passages (including Luke 4:16-30) individually rather than as a group, regard them not as products of aggressive redaction but as deriving from Luke’s access to independent streams of tradition, identifying common redactional dynamics in each of these passages. I maintain that we more plausibly attribute them to Lukan redaction.” As this assessment illustrates, much of the discussion revolves around readings of texts that either assume an inadequate job of editing very diverse traditions or an intentional shaping of the Gospel narratives to present a particular theological perspective. In the case of the latter, Luke diverges from Mark’s order of the Nazareth sermon and adds material to make a particular point, Luke uses varying traditions that fit his theme, and in the case of a more extreme interpretative viewpoint Luke alters the tradition to make varying or differing theological points (see Carey, 2013:302-307).

These types of debates and reconstruction are outside the final-form analysis envisioned here. What is more important in the current study is the way in which Luke’s Gospel is understood in relation to its place among the other Gospels in the canon. The ways in which Luke and particularly Luke 4:16-30 is both consistent with and adds to the theological understanding of the other Gospels is most critical to the current analysis. In this regard what is most important is that Luke’s Gospel is more focused on the poor and the marginalized and is far more literalistic than the other gospels in its insistence on Jesus’ inclusion of the marginalized and the oppressed.

This does not by necessity require Luke to be seen as contradictory to the other Gospels. Luke’s literal use of “the poor” is different than Matthew’s “poor in spirit” but the extent to which even Matthew is spiritualizing the poor is unclear. Luke’s focus also does not, as Green (1997) points out, abandon an understanding of salvation, but may simply be seen as shifting the focus on salvation in a different direction. Marshall (1988:117) emphasizes this when he suggests that “Luke’s stress is on the blessings of salvation that he brings.” It is possible then to see Luke as affirming the liberative and social rewards of God’s salvation in the midst of highlighting God’s intent in bringing those rewards to the poor broadly understood. But because the Gospels include Luke it seems more difficult for biblical theologians to ignore the importance of a more literal interpretation and a more social



application of Christ's mission to the poor and marginalized. This approach would suggest that Matthew's spiritualization of the poor, if Matthew can even be said to do so, cannot be made to take preference over Luke's insistence on Christ's inclusive mission to the poor. Matthew cannot be given a hermeneutical priority over Luke if the full message of the Gospels is to be understood. Thus, Luke may be said to provide, not a contradictory view of salvation, but a fuller view of salvation that, as Marshall (1988:117) suggests, focuses on the social rewards or the "blessings" of salvation in the here and now. This might be ascribed to a distinct eschatological perspective on Luke's part that looked to provide an ethic for Christian living after a realization of a delayed Parousia. This perspective will be addressed in detail below. Regardless, Luke's Gospel must be allowed to speak on its own terms if its place is to be properly understood among the Gospels.

#### *4.2.1.5 Intertextuality*

It has already been mentioned several times that Luke 4:16-30 contains direct quotes from both Isaiah 62:1-2 and Isaiah 58:6. It also includes allusions to the stories of Elijah and Elisha in 1 Kings 17:1-7; 18:1; 17:12, 15, 18, 24; and 2 Kings 5:1-14. Luke's use of Isaiah in vv. 18 and 19 are illuminating. The selection of the texts connects Jesus' mission to Jubilee symbolism and moves that symbolism forward into Jesus' understanding of his messianic role (Ringe, 1985; Blount, 2001:79-91). Thus, the liberative or restorative nature of "release" and "salvation" in the texts is difficult to miss.

There are at least two places where Luke's narrative is in agreement with the Masoretic text of Isaiah. The LXX version says, "Because he has anointed me. He *has sent me* to proclaim good news to the poor." The Masoretic text has, "Because he has anointed me to announce good news to the poor." Luke follows the Masoretic text. While the distinction is subtle it is important. In the LXX the emphasis is on being anointed and then sent to complete the task of preaching to the poor. In the Masoretic text and the Lukan text, the implication is that Jesus is anointed for the purpose of proclaiming good news to the poor. In the LXX the proclamation is a consequence of the anointing, whereas in the Masoretic the proclamation is the purpose of the anointing. The anointing for liberation is more readily apparent in the Masoretic and Lukan texts than the LXX. Additionally, Luke's Jesus prefers the Masoretic "to proclaim" in relation to the "year of the Lord's favor" to the LXX's "to announce." There is also at least one instance where Luke omits the text of both the Masoretic

and LXX, dropping “to heal the brokenhearted.” This has the effect of highlighting the social and political over the emotional and the spiritual (Hendriksen, 1978: 252)

Likewise, the abrupt ending of Isaiah 61:2 in the Lukan account after “to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” intentionally omits “and the day of vengeance of our God.” Jeremias (1958:48-50) in fact sees this omission as a reason for the congregation’s anger because Jesus did not recognize God’s vengeance on the Gentiles. Whether Jeremias’ larger conclusions are correct he is right in assuming that the absence of vengeance is significant to the Lukan account. It signals the comprehensiveness and expansion of the grace of God to those outside the established religious order and the inclusive nature of Jesus’ message.

Further, the insertion in the Lukan text of Isaiah 58:6 “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” brings to memory the rest of Isaiah 58, which makes the point that Israel’s primary sin was their oppression, injustice and forgetfulness for the poor and marginalized. This both focuses Jesus’ role on restoring and reversing the sins of Israel as he himself restores the captive, the poor, the blind and the oppressed, as well as showing the importance of justice to the mission of Jesus. Bock (1994:410) concurs, “Jesus will do what Israel was rebuked in Isaiah 58 for not doing: Jesus will meet in love the needs of those who need God. The picture again is of Jesus reaching out to the needy and giving them aid. It is a declaration of injustice reversed.” And is also consistent with the discussion of covenant restoration above.

What is apparent is that this Old Testament citation in the hands of Luke’s Jesus signals the importance of justice, liberation and inclusion for the poor. Jesus functions as the Messiah who has come to effect covenant restoration in the inclusion of the poor. This is signaled through both the use of Jubilee symbolism and the careful selection and presentation of the Old Testament readings. Jesus’ salvation is meant to include the poor, the marginalized and other excluded groups as a way of undoing Israel’s past sin. This salvation is literal good news to the poor. Christ’s inclusion of the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed in the new covenant community is not only restorative but missional, as the gospel is expanded, as well as social, as the new community embraces the restoration of the previously marginalized into full membership in its body.

#### *4.2.1.6 Preliminary Interpretation*

On the basis of the exegesis above it is now possible to offer a tentative, preliminary interpretation. This is offered as a starting point not the end result that must be evaluated against the additional work of biblical scholars and theologians presented below.

First, it is suggested that the text presents Jesus as literally preaching good news to the poor, granting sight to the blind, setting the captives free, and providing release for the oppressed. In doing so the text of Luke 4:16-30 is programmatic of the entirety of Luke-Acts.

Second, the narrative is focused on the messianic nature of Jesus' mission and uses the Isaianic prophecies as identifiers of Jesus as the Christ. Jesus, as Messiah, can be identified through his completion of these tasks. This is not to suggest that these messianic identifiers are simply to be understood as consequential; they are in fact intimately connected to what it means for Jesus to be Messiah. The Messiah by nature must be one who sets at liberty the oppressed.

Third, Jesus, as one who has come to reverse the sins of Israel, is focused on undoing the previous injustices of Israel and establishing a new ethic of inclusion and care for the poor, understood broadly as the socially and religiously marginalized. This new ethic of inclusion is either explicitly or prefiguratively indicated in Jesus' use of the Elijah/Elisha narratives. This is also evident in the covenant restoration structure of Luke-Acts. The poor and marginalized along with the Gentiles are a particular, literal group, who have been given a place in the new covenant of Christ. This act of inclusion has the additional result of reversing the sins of Israel so evident in Isaiah 58.

Fourth, Luke-Acts taken as a whole provides a unique lens through which salvation is to be seen. Lukan salvation is more distinctly focused on liberation than is the case with the other Gospels. Lukan salvation is primarily an exposition on the social and temporal blessings of salvation. This emerges as a result of a Lukan move from an imminent to an inaugurated view of eschatology. Additionally, while individual salvation in Luke may be viewed as latent or a part of the backdrop of the Gospel, it is important to see that Luke intends to capture the broader landscape of salvation or (perhaps better put) to address the providential scope of Christ's salvation. Thus, Luke focuses on the expansion of the gospel and the inclusion of specific groups rather than specifically addressing the individual

doctrines of grace. In the process Luke shows the ways in which these groups benefit from this salvation and the change of status implied by their inclusion in the people of God and the community ethic that is necessitated by their inclusion. Furthermore, the inclusion of the poor and marginalized and the denial of the power of marginalization to the religious hierarchy necessitates a real change in social systems of power that elevate the poor, the marginalized, and the Gentiles within the prevailing religious system.

Finally, Luke-Acts intentionally positions salvation/liberation and the Jubilee prophecies in the person of Jesus. In doing so it blurs the boundaries between the spiritual and temporal and privileges the power of Christ over the power of political and social entities. This does not set up a contradiction and separation between the spiritual and the temporal but positions the spiritual as a primary actor in social and political systems and as a deeper resource for the formation of justice communities.

Thus, it can be said that Cone's more literal liberation interpretation of the text seems valid if understood within a broader and more intimate connection between the temporal and the spiritual. What follows will work to demonstrate this from the perspective of a broader biblical theological analysis.

#### **4.2.2 Alternative interpretations: biblical scholars (Movement Two, Step Three)**

There are five primary views of Lukan theology that should be considered when trying to arrive at the theological significance of Luke 4:16-30. These include the theological treatments of Hans Conzelmann (1957), Joel Green (1997), I. Howard Marshall (1970 and 2004), C. Kavin Rowe (2010), and Brian K. Blount (2001). Each will be treated in turn with the exception of Green and Marshall, who will be treated together because of the similarity of their views. It is also important to recognize, particularly in light of the identification of the covenant structure in Luke-Acts above, the role of covenant as an overarching motif in Reformed biblical theology.

Hans Conzelmann (1957) was the first biblical scholar to take seriously the task of identifying a uniquely Lukan theology. Prior to Conzelmann most Lukan scholarship focused on Luke as a historian. Marshall's (1970:53-76) discussion of the state of the field in regard to scholarship on Luke as historian is instructive here. Conzelmann saw in both the Gospel

of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles a clear theological focus and attempted to demonstrate that Luke's narrative choices were intentional and deployed toward a theological agenda. Conzelmann's arguments are progressive. He demonstrates first that there are clear patterns in the Gospel that are marked by a clear geographical progression that proceeds from Galilee to the journey narratives and climaxes in Jerusalem (Conzelmann, 1957:18-84). Having shown that Luke has a pattern and aim beyond a chronological history Conzelmann then has to unpack the reason behind Luke's unique theological perspective. Conzelmann (1957:95-136) insists that this is the delayed Parousia. Luke's church, Conzelmann surmises, is struggling with the delayed return of Christ and how it exists in light of a non-imminent return. This is Conzelmann's strongest argument and it is the one that has found the most support in later Lukan scholarship. Proceeding from this problem he then identifies Luke's theological solution as the articulation of a redemptive history (Conzelmann, 1957:137-234).

It is critical to understand how Conzelmann links the delayed Parousia to the need to articulate a redemption history. Conzelmann believes that the church, while it held onto the eschatological hope of an imminent return, saw the Empire as an institution to be withstood while it awaited the return of Christ, who would make all things right. As hopes of this return diminished and the church began to realize that the return was in fact delayed, it needed a means for understanding its new reality in light of its continued existence under the Empire. The church then began to advance a more conciliatory stance toward governmental authority and emphasized its nonthreatening nature (Conzelmann 1957:137-144). Luke portrays the church as those called to live in relationship to God but to do so in a more mundane way and with a less oppositional and a more isolationist posture. The church becomes the interrogatory step between the centrality of God's redemption in the death and resurrection of Jesus and the completion of the second coming.

The influence of Conzelmann's views is undeniable, but, as Marshall points out, his redemptive historical scheme is not without problems. Marshall (2004:145) insists that a delayed Parousia was not as significant in the church's turn to a redemption-historical account of Christ's work and the church's place within that account as Conzelmann insists. For Marshall, the church already had a view of salvation history prior to its understanding of the delayed Parousia. If Marshall is correct that Conzelmann's progressive view of the development of redemption-historical understanding was in fact not an innovation but an articulation by Luke of the church's standing opinion on the matter, then it also brings into

question Conzelmann's sharp distinction between the early church's view of politics and the relationship between the church and Empire. Conzelmann's view that "whereas in the original eschatological perspective it was felt that the State had to be withstood, now the attempt is made to enter into conversation with it, in order to achieve a permanent settlement" (Conzelmann, 1957:138) has to be questioned. If, as Marshall assumes, the church had always held to a steady view of the return of Christ and the church's place in the world, then Conzelmann's view of a sudden move to political quietism seems misplaced. This is not to suggest, however, that the delayed Parousia had no effect on Lukan theology, merely that it did not play the decisive role in a Lukan political theology.

Ultimately, Conzelmann's primary contribution to any theological interpretation of Luke-Acts is two-fold. First, his identification of the significance of a delayed Parousia is critical for understanding the importance of an ethic of discipleship and relationship inherent in Luke's Gospel. How one lives in light of the delayed return of Christ in relationship to questions of injustice, inequality, and one's neighbor is vastly more important and presents critical interpretive keys to the Lukan texts. Second, Conzelmann's identification of the challenges of living in light of and in relation to empire as both a theological and political question for the church is key to understanding that Luke does in fact include a political theology and can be read in light of a particular perspective on political action, whether one believes with Conzelmann that this theology is emerging or with Marshall that it is already fixed in the early church. These two perspectives, the reorientation of thoughts about the Christian life and the importance of political relationships within any concept of the Christian life, both support the interpretation of Luke 4:15-30 as containing a social ethic that is dependent on a broader salvation-historical or providential understanding of the work of the church. Although Conzelmann's actual conclusion that the church was seeking a way to live in harmony with government, and not to express liberationist ideas, will need to be dealt with further; his underlying assumptions seem to support the interpretation that has already been offered above.

Both Marshall and Green prefer a treatment of Luke that focuses on the importance of salvation apart from any purely providential notion of salvation history. However, their views differ somewhat. For Marshall, salvation is more clearly spiritual in Luke and more one-dimensional. Green, however, recognizes a more nuanced understanding of salvation.

While Marshall (2004:143-145) recognizes the use of liberationist language in Luke, he sees it as symbolic, not literal, and offers two primary defenses. First, he sees the lack of historical fulfillment of a political insurrection by Jesus as clear evidence that the language was intended to be symbolic. But this assumes the early church had embraced the idea of a delayed Parousia, which, as seen above, Marshall argues against in his treatment of Conzelmann. This means that Marshall is supporting his view by extra historical evidence and not interpreting the text in light of its own narrative understanding. Within the context of the narrative, as long as Christ's coming is kept alive—either imminent or delayed—the possibility of the overthrow of corrupt and injustice governmental systems remains a possibility and the literal language of deliverance and Jubilee remain at least a hope. Thus, the need to eliminate literal liberation from the text is only necessary if the text demonstrated no hope for a temporal intervention connected with the eschaton. Marshall also concludes that just as Christians today use the symbolic language of war to express purely spiritual ideas, so did the early church. This argument is purely anachronistic.

Green (1997:21-25), concurs with Marshall's identification of salvation as the primary theme of Luke's Gospel. But Green sees the message of salvation as focused primarily on ecclesiology and discipleship. Green expresses this as primarily an outgrowth of what has already been described as the benefits or the requirements of salvation. Luke's Jesus is the Savior whose salvation brings real benefit to all and particularly to those who have been marginalized. The consequence of this radical inclusion is a new requirement for all the people of God to live in light of this new community. It produces a new radical discipleship. Green (1997:23) describes this discipleship as "membership in the people of God" in which

The focus is removed from issues of inherited status and a premium is placed on persons whose behaviors manifest their unmitigated embrace of the gracious God. Genuine "children of Abraham" are those who embody in their lives the beneficence of God, and who express openhanded mercy to others, especially toward those in need. Jesus thus calls on people to live as he lives, in contradistinction to the agonistic, competitive form of life marked by conventional notions of honor and status typical of the larger Roman world.

Green's view, contra Marshall, refocuses Lukan salvation toward a broader assessment of ecclesiology and in doing so takes seriously the literalness of the text, particularly those parts of the text that treat poverty, oppression and marginalization. But Green's view remains primarily Hauerwasian in its approach, seeing the calls for justice and reversal and inclusion

as focused on intercommunal relationships and only secondarily on the church's relationship to society as a whole. Thus, it fails to recognize as does Conzelmann the political theology, social reversal, and power dynamics inherent in the text.

C. Kavin Rowe (2010) takes seriously the importance of the political in Luke-Acts in his study focused on Acts but with direct implications for the Gospel of Luke as well. Rowe calls attention to the fact that readings of Acts that see it as a text that "argues for the political possibility of the harmonious existence between Rome and the early Christian movement" (Rowe, 2010:3) have failed to account for the radical nature of Christianity and its effects on social and political systems and has resulted in either spiritual readings of Luke-Acts or political ones that affirm acquiescence to governmental authority. Rowe presents a new way of viewing the social and political within Acts. He argues that "Reading the argument of chapter 3 (the political argument) together with that of chapter 2 (the spiritual argument) produces a dynamic tension that animates the narrative of Acts and must be thought as whole" (Rowe, 2010:149-150). Rowe's contention is that conversion, with its subsequent lifestyle changes, had direct implications for Greco-Roman society that are evident in the conflicts in Acts. The church did not, however, engage in a direct assault on the Roman governmental systems. But Rowe also argues that Acts does confront Rome with a very distinct accusation, and that while the church does not desire Rome's power it does not accept Rome's injustices. The constant argument of Luke-Acts is that Christians are innocent and Rome is wrong in its condemnation, injustice, and oppression. Jesus died innocent of violating Roman law and Paul will ultimately do the same. Luke-Acts condemns the oppression of Christians by Romans while condemning the exclusion of Gentiles and other "outside" groups by the Jewish religious leadership. Thus, Luke-Acts in Rowe's perception is not passive either in its alteration of culture or in its confrontation with Rome; it simply is uninterested in assuming political power, which it views as subservient to the power of God. Rowe highlights the way in which the supernatural power of God is at work in the world delivering his people, providing for the poor and marginalized, and engaging in real tangible ways. Luke-Acts pulls back the veil between the spiritual and the temporal world and reveals the supreme power of God at work in the world and the inability of worldly power to match it. The fact that Jesus and Paul do not wish to overthrow the government and assume political power does not mean that God and the Church are not at work in the world transforming it to the image of God.



Rowe's view of Acts as a whole points toward a social and political theology that shows real promise when combined with Green's ecclesiology.

It is important also to take into consideration the work of Brian Blount (2001), who follows the work of Sharon Ringe (1985) in connecting the Gospel of Luke to the message of justice inherent in the prophets and the Jubilee symbolism inherent in the mission of the Messiah. The direct connection of the Lukan Jesus with this prophetic and messianic tradition results in a thrust within Lukan theology that according to Blount (2001:80) means that "Jesus' messianic activity is the work of liberation." Thus, Blount adds to Green's understanding a notion of Christian activity in the world that further grounds liberation Christologically and provides the support for Green's notions of discipleship that extend it beyond the internal relational dynamics of the church.

Given the focus on covenant in Luke-Acts outlined above, it is also important to consider the overarching nature of covenant as a holistic biblical theology. This includes the primary supports for covenant used in this way and the understanding of covenant that is being followed here.

Covenant has a great deal of support among biblical theologians as a primary, if not the primary, aspect of the Scriptures when understood holistically. This is especially true of evangelical scholars, who tend to affirm to some degree either covenant theology or dispensationalism. As Gentry (2016:24) asserts, both covenant theologians and dispensationalists tend to utilize covenant in their theological constructions. Covenant is seen as important by biblical theologians representing a wide array of approaches, including Goldsworthy (2012), Childs (1992), Gentry (2016), Hafemann (2007), and Hahn (2009).

But it is important to ground the importance of covenant in a clear understanding of what it means for covenant to function as a biblical theology. Both Gentry (2016:24-30) and Hafemann (2007:22-23) are instructive at this point. They reference two means of doing biblical theology that have proven problematic, including the location of a single theological center in the biblical text and the identification of an important theme. Both Gentry and Hafemann want to distance their understanding of covenant from these approaches. Covenant is neither the center of the biblical story nor a theme in the biblical story, but forms the primary structure that advances the plot of the biblical story. This view is predicated on an understanding that the biblical materials, in all their diversity, have in mind a single salvation-historical narrative that illuminates God's interactions with and on behalf of God's creation

and for God's glory. The Bible is that unfolding story and the way in which that relationship is advanced in Scripture is through the various covenants. Thus, covenant forms the structure, one might say the hinge, that both unifies and allows for the advancement of a progressive, providential salvation history. It is important to maintain this idea of covenant as the theological structure of the biblical narrative as opposed to the center or central theme of the biblical text.

But what then is meant by covenant? Hahn (2009:1-9) does a good job of summarizing the primary views that have developed in regard to what covenants are and how they are to be understood. These views, according to Hahn, fall primarily into two schools of thought. Those who followed the early views of Wellhausen, who saw covenant as a development in Israelite religion that moved away from kinship ties toward ethical and moral contracts (Hahn, 2009:1) tended to see covenant as legalistic or judicial (see, for example, Hahn's assessment of Mendenhall, 2009:2). On the other side of the spectrum are those who followed the work of Eichrodt in seeing covenant as primarily relational in its capacity to form relationships between persons who had no biological or tribal affinities (Hahn 2009:2). These included Frank Cross, who according to Hahn "grounds the concept ... in the kinship-based social organization of West Semitic tribal groups (Hahn, 2009:3). Thus, understandings of covenant exist on a spectrum between legal contract and relational bounds.

It is important to note that many contemporary evangelical scholars tend toward the relational interpretation of covenant. This would include both Gentry (2016) and Hafemann (2007). Hafemann's definition of covenant is especially illuminating. Hafemann (2007:22) sees covenant as encompassing the basic ideas of "(1) the essential character of God as King or Sovereign Ruler, (2) the election of a people under his rule who, as his 'adopted' children live in dependence upon him, and (3) the corresponding nature of God's bond with these as their 'Sovereign Father'." In tying covenant to the salvation-historical plot of Scripture Hafemann continues, "this 'covenant relationship', in which the basic categories of kingship (Sovereign Ruler) and kinship (Father) are mutually interpretive, is not static, it is the dynamic, historical arena within which God reveals himself. As such, it provides the interpretive lens for understanding who God is, who his people are and how they relate to one another." Thus, for Hafemann, covenant is a relationship with commitments and this includes both commitments of humanity to God and the people of God to one another and broader humanity. These relational commitments extend to the new covenant and are

broadened due to the inclusive and missional nature of that covenant (Hafemann, 2007:49-56).

To bring this broader understanding of covenant into conversation with the discussion of covenant structure in Luke above, five observations are in order. First, the idea of covenant as a relationship that brings together into familial relationships those who are not related biologically is critical to an understanding of covenant as inclusion in Luke. God's act in Christ, in including the poor and marginalized and the Gentiles in God's providential plan for the redemption of humanity, brings into relationship and community those who were previously outside and requires their acceptance and inclusion by those who held places of privilege and power within the older covenant community. Secondly, Luke, through the various passages that focus on reversal, speaks to a new ethic that is required for the new covenant community and that requires the abandonment of old notions of privilege and status for a community of mutuality within the new covenant community. Third, in the new covenant God asserts God's sovereign right to election and to determining who was a part of this new community, and God does so over and against the authority of the religious hierarchy to exclude and marginalize. Only God in Christ determines who has a place; God chooses those who had been previously excluded. Fourth, the context of the Gentile mission in Acts and its foreshadowing in Luke mean that there is a requirement not only to accept the excluded but to actively seek their participation in the community. Finally, the extent to which Luke unifies the old covenant and the new within the theme of the restoration of Israel suggests, as mentioned above, that the new covenant is in some way fulfilling the broken obligations of the old covenant. The allusion to Isaiah 58 and the sins of injustice toward the poor and marginalized indicate that the inclusion of this group into the new community is in some way necessary for the restoration of Israel. Relationality, both vertical and horizontal, is fully in view in a covenant-based reading of Luke-Acts.

It must be admitted that these applications of a broader covenant theology to Luke-Acts constitute an attempt at a constructive reading by the author and as such they need to be engaged more broadly than is possible given the scope of the current work. But the conclusions here are at least logically consistent with both the scholarship on the importance of covenant as a structural feature of Luke and the broader scholarship on the significance and definition of covenant in the full canon. They therefore seem important in any attempt to understand the meaning and application of Luke 4:16-30.

#### *4.2.2.1 Interpretive assessment of alternative views*

Where, then, do these varying views of Luke-Acts intersect in a coherent interpretation of Luke 4:16-30? All of the views presented above, with the exception of Marshall's, recognize the existence of the political within Luke's theology as well as affirm some place for the literal application of the Gospel's call for the inclusion and just, ethical treatment of the poor and marginalized within the covenant community as a requirement of missional engagement. Conzelmann's focus on a delayed Parousia emphasizes the need to reimagine life in the world while the church continues to wait for Christ's return, which in turn suggests vis-à-vis Green that Luke indeed intended to demonstrate a new way of living both in light of this and in light of the inclusion of those outside the community in the work of God. Blount grounds this view in a Christology that connects Christ both to the prophetic view of justice and to the messianic mission of Jubilee that then informs the church's behavior as a new people of God. Rowe adds to this an assessment of the transformative power of God through the church on society as a whole and a focus that sees governmental power as weak in relation to the supernatural power of God. Worldly power per Lukan theology is not sufficient for the kingdom of God and should not be desired. But the church does have a requirement to give witness to the government's injustice, "slaughter of the innocents," and to the truth that government cannot clearly see and comprehend apart from the supernatural power of God. The study above also suggests that within the context of Luke is a focus on covenant that shifts Luke's concerns from a Pauline focus on the doctrines of grace and individual salvation to the broader category of providential history and the inclusion of those groups who had been previously excluded into the new covenant community. This broadened community changes the power dynamic among its members, requires an ethic of reversal and a different way of viewing social status within the community and in the world in light of its new missional calling. All of this taken together moves the focus of Luke 4:16-30 toward a more literalistic understanding—not one that excludes the doctrines of grace but one that focuses on the implications of those who are already saved and the broader questions of ecclesiology, sanctification and mission. In short, these views support a more literal reading of Luke 4:16-30 and taken in their totality suggest that the interpretation offered in Movement Two is accurate.

### 4.2.3 Movement Three

The work of Movement Three is to ask what theological significance is to be gained from the exegetical work of Movement Two. Specifically, what uses can be made of the text for more comprehensive theological assessments, including ultimately the doctrinal work of Chapter Five? This movement will therefore examine the important theological themes identified in the work of Movement Two. It will place the text in dialogue with other texts that might have the potential of contradicting or altering the theological application of the passage under consideration. We will look at the texts used by a range of theologians and ask to what degree their use is in agreement with the exegetical work above. This process will also take into consideration the specific work of other Black theologians and exegetes to ask if there are specific perspectives evidenced in this group and if those perspectives are in agreement with this project's interpretation of the text. All of this will then suggest how this text might speak to the constructive theological work of Chapter Five.

#### *4.2.3.1 Identification of the primary theological focus(es) of the text. (Movement Three, Step One)*

There are at least six overarching theological themes that are evident in Luke-Acts generally, and specifically in Luke 4:16-30. These include salvation, covenant, inclusion, Jubilee, the in-breaking of the divine into the temporal, and reversal. Each will be dealt with individually.

The Lukan view of salvation has already been discussed above in the examination of Marshall's and Green's understanding of Lukan theology. It has also already been argued that Green's understanding is to be preferred, given that it takes into consideration what is evident from direct exegesis of the text and the theme of the delayed Parousia so evident in Lukan scholarship since its original proposal by Conzelmann. Green's (1997) understanding of Lukan soteriology is that it is inclusive of spiritual salvation but also intentionally extends the notion of salvation to include the blessings of salvation and the specific way it transforms both the community and the individual toward a radical discipleship. The result of this expanded view of salvation is that it looks beyond, while also including, individual salvation to suggest the practical and ethical applications of salvation.

It should, however, be pointed out that Green's assessment does not move the text toward an interpretation of salvation that would be consistent with modern Latin American liberation theology. The poor are not "saved" by virtue of their poverty. Luke's vision is of

salvation as resting in the person of Christ and those who are saved are saved through and in Jesus not by any social or economic classification. Green does not, however, downplay the importance of the poor and the marginalized to Christ. He simply connects the liberation of the poor to their embrace of Jesus and the salvation of the rich to a willingness to surrender a life of power and privilege for a life of servanthood and solidarity with the marginalized that flows out of their commitment to Christ. Salvation has social implications for those who are saved, and these are tied up in matters of justice, equality and mutual service. Ultimately, Lukan soteriology is salvation in service to sanctification and that sanctification has a radical social imagination that defies existing ideas of status, honor, power, privilege and place. This social discipleship is intended to be both a community-building strategy which has a uniquely ecclesiological function and a transformative spiritual power in the life of the individual believer as it serves both as an identifier of the “saved” and as a guide to spiritual growth and practice. The care and solidarity with the poor and marginalized that seems so central to Lukan theology, therefore, becomes both the central guiding principle in the life of the disciple and the standard for ecclesiological communal practice.

The latter is true, as has been suggested above, because of the outgrowth and primary structuring role of covenant in Luke. Christ comes to restore Israel and to inaugurate a new covenant that makes amends for the injustices outlined in Isaiah 58 both by the inclusion in the new covenant community of the poor, the marginalized and the Gentiles and by restoring what was broken through the death and resurrection of Christ. Again, this has real social implications as the power of inclusion and exclusion shifts from the religious hierarchy to God’s sovereign will in the new covenant and as the new covenant establishes a community of mutuality that is contrary to the power and status norms of honor/shame cultures.

Likewise, the idea of Gentile inclusion is central to the theology of Luke-Acts and it has already been argued above that Gentile inclusion is either stated explicitly or foreshadowed in Luke 4:16-30. The inclusion envisioned by Luke is an inclusion that shatters not only ethnic distinctions but also distinctions of class, power, gender, and social standing, and offers inclusion even to those who have been labeled impure or those whose social behaviors have placed them outside the community. This inclusion is, however, conditional. It is not a universal salvation. But the conditions for inclusion shift dramatically. No longer is inclusion based on birth or compliance with established social, cultural and religious norms but is conditioned on a relationship. Inclusion is offered to all those who will embrace Jesus.

Salvation rests in the person of Jesus and inclusion among the chosen of God is identified by where a person stands in relationship to Christ. Thus, Gentile inclusion redefines the doctrine of election toward a more inclusive community determined less by social, ethnic, gender and class identification and more by self-identification and acceptance in/by Christ. The relational nature of covenant is also operative here. The covenantal act of a kinship contract that binds all parties in relation to one another apart from blood or tribal ties is central to Luke's understanding of new covenant community and is central to how this community is shaped from groups who were previously excluded.

Luke's perception of the consequences of Christ's salvation is seen through the symbolism of Jubilee. It is clear that Luke 4:16-30 intends to portray a Jubilee image in its use of Isaiah 61:1-2. Ringe (2004:36) elaborates on the important theological content of these images, which she sees as the inauguration of the sovereign reign of God and the liberation of the powerless and marginalized. It is important to note that she does not view Luke 4 as calling for a literal Jubilee year but recognizes its symbolic significance in asserting God's attempt to establish God's sovereignty and God's justice. The implications for Luke of the inclusion of the Jubilee is that Lukan theology becomes focused on not just the sovereign reign of God but the inauguration of that reign in Jesus that is typified by an emphasis on the kind of justice and community that such a reign brings. All power becomes surrendered to the power of God and all relationships become directed toward the acceptable justice of God. That means that the poor are restored and the oppressed are provided release from their oppressors. The power of God in the world becomes available for the transformation of social disorders. It also represents the restoration of those on the religious margins to the kingdom of God. The Jubilee imagery in Luke suggests that God is at work transforming social orders through God's work of transforming the people of God. This means also that in light of the new covenant of inclusion God has directed the inclusion of the poor and marginalized in the new community of God which carries particular social and liberative benefits and becomes "good news" to the poor.

If the theology of salvation, covenant, inclusion and Jubilee seem primarily directed toward the building of the community and a common practice of discipleship within the people of God, Rowe's (2009) emphasis on the in-breaking of the power of God into the temporal world and the collision of cultures that comes with the practice and witness to the Christian gospel envisions a God at work in the larger world and engaged in activity that has

real social consequences. This collision takes place as Christian faith is found to be at odds with and in fact detrimental to the prevailing economic, political, religious and social systems of the Greco-Roman world. The practice of the Christian life and the inclusive community envisioned in the new covenant become sources of social unrest between Christians and both pagan and Jewish culture. Christianity also bears witness in its teaching and in its community to a social structure that is a critique of pagan culture and that directly bears witness to the injustices of Roman rule and the administration of justice by the Jewish hierarchy. Thus, in Rowe's understanding the Christian community escapes Hauerwasian isolationism and becomes a direct vehicle of God that challenges the prevailing systems of power and privilege.

Finally, it is important to recognize the one theological theme that is affirmed by most Lukan scholars but that receives very little attention except in the work of Blount (2001:79-91): that theme is reversal. Blount (2001:82-85) gets it right when he points out that both salvation and inclusion mark reversal, and reversal becomes the ethical principle that governs Christian discipleship in the image of Christ.

As Blount (2001:82) insists, "In the kingdom, societal insiders who dismiss God's call will find themselves on the margins; those who have been societally marginalized, but who respond to God's call and commands, will find themselves at the center of God's consummate kingdom. God's kingdom, according to the parable, attends to obedience, not status."

Likewise, Jesus who is the ultimate example of reversal, becomes the basis for Christian interaction. Those who have power, status, and position are called to surrender it in the same way that Jesus on the cross surrendered his status and power in obedience to God. Thus, Luke becomes a guide to discipleship for the rich, the powerful and the privileged that requires a unique form of obedience and surrender. The poor and marginalized on the other hand have an easier time embracing obedience to Christ because they have less to surrender on their path to that obedience. This radical reversal in Luke has real implications for ethical practice and discipleship and relationship within the body of Christ.

How then might the theological vision of the Gospel of Luke be portrayed? Certainly, if it is anything, it is a view of the in-breaking of the sovereign reign of God that opens the kingdom of God to those formerly placed outside that kingdom. In doing so it shatters notions of status and honor in society and challenges prevailing systems of power and privilege and



in fact leads to a reversal of status and privilege within God's community. The poor and the marginalized have direct access and in many cases easier access to the kingdom of God than do the rich and powerful. Within the context of this in-breaking those who receive this new salvation are transformed by it. The poor and marginalized by virtue of their inclusion are elevated, and the rich and the powerful are called to surrender power in the interest of servanthood and community unity and to embrace as sisters and brothers those whom they formerly viewed as outside the grace of God. This newly formed community as it bears witness in the world to the sovereign reign of God in Christ also bears witness to the truth and challenges the evil that manifests as injustice. It requires new ways of seeing the world that challenge social, economic and political systems and shed light on injustice and the persecution of the innocent. Thus, salvation becomes both spiritual and social; sanctification requires reversal and solidarity with the poor; ecclesiology requires a unity that sets aside power, privilege, and status in the interest of Christ and the church as it fulfills this sovereign, Jubilee-laden will of God that of necessity challenges society to abandon the lie for the truth of God.

If this is the theological message of Luke then the Gospel is declaring a more radical message than is currently recognized by most evangelical theology. This is not a message of universal salvation or of salvation predicated on social class or standing but a radically socially and culturally reorienting gospel that may require the reexamination of doctrinal and ethical stances. But are there other texts that challenge or may even seem to contradict this reading of Luke? And what might these texts have to say if taken alongside Luke-Acts about issues of status, power, privilege and the challenge of the status quo? That will form the work of Movement Three Step Two below.

#### *4.2.3.2 Place in dialogue with texts that seem to oppose the text's identified theological interpretation. (Movement Three, Step Two)*

It is important to affirm, along with Vanhoozer (2005:299), that "If the canon is to serve as our interpretative framework, it is not enough to make sense of individual texts or even of the ways in which they relate to the world; we also have to deal with how the various maps (texts) relate to one another." This is especially true of what Vanhoozer (2005:273) calls "pluriform texts," those texts that diverge in relation to genre or that seem to suggest a different understanding of theology or ethics. These texts must be considered together or

“coordinated” in any overall application of the biblical text to doctrine or dogma. If Luke 4:16-30 is concerned primarily with inclusion, reversal, and the salvation/liberation of the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized and is couched in the form of narrative, there are at least two sets of biblical passages that have already been identified in Chapter Three whose interpretation seems to lean instead toward hierarchy, privilege, and exclusion. These are Romans 13:1-7 and the household codes in Paul’s letters. The traditional interpretation of these texts sets them in direct opposition to the interpretation of Luke 4:16-30 suggested above. They also represent a distinctly different genre. Certainly, they have to be taken into consideration here because of the final-form, canonical view of Scripture envisioned by this project.

In regard to these alternative texts the focus will be on the broader hermeneutical issues with reference to more nuanced exegetical matters primarily when there is a point of contention in the exegetical literature that affects textual interpretation. Therefore, it is possible to move to an assessment of the various competing interpretations of the texts in question and to analyze each in turn, thereby reaching some conclusions on the interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 and the household codes that can then be “coordinated” with the working interpretation of Luke 4:16-30.

It is important to note that the primary interpreters of Romans 13:1-7 have been theologians and not biblical scholars. Given the relative consensus on exegetical matters, biblical scholars tend to spend limited space on the passage in their commentaries. The most extensive treatments, therefore, are by theologians and theological ethicists. John Howard Yoder (1994:199-200) distinguishes the two primary interpretive traditions: the traditionalist or “positivistic” and the “normative” view. But any discussion of the interpretation of these texts must also include contemporary insights from post-colonialist biblical scholars and theologians.

Yoder credits the Lutheran tradition, particularly literalist understandings of the two-kingdoms theology, for the traditional view. But it was also clearly evident in Calvin’s (see section 3.2.2.4 above) and Henry’s (see section 3.5.2.2.3 above) views of Romans 13 noted in Chapter Three above. Yoder (1994:199) says that according to this tradition, “one of the ways of understanding the ‘institution’ of government by God is to claim that whatever government exists, it is by virtue of an act of institution, that is, a specific providential action of God, that it came into being.... Whatever is, is the will of God.” This sums up the

traditional reading of the text. Calvin's insistence that God ordains all governments including evil governments and that Christians are required to submit to all governments is characteristic of this type of reading. Henry also affirms the authority of government and the requirement of Christians to submit to the "laws of the land." Calvin's views are primarily based on a very high view of the providence of God, whereas Henry's views are centered on his limitation of the concept of justice to the execution of "law and order" by governmental authorities.

Yoder's (1994:253-260) primary concern about the traditionalist interpretation, besides his clear opposition to bearing arms, is that it seems to be in opposition to clear calls in the Scriptures to oppose evil and limitation on believers, especially in the Old Testament, to obeying laws that clearly violated the law of God. Yoder (1994:262) wants to decenter Romans 13 as the principal understanding of the Christian relationship to government. While it is true that Romans 13 should not stand alone, it is also the case that Romans 13 cannot be ignored in any theology of submission, resistance to evil, and the maintenance of systems of supremacy.

The more pressing issue related to the traditional interpretation is its application in contemporary settings. The use of the text to support Nazi authority in Germany during World War II (see, for example, Joachim Hossenfelder, 2015:45-54) and its use in South Africa to support apartheid (see Mukuka, 2012:105-138) bring into question how the text's call to submission can be universally applicable in all circumstances to all forms of government. With reference to the study of Calvin and Henry, it should also be remembered that Calvin reluctantly suggested that if the government forbade worship a Christian might have an obligation to disobey. Likewise, Henry ponders, without answer, whether a Christian might participate in the overthrow of a communist government. The application of the text raises many ethical questions when considered in light of actual world events. This coupled with the existence of instances in Scripture where believers did resist and refuse to obey particular governmental laws and obligations has led to the development of the "normative view" of Romans 13.

This view is characterized by Yoder (1994:199-200) as running from Zwingli and Knox to Cromwell to Karl Barth and Emil Bruner. It is also the view that provides an interpretive framework for both the Barmen Declaration against Nazi attempts to control the

church in Germany and the Kairos Document that was written in opposition to the apartheid government of South Africa. Yoder (1994:199) summarizes this view:

What is ordained is not a particular government but the concept of proper government, the principle of government as such. If, however, a government fails adequately to fulfill the functions divinely assigned to it, it loses its authority. It then becomes the duty of the preacher to teach that this has become an unjust government, worthy of rebellion. It can become the duty of Christian citizens to raise up against it.

The primary textual justification for this interpretation is that the text does present an idealized view of government that assumes that it is working for the good of the governed and that its policies maintain order. Thus, there seems to be a clear definition of what a proper government does in Romans 13 and at least a minimal measure by which to judge whether a government is fulfilling these minimal obligations.

Perhaps the best and most thorough treatment of Romans 13:1-7, in the normative tradition, is found in the post-WWII theological reflection of Karl Barth (1954) on the nature of political theology. Barth grounds this theology in Romans 13 and provides a clear understanding of the role of the church in the secular world.

It is important to understand that Barth works out the larger ramifications of Romans 13 in a series of talks and essays intended to address both the horrors of WWII and the rising threats of communism in Eastern Europe. Thus, this later theological reflection diverges somewhat from his earlier commentary on Romans written and revised between 1918 and 1922.

The Romans commentary maintains a view of the relationship of Christians to the State that is part of Barth's larger argument about the qualitative distinction between God and humanity. Using a mathematical formula, Barth (1968:483-485) maintains that both established government and rebellion remain bracketed from God such that only God's actions outside the brackets of fallen human institutions can effect real change and bring about positive government or positive revolution. A corollary to this is that all activity within the brackets can only be a reflection of God's primal order. The government points to God's order because it is only through the evil of human order that humanity understands the goodness of God's order. Barth (1968:484) comments that this "is shown by the unmistakable fact that the passage dealing with human *rulers* follows after the passage dealing with the *enemy* and is prefaced by the quite clear statement that men are to overcome evil."

Government in relation to God can only be seen as imperfect and evil. Its primary value rests in its ability to point to God.

But revolution is also never able, on its own accord, to deliver the true order reflected in God. God remains the only equation, positioned as God is outside the bracket, which can change or transform what is inside the bracket.

Thus, in his *Commentary on Romans*, Barth affirms a traditional reading of Romans 13. But as he turns slowly toward a more immanent understanding of God after WWII his understanding of Romans 13 expands to include a carefully articulated political theology that is dependent on the normative interpretation of the text.

This is particularly in evidence in an essay written in the summer of 1946 entitled “The Christian Community and Civil Community.” This essay is an enlarged commentary on the fifth thesis of the Theological Declaration of Barmen and deserves greater attention than it has received.

Barth (1954:15-50) begins the essay by insisting on the importance of seeing both the Church and civil society as communities. The Church is a closed community consisting only of believers, whereas the State is a community that consists of all persons within particular geographic and political boundaries, including both believers and nonbelievers. Thus, Barth envisions the Church in relation to the State as concentric circles, with the Church community being a smaller circle within the larger circle of civil community.

As Barth (1954:16, 17) explains the relationship between the two he does not see the borders as equally porous. The Church is always a member of the civil community and as such exercises responsibility for the civil community. But the State is not a part of the Church community and thus exercises no such responsibility for the Church other than to recognize its right to existence as one entity among many within the civil community. The varying functions of the two communities is also critical to Barth’s analysis. The Church possesses the direct light and revelation of the truth of God, but the State is blind and without knowledge of the truth of God even while guided by the providential will of God. Barth (1954:17) states, “One cannot in fact compare the Church with the State without realizing how much weaker, poorer and more exposed to danger the human community is in the State than in the Church.”

Turning to comment on the Church’s role within the State, Barth (1954:21-23) points out that the Church recognizes in civil community the “operation of a divine ordinance.” In this part of his argument, he affirms a traditional view of Romans 13 to the extent that he

recognizes that God has raised up governments to provide order. But Barth goes further by suggesting that this desire for order on God's part is an expression of his patience and grace in giving humanity the time needed to accept his divine salvation. It is only in order that the evangelistic work of the Church can move forward that God both tarries and provides order to present the situations necessary to conversion. According to Barth (1954:21), "it (the State) renders a definite service to the divine providence and plan of salvation." Barth ties the Church's chief concern, salvation in Christ, to the order engendered by good government and says that because of the Church's concern for the one it must be concerned for the other. This intimate connection, says Barth (1954:22) "makes one thing quite impossible, however: a Christian decision to be indifferent, a non-political Christianity."

Because of the deeply political nature of the Christian life in the civil community and the importance the State plays in making possible the mission of the Church, the Church cannot "halt at the boundary where the inner and outer circle meet," but must engage directly in the life of the State. The Church's role is to provide the truth of God to the State which the State does not possess. It also consists in the Church supporting the State's primary role of providing order in the world by not withholding itself from full participation in the life of the civil community (1954:23, 24).

At this point Barth is quick to qualify what submission looks like. Barth distinguishes subordination from blind obedience. Proper subordination means that Christians assume "responsibility" for the proper maintenance of a proper State that secures order and peace for its citizens. By re-envisioning subordination as responsibility Barth allows the Church to oppose evil government or disordered government as part of the church's responsibility to support a government that evidences the intended divine order. This may mean that in order to submit and do what is best for the civil community the Christian may have to rebel against the State to restore proper order. Rebellion is only supportable when its motivation is the responsible restoration of good order as members of the civil community and when it has a clear aim and plan for reestablishing that order (1954:24-28).

Barth also insists that the Christian community must not seek a place of special privilege in the civil community or place itself above the laws of the civil community (1954: 24). Likewise, the Christian realizes that all forms of political theory are fallen and therefore should not Christianize any single political theory. The proclamation of the kingdom of God by the church means that the kingdom is the only truly perfect communal expression, and no

temporal government or political system can ever approximate it. Barth also insists, in agreement with Carl Henry, that the kingdom of God will not be realized in this world and therefore the church should not be working to set up the kingdom of God on earth in the form of a temporal government.

While the eschatological kingdom of God cannot be realized on earth through any temporal government, both God's model in the church and God's model in the kingdom can serve as an exemplar for what the Christian aspires to and advocates in the State. The similarity of this model to Cone's view of the uses of eschatology should be noted here. Barth prefers the exemplar approach as a means to a specific revelation of God that underpins good government to any attempt to explain God's ordination of government in terms of natural law.

Working off this idea of the kingdom as exemplar, Barth suggests several ways that the church's knowledge of the kingdom should affect its role as responsible citizens in the civil community. This includes reminding the State of what true righteousness is (1954:33). Further, the church is called by its understanding of the kingdom to advocate first and foremost for human beings and not for causes; this flows from the church's call to love one's neighbor (1954:34, 35). Likewise, the church demands a rule of law that acknowledges that all persons are equal under the law "with no exemption from and full protection by the law" (1954:35). Also, because God stands for the poor and marginalized, the church must always stand for social justice in the civil community (1954: 30). Finally, the church must stand for freedom of individual conscience (1954:37). There should be a benefit to the civil community as the church reflects on the truth of its own existence and applies the benefits of those truths to its participation in the civil community.

There are seven primary conclusions to be drawn from Barth's view of the relationship of Church and State based on his understanding of Romans 13:1-7. First, arising from his *Commentary on Romans*, God has sovereign authority over the government. Second, the church is a part of the world and cannot be isolated from it. Third, the church's place as part of the civil community requires its participation in the life of the community and particularly in the community's political life. Fourth, the church possesses a truth to which the civil authority is blind and it is incumbent on the church, for its own sake, to speak that truth to the powers of this world. Fifth, the church does not place itself above the law or seek its own ends or privileges. Sixth, the church bases its participation in the political life of the

civil community on the church's own life and God's truth as evident in the future kingdom of God. Finally, all of this depends on an understanding of submission in Romans 13 as proper responsibility.

It is likely to be argued that Barth's theological reflections on Romans 13 seem to stray from a strict literal reading of the text. Barth focuses on the sense of the text and that alone is likely to be contested by evangelicals of the sort envisioned by this study. But perhaps it might be suggested that Barth's interpretation or application of the text might be saved by way of an appeal to hermeneutical equivalency.

While Barth does not appeal to the concept, he does examine the text through the lens of the modern Western democratic state. There is a vast distinction between citizens in Western democracies who hold some degree of political power and privilege and first-century Christians who were doubly marginalized and powerless. Paul and his church had no power within either the Jewish religious hierarchy or the Roman government. He also lived in an era where the notion of citizenship was severely restricted and the power of citizens extremely limited vis-à-vis the power centered in the ruling elite. The ability to exercise power was restrained legally, culturally and practically for Paul and his Christian contemporaries.

In contrast, the power and privilege exercised in the West by Christianity since Constantine and the increasing power of individual citizens in modern Western democracies is substantial in comparison. The ability of contemporary Christian citizens of these states to participate in governmental systems, to influence laws, to protest and assemble, and the political enthronelement of revolution, freedom, and individual rights in the Enlightenment have created a unique position for at least some citizens in relationship to civil government and the civil process. Given these realities, the maintenance of proper order and the common good in Western society is the responsibility of citizens collectively and individually and not the responsibility of a ruling elite.

Therefore, Barth does not take as great a leap from the text as might otherwise be imagined. In Paul's context, where the very survival of the church required it to acquiesce to government rule, submission by necessity takes the form of quietude. In the case of Christians who hold power and privilege within a participatory government, the maintenance of order and good government may look more like exercising their responsibilities as citizens to change laws through the formal and informal means available to them. Submission might



look like using their voice to speak truth within and as part of their responsibility for the civil community.

Within the context of this current study, focused as it is on a theology of power and privilege, this text must be seen as constraining Christians with participatory rights within society to work within the confines of the gospel in the exercise of those privileges. Christian citizens who occupy this space are not therefore able to draw on this passage as a means to justify the subjugation of fellow citizens. In fact, those who hold positions of power and privilege, both in the church and civil society, have a special obligation both to the truth of the gospel, which affirms the dignity of all humanity and the Christian call to love both neighbor and enemy, and to their obligation to use the position provided to them by civil society to create a society built on the truth of God, which demands both equal protection and equal privileges under the law. The Christian citizen within a contemporary participatory democracy stands, therefore, in a unique relationship to Romans 13 that is distinctly different from that of the early Church.

But what about the marginalized within civil society? First it must be said that Romans 13 does not speak to persons in general or the government in particular but it is addressed to Christians. Its primary focus is on Christians who believed they could withdrawal from participation in civil society and ignore civil authority (Dunn, 1998:674-680).

Romans 13 in effect calls on Christians to stop claiming a special privilege for themselves as above the everyday laws that bound them to others in society or from the paying of taxes required of others. This idea of exercising special privilege or seeing themselves as outside of society is central to Paul's point. It neither precludes the work of God in elevating the poor and marginalized through revolution, nor prevents Christians from standing on the side of their neighbors who are treated unjustly or unlawfully. The primary bracket which the text places on Christians is a prohibition on self-interested rebellion or withdrawal that places them above the law and outside of civil community.

It is also important to realize that as far as Barth's normative view has gone there are also other scholars who suggest that the text may not in fact point to abject submission in quite the way traditionalists have suggested. This has been the primary contribution of post-colonial biblical and theological scholarship (see, for example, Makuka, 2012:105-138). Using post-colonial theory is difficult within an evangelical interpretive framework. The

tendency toward reader-response criticism becomes problematic for any effort to point the text toward single, or at least a set, of complementary truths. Conclusions that have direct connections to reader-response criticism are likely to be rejected by a large portion of orthodox, traditionalist evangelicals and therefore so would any conclusions drawn from them. So, it is important to delineate how post-colonial observations are being used here.

The broader interpretative conclusions of post-colonial theory are not under consideration within the narrow framework of this study, but some aspects of post-colonial theoretical understanding about the colonial context and the ways that context shapes the production of texts are relevant. This is particularly important in any understanding of how Paul's text might be shaped by his participation in diaspora Judaism and his status under Roman occupation. This particular understanding of Paul might suggest a different reading of the text than might otherwise be the case. It is possible that a colonial positioning of Paul is at least less anachronistic than any view of him that would see him as possessed of any power within his cultural and political world. Thus, an analysis of Paul's particular position under the Roman colonial empire and the way this position might shape the understanding of his writings is certainly in order.

There are at least two ideas within post-colonial theory that seem directly applicable to any interpretation of Romans 13; these include the notions of hybridity and the double-voiced text. The idea of hybridity is particularly evident in Paul. He exists in an in-between space caught between the role of the occupied and marginalized Jew, as well as the double marginalized Christian, and his Roman citizenship. According to Makuka (2012:105), "Paul is presented here as an ethnic hybrid who both affiliates with and challenges the *Imperium Romanum* at the same time." Makuka (2012:105-138) sees Paul as occupying a space between the colonizer and the colonized, the Jew and the Gentile, and as suggesting a new creative way of being that challenges the status quo while avoiding direct confrontation with the colonial powers.

It should be noted that this is in direct contravention of much Black exegesis in the United States where some Black biblical scholars have followed the commonly repeated trope of Howard Thurman. Thurman posits that Paul and Jesus occupy two distinct social positions; Jesus is marginalized and oppressed whereas Paul holds a position of privilege as a Roman citizen. Therefore, Paul has little to say to marginalized people, and the teachings of Jesus must be the point of departure for the oppressed, not Paul (Bowens, 2020:232-233).

This move prioritizes one part of the canon over another: the Gospels over the writings of Paul. Therefore, it is not consistent with the final-form, canonical approach of the current study.

But Makuka's view of hybridity does rescue Paul from a supposed privileged position. Indeed, Paul's social position is different from that of Jesus, but he is in no way positioned in a place of privilege in relation to the civil authorities of his day. His in-betweenness may in fact isolate and marginalize him more. What an understanding of Paul's hybridity does is point to a possible motive for a specific textual strategy. Paul shapes his views with the perspective of a doubly marginalized subject of both Jewish religious authority and Roman civil authority. The conciliatory language of Romans 13 points to Paul's and the early church's precarious position in reference to both the Roman government and Jewish antagonism. But it also shapes a new reality of the church between God and civil authority and reimagines the world in Christian theological terms. This theological reorientation is not without its rebellious implications, which become apparent in the second of the two post-colonial insights in view here: double-voicedness or the hidden text.

William Herzog (1994:341) insists that, "in a setting where power relations are asymmetrical, it will be much more likely that the political speech of the weak will dissemble, that is, it will feign obedience and loyalty to the colonial overlords while pursuing its own hidden agenda." Sun Uk Lim (2015:1) agrees: "Paul affiliates with the colonial authorities at the public level, he persuades the audience to resist them—especially when it comes to the imperial worship—at the hidden level." Thus, Romans 13 says two things, or better said, the text speaks at two levels.

But what does this mean for an interpretation of Romans 13? It is possible to ground this understanding of the text more directly in the text itself than does either Herzog or Lim. The text's public-facing discourse is not in question. Its call to subordination to governmental authorities and its admonition that government is ordained of God flatters and placates civil authorities. But there are also subtle implications of Paul's theology.

First, Paul does not place governmental authority under the authority of divinity generally but under the authority of the Christian God who has a specific plan to elevate, deliver and save God's people deeply embedded in God's providential will and a revealed eschatological future. This makes Paul's proclamation that government is ordained and held within the providential will of God deeply liberationist. Paul's original readers would read

the text with a great deal of hope and confidence that God would deliver them from Roman oppression (Hanc, 2014:313-316). The liberationist impact implied in the pronouncement that all government exists under the sovereign will and authority of the Christian God is lost 2100 years removed from its writing. But it is nonetheless a component of the text that likely held great hope for early Christians.

Second, the text serves to limit the role and power of civil government and subordinates it to the welfare of its citizens and subjects. The government exists for a limited purpose, the preservation of an ordered society. It also defines and distinguishes between a good government and a bad government. The good government gives its law-abiding citizens nothing to fear. This presents criteria by which the Roman government and its representatives can be judged and measured and whereby it can be determined if they are in fact functioning according to God's intended and stated purpose for proper government. Those clearly operating outside this divine purpose could be expected to incur the judgement of God. It also demarcates the specific limitations of governmental power. Certainly, the idea of the limits of civil power, particularly in relation to subject peoples and nations, would have been a novel idea in Paul's time.

The text therefore participates in a multilevel discourse that is conscious of the hybrid, in-between space that it occupies. It does call Christians to take a position within civil society that is careful to observe the strictures of Roman law, but it also signals that God is in control, even of Rome, and is working for the good of God's people. Romans 13 also provides the means, again couched in cautious language, of understanding the boundaries and limits of secular power. It therefore would be hard to suggest vis-à-vis the traditionalist view that the text has no subversive meaning.

How then, in light of all this, is Romans 13:1-7 to be understood? And how is it then to be brought into dialogue with Luke 4:16-30?

Understood within its mid-first-century context, Romans 13 clearly has three purposes. First, Christians are forbidden by the text to view their life in Christ as an excuse for privileging themselves above the law or withdrawing themselves entirely from civil society. The Christian continues to have civil and political obligations within the larger world. Second, the text makes civil government subservient to the providential will and sovereignty of the Christian God, while also limiting the scope and sphere of authority within civil government. The text of Romans basically limits "what is Caesar's" and extends "what

is God's." Finally, Romans 13:1-7 situates Christian civil responsibility within the context of a broader ethic of love for neighbor and particularly the care of the weak. Situated as it is within a fuller ethical parenthesis extending from Romans 12:9 to 13:14, which deals primarily with the primacy of Christian love, it seems to suggest that any Christian participation in the civil community must be marked with a distinctly Christian form of love for both enemy and neighbor (see Dunn, 1998:674-680).

Understood within a contemporary Western democratic society, particularly by Christians who have access to formal and informal means to full participation within political systems, Romans can be read differently, at least slightly. In a context where political power and responsibility is ultimately invested in the citizens, submission takes on the language of responsibility and that responsibility may at varying times and varying places look like either total obedience or rebellion. The people after all are the basis for the government and have a responsibility to ensure the practice of good government per the dictates of Romans 13. For the Christian citizen, and the church, there is a special obligation to arrange its political life under the obligations of Christian love found in the broader parenthesis that includes Romans 13:1-7 as well as the broader ethics of the New Testament canon. This ensures that neither the individual Christian nor churches nor governments can use the call to submission as a means to preserve oppressive systems or maintain personal or privileged group status to the detriment of others. This, of course, is the central argument of both the Theological Declaration at Barmen and the Kairos Document, in relation to Romans 13:1-7.

How then is this understanding of Romans 13 to be placed in dialogue with Luke 4:16-30? First, the two seem to share two very important foci. Both Romans 13 and Luke 4, particularly within the broader theology of Luke-Acts, seem to emphasize the sovereign, providential work of God toward the deliverance of a people from all nations and God's personal liberative/salvific actions on their behalf. Both the Christ of the Jubilee and the God who orders all governmental powers is actively, supernaturally at work creating a people for God's self and securing a place for them in the world (see Ringe, 1985).

Additionally, Luke-Acts and Romans 13 serve to suggest ways of living ethically in the world while awaiting the eschatological return of Christ. For Romans, this is an imminent return, which nonetheless still forestalls the withdrawal of Christians from secular society and obligations. In Luke-Acts it is a delayed Parousia under which the necessity of a clear ethic for living in the world become even clearer. Read together, the themes of care for the

poor and marginalized, the reversal of position of the weak and the powerful, and the focus on inclusion in Luke-Acts provide a specificity to the love ethic in Romans 12:9 – 13:14 in which Romans 13:1-7 is a part. Thus, both Romans and Luke contain ethical foci that obligate those who are part of the new covenant community to live in love. Brought forward into a Western democratic society where Christians have a responsibility along with all citizens for the government, the covenant ethic of Luke, centered in the love ethic of Romans, receives greater definition.

While this leaves unanswered, and beyond the scope of the current project, how the text might be interpreted in non-Western and non-democratic contexts where Christians lack direct political agency, it does at least suggest that within systems of power and privilege, where Christians have this agency, Romans 13 is not at all problematic, and may even support, as opposed to limit, an ethical reading of Luke 4 and other biblical texts. This does of course assume the acceptance of the above interpretation of the text at least within the limited hermeneutical parameters imposed on the text by thinking about Romans 13 within systems where Christians have political agency and power and therefore responsibility for the maintenance of “good” government. Thus, what is suggested here is that far from supporting Calvin’s, Edwards’, and Henry’s view of submission without the possibility of revolt, Romans 13 may suggest a course of action that affirms both Cone’s view of God as the God of liberation and Hodge’s view of the possibility and necessity of revolt in the interest of good government. Seen in light of the latter, it does not present itself as problematic to a more literal reading of Luke 4:16-30; the necessity of spiritualizing the text in light of Romans becomes obsolete under this interpretation.

If this treatment of Romans 13 is accepted, it sidesteps the traditional insistence on the submission of oppressed people to oppressive governments and laws as well as informs a particular Christian political agency that supports a literal reading of Luke 4:16-30. This creates a different way of approaching Romans 13 and distancing it from the traditional readings of this text within the evangelical tradition presented in Chapter Three. But submission to government is not the only trope that was used in this tradition to support or directly formulate racist grammars. The tradition’s focus on hierarchy, in all four of the individuals considered, is also central to racist logics. This focus on hierarchy took its primary support from interpretations of the household codes found in the writings of Paul

and Peter. It is important to consider these texts as a group before returning to the full exposition of Luke 4:16-30.

If the perceived requirement to passively obey government presents a critical problem for liberationist interpretations of Luke 4:16-30, so do literal applications of the household codes in Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:22-33. Literal interpretations of the former require adherence to the status quo even when the system supports white supremacy and the centralization of power and privilege along lines of race. The household codes, interpreted hierarchically, have the potential to reinforce hierarchical systems of gender and class that then become subsumed into racist grammars. These texts then seem to mitigate against the themes of reversal and the elevation of the poor and marginalized envisioned in Luke-Acts. It therefore is important to address this seemingly contradictory pattern in the New Testament literature.

Like Romans 13, the literary exegesis is fairly straightforward. The primary textual points of dispute rise and fall on interpretations of the meanings of *hupotassō* (submit) and *kephalē* (head). But the greatest points of disagreement relate to the interpretation and application of the text. Therefore, it is important to examine the primary hermeneutical debate before proceeding to place Luke 4:16-30 in conversation with Colossians 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5:22-33.

There are five approaches to the interpretation of the household codes. They include liberal and post-liberal feminist/womanist/liberationist interpretations (see Bowens, 2020; Crowder, 2016:28-40 and Martin, 1991:206-231), as well as evangelical interpretive traditions. Among the latter there is a division between hierarchialists/complementarians (Piper and Grudem, 2021) and evangelical feminists/egalitarians (Pierce and Groothuis, 2005). Within the evangelical egalitarian group William Webb's (2001) redemptive hermeneutic deserves special mention. Outside all these positions are scholars best described as "third-way" exegetes, like Michelle Lee-Barnewall and Craig Blomberg (Lee-Barnewall, 2016), who believe that the standard approach to the interpretation of these texts is faulty and neither hierarchy nor egalitarianism is present in the codes. It is important to examine each of these interpretations.

Liberal and post-liberal scholars have largely engaged in a denial of the validity of the texts. This has been true of feminist, womanist, and liberationist theologians and biblical scholars. Feminism and womanism in particular have engaged more in a cultural critique of

the household codes than a full exegetical and theological treatment of the texts in their own right. Thus, many feminist exegetes seem to subscribe to Rosemary Ruether's (1983:18-19) "critical principles of feminist theology" which she identifies as "the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive." This principle flows directly into feminist and womanist biblical exegesis of the household codes, where the existence of patriarchy necessitates a critique of the text and an excision of the text from theologies of divine and human relationships.

This is evident in the work of Clarice Martin (1991:206-231) in Cain Felder's *Stony the Road We Trod* in which she argues

that the *Haustafeln* (household codes) and the letters in which they are found are not Pauline. The question of whether the *Haustafeln* are Pauline is, of course, linked to the question of the authenticity of Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter. I would argue that Colossians and Ephesians are deuterio-Pauline, that is, written by circles of Paul's students on the model of the Pauline letters, and that 1 Peter is pseudonymous.

Working off this later dating of the letters, Martin (211) affirms Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's assessment that the authentic view of the early church was a "discipleship of equals." Later post-Pauline generations, grappling with in-fighting, abandoned this authentic egalitarianism in favor of the household codes to restore order. Thus, the codes are inauthentic and not helpful for contemporary theological or ethical use.

The problem with this approach, within the context of the current study, is two-fold. First, it suggests a conclusion not in evidence. Authorship and dating of the Pauline corpus is a highly subjective field of scholarship and is too suspect to carry the weight of the type of exclusion suggested by Martin. This is particularly the case in light of the extensive acceptance of Colossians as part of the uncontested Pauline texts primarily due to its connection to Philemon.

Second, regardless of the dating or the authorship of the text, this study would still need to object to Martin's insights no matter how interesting or promising they were, due primarily to the hermeneutical approach envisioned in the current work. Dependence on a canonical, final-form approach to the text eliminates questions of textual authorship or date as a primary factor in the interpretation of the text. It also insists on a radical inclusion of texts even when they seem to be problematic for the interpretation of other texts or problematic for contemporary readers. Thus, it would be difficult to adopt a feminist or



womanist hermeneutic because the views of the text are so radically different. The distinction between a methodology of exclusion and a methodology of radical inclusion are just too great.

Therefore, what seems necessary is the consideration of interpretive approaches that are more serious about the authority of the text. The most literalist of these approaches is found among evangelical hierarchialists/complementarians. It should be noted that the two views, hierarchical and complementarian, are closely connected but not necessarily interchangeable, at least not as far as complementarians are concerned. Hierarchialism is the older of the literalist views and is in evidence in the work of Calvin, Edwards and Hodge, as has already been suggested in Chapter Three. This view recognized and affirmed strict social distinctions based on class, gender, education, and in the case of Edwards and Hodge, race. It preserved cultural views of power and privilege that also included distinct value judgements and responsibility based on social and gender status. Within these systems non-egalitarian treatment of the “lower classes,” women, and racial minorities was often based, as shown above, on Aristotelian notions of distributive justice anchored in a literalist approach to the household codes.

Complementarianism, on the other hand, attempts to use the contemporary language of equality while preserving the distinctions in roles and authority based on gender. It should be noted that contemporary complementarians have abandoned the defense of class and race hierarchy based on its dependence on the slavery sections of the household codes. Their use of the texts is largely limited to preserving gender distinctions and particularly male leadership/authority within the home and the church. Their primary logic is that God created men and women for distinct but equally valuable roles and that the role of leadership in the home and the church was given by God to men at creation. An example of this is Piper and Grudem’s work (2021:13-16) which clearly defines the complementarian approach. It should be noted that the base logic of this view comports with the logic of “separate but equal” that underpinned segregationist laws in the south of the United States and apartheid in South Africa. Regardless of their approach, both hierarchialists and complementarians preserve male authority over women and use the same literal approach to the text which warrants their treatment together.

The most extensive defense of hierarchical/complementarian views is found in a volume entitled *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical*

*Feminism* edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (2021). The chapter by George Knight III (2021:215-232) along with the chapter by Wayne Grudem (2021:449-568) clearly lay out the complementarian position in relation to the household codes. Knight's argument breaks down into discussions of submission and headship, extends the husband-wife relationship to include male leadership in church and society, and attempts to avoid an affirmation of slavery by grounding slavery in temporal culture while grounding gender roles in the created order.

The central textual debate revolves around interpretations of *hupotassō* (submit) and *kephalē* (head). Knight (2021:217) affirms a position that submission in the household codes calls the wife to voluntarily submit to her husband out of love and reverence for Christ. According to Knight, this submission is not limited but must be in "every aspect of life" (Knight, 2021:222). Submission is also not a mutual submission in spite of the fact that the Ephesian passage calls for submission to "one another." Knight (2021:219) argues:

It is sometimes urged that mutual submission alone is in view in the section on wives and husbands, and that therefore wives are not being called to a unique or distinct submission to their husbands. Since, however, verse 21 is a transition verse to the entirety of the section on household responsibilities, consistency would demand that the section on children and parents and on servants and masters also speaks only of mutual submissiveness and not of different roles. Since this is self-evidently not so for the section on children and parents, on the one hand, and masters and slaves, on the other, the implication is that distinguishable roles and specific submission are also taught in the section in husbands and wives.

Thus, submission involves a wife's recognition of the headship/authority of her husband. But what does "head" mean in the context of the household codes? Knight (2021:221-222), following Grudem (2021:449-568), defines "head" as "leader or authority" and opposes the definition of head as "source." Thus, the assignment of the role of "head" to the husband endows him with authority over his wife.

Knight (2021:221), strains to extend the husband/wife relationship to a generalized understanding of male leadership in church and society, stating that:

Paul does not ask every woman to submit to every man, but rather asks wives to submit to their own husbands. Paul is not insisting that every relationship between a woman and a man is one of submission and headship, but that where leadership is an ingredient of the situation, as in marriage, the woman should submit to that leadership (headship) of a man.

It is unclear how Knight makes the leap from familial to societal submission to male leadership. It is also difficult to see situations where submission and leadership were not the dynamic or what Knight intends to exclude in societal relationships. All and all, the internal logic of his argument seems contradictory.

Finally, when addressing the relationship between the husband and wife and the master and slave, Knight (2021:231) argues for the permanence of the husband/wife and parent/child relationship while also arguing for the temporality of the master/slave relationship. The parent-child relationship is grounded in Old Testament law, specifically the fifth commandment. Likewise, he grounds the husband/wife relationship in creation because of the connection in Ephesians to the Genesis account of creation. But, according to Knight, “no permanent moral command or any other moral absolute with reference to slavery is used in Paul’s instructions to slaves.” Thus, Knight sidesteps the question of how the affirmation of slavery might affirm the temporality of the entire household codes.

What then is to be made of any possible use of the complementarian perspective on the household codes? First, the views and the arguments related to submission and headship do seem more grounded in the original intent of the text than do other interpretive perspectives. But it will be argued below that they may not be pointed in the right direction when it comes to the application of the texts. Second, complementarian approaches apply an understanding of leadership and authority roles that seem more at home in contemporary organizational theory than in New Testament commentary on inter-community relationships, the latter seeming to have a more organic intent than the former. Third, Knight cannot resist doing violence to the text. He insists on its unity when making his argument against the mutuality of submission and allows for its discontinuity in relation to the unique temporal, cultural nature of the master-slave relationship contra the moral/creational eternal imperative of the parent/child and husband/wife relationship. While each argument holds an inherent logic taken alone, taken together they suggest the very real discomfort felt by modern interpreters about the presence of slavery in the texts which did not present a problem for early hierarchical exegetes like Calvin, Edwards and Hodge. Thus, complementarians are forced to stray from the literal interpretation of the text or contrive ways of excising slavery while still affirming gender power distinctives.

Fourth, the mention of Genesis 2:24, “the two shall become one flesh,” in Ephesians does not seem to bear the full exegetical weight of the creation complementarianism that

Knight suggests is evident in the text. This is true in two senses. It is true to the degree that this quote is embedded not in the section on the submission of wives but in the exhortation of husbands to love their wives as “they love themselves.” The clear implication of its use is to convince men of the extent to which they should love and care for their wives. There is no suggestion within the text itself that Paul is alluding to a larger gendered order in creation. While this case might be better built with allusion to other texts, it is not true that a clear order of creation is evident in the texts of either Colossians or Ephesians. Also, as will be seen in the egalitarian argument below, it is not clear even in direct exegesis of the Genesis account whether any evidence of authority can be seen in the original state of creation or whether division is the result of the fall. Both of these difficulties create problems for Knight’s attempts to predicate gender distinctions and male authority on the created order. Ultimately, complementarian appeals to creation seem more grounded in ideas of natural law and general revelation than to specific indicators in the text.

Fifth, the expansion of a text specific to household roles and relationships to broader discussions of male leadership in other spheres seems to stretch the text beyond its intended meaning. There is no indication in the household codes themselves that they were intended to support other relationship scenarios outside the home.

Finally, and particularly as it concerns its usefulness for the current study, complementarianism can be viewed as an attempt not to read the text on the basis of its original meaning but to defend the text by couching it in modern language of equal respect but separate roles. The hierarchical approach with its full-on literalism seems to do less damage to the original intent of the text than does complementarianism. In the end, it also uses the language of egalitarianism while espousing a hierarchical praxis that is intellectually disingenuous.

What complementarianism does do is take seriously the emphasis on submission in the text of the household codes, even if it does continue to deny the focus on the mutuality of submission in Ephesians. It must also be acknowledged that complementarianism depends on a broader array of biblical texts than the household codes in its efforts to expand set gender roles beyond the relationship between husband and wife. Critiquing complementarianism as a holistic system is not in view here. What is under consideration is the complementarian views of the household codes and only secondarily the system as a whole and only as it connects directly with arguments for male authority in the text of the household codes. The

justification for this narrow approach lies in the focus of the study and the way the codes are used in the evangelical tradition under consideration.

The four theologians considered in Chapter Three focus on the household codes as support for a more generalized defense of hierarchical roles where both class and gender are under consideration. It was the conclusion of Chapter Three that this hierarchical grammar forms the underlying foundation of subsequent racist logics. This is less the case with passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34 that admonish women to silence. These passages, focused tightly on gender roles, are rarely extended to more generalized understandings of hierarchy. This is not to suggest that sexism and racism do not share a common lexicon and roots in hierarchialism, but only to state that the inclusion of class (master-slave) distinctions in the household codes make them far more extendable in relation to racist logics.

Further, the focus of the study is on power and privilege as they intersect primarily with racism and white supremacy. How these categories intersect with gender is an important question but would require a whole other study and is beyond the scope of consideration. Gender is engaged here because it is the only section of the codes that contemporary scholars debate and that also preserves a literal interpretation of the text. As has been demonstrated above, complementarians prefer to bracket out the class distinctions and more generalized hierarchical implications of the text because of their discomfort with the slave-master arguments of the text. Thus, they maintain a remnant of the generalized hierarchical system which is evident across the literal interpretation of the full pericope by Calvin, Edwards and Hodge. Therefore, the whole must be engaged in the current study by virtue of the parts, the hierarchy that lingers implicitly in the complementarian interpretation of the household codes. Therefore, a more limited focus on the codes and a brief foray into gender seems in order at this juncture.

But if the above critique of complementarianism is accepted, does that necessarily require a commitment to evangelical egalitarianism/feminism? Not necessarily. The counter argument to Piper and Grudem's *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* is the volume edited by Ronald Pierce and Rebecca Groothuis, *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*. The chapters by Fee (2005:364-381), Giles (2005:334-354), Marshall (2005:186-204), and Webb (2005: 382-400) are the most useful to the current study.

Fee's chapter focuses on the hermeneutical issues that surround the gender debate. Fee on the one hand denies the liberal/post-liberal tendency to disallow sections of the text, while on the other hand he proposes an evangelical hermeneutic which he believes grounds the interpretation of the household codes and other scriptures under consideration in the gender debate in a thoroughly egalitarian interpretation.

Fee (2005:370) argues that Scripture has a two-fold nature: one as the word of God and the other grounded in the humanity, historicity and culture of the author. What this means for Fee is that certain portions of texts may be so culturally dependent as not to have significance for contemporary theological and ethical consideration. Additionally, Fee distinguishes between the interpretation of implicitly theological texts and texts from which a theological point can be derived only secondarily by way of implication. In the case of the latter, any theological maxim must be approached with a degree of humility and skepticism (Fee, 2005:373-375). Fee affirms a kind of theological triage that insists that theological propositions, doctrinal beliefs, and/or ethical applications that are derived from the text by way of implication are always second-order doctrinal statements that cannot be seen to carry the same interpretive weight as explicit theological statements (Fee, 2005:373). Thus, Fee views the household codes as evidencing a strong tendency toward depicting cultural, not theological, norms that are not eternally prescribed on the contemporary church. "The house codes in Colossians and Ephesians," Fee states, "are not intended to set boundaries but rather to encourage Christian deportment within an existing patriarchal culture" (Fee, 2005:380).

While Fee's hermeneutic has a lot to offer, particularly his discussion about explicit and implicit theology in Scripture, his focus on the exclusion of propositional statements by means of cultural specificity is particularly problematic within the confines of the text-based hermeneutic pursued by this current project. The point at which a text's eternal theology is proclaimed and the temporal cultural implications of a text begin or end is exceedingly difficult to infer and opens the text to subjective interpretive distinctions that run the risk of excluding the text because of non-text-based strategies. Thus, in practice the exclusion of texts on the basis of cultural specificity seems to approach, if not entirely approximate, the feminist exclusion of texts on the basis of a subjective appraisal of the text's authenticity. The fact that the temporal cultural nature of the text becomes central in evangelical egalitarianism is also problematic for comparing the household codes to Luke 4:16-30. It would be all too easy for evangelical egalitarians to simply disallow the implications of the

household codes in favor of a liberationist reading of Luke 4 or for traditionalists to limit the implications of Luke 4 to Jesus' time and cultural situation. This prevents the canon from speaking as canon and the possibility that the household codes might speak in harmony with Luke 4 or may suggest additional nuances to its understanding. Thus, exclusion on the basis of culture is antithetical to the intent of this study.

Another approach among evangelical egalitarians to rebutting complementarianism is to deny some of the broader theological implications that complementarianism draws on. This is evidenced in Kevin Giles' (2005:334-354) chapter on the eternal subordination of Christ to the Father.

Giles challenges Wayne Grudem's claim that Christ is eternally subordinate to the Father in the Godhead and that, by extension, the subordination within male/female relationships can be seen as reflective of the eternal reality of the Father and the Son in the Godhead. Giles challenges Grudem's assertion that this view was held by the church "from the Council of Nicaea onward" (Giles, 2005:336). Giles argues compellingly that the "eternal subordination of the Son (whether ontological or functional) does not have the historical endorsement of the Nicene and Athanasian creeds, the Reformation confessions of faith, or theological luminaries such as Athanasius, Augustine and Calvin" (Giles, 2005:339). Taking each in turn, Giles shows that the view most prominent in the church was functional or temporal subordination.

Giles' arguments will be revisited in the doctrinal discussion in Chapter Five, but are mentioned here because they do serve as a direct assault on the support of complementarian views by reference to the eternal subordination of the Son. But this argument still is insufficient in and of itself to overturn complementarianism and may not be the intellectual coup that Giles imagines. While it is true that if Grudem's understanding of the eternal subordination of the Christ were to stand it would lend more weight to complementarian views by grounding their theology in an ontological distinction in the Godhead, it is also true that even without this ontological distinction complementarians/hierarchicalists are still able to draw on Christ's temporal kenosis to mount Christological arguments for the subordination of women. Giles helps prove this point by identifying Calvin as supporting a temporal view of Christ's subordination (Giles, 2005:342-344). Calvin, as has already been demonstrated in Chapter Three, is a thoroughgoing hierarchicalist, particularly in his interpretation of the household codes. Thus, Giles' arguments fail to fully defeat notions of subordination in favor

of egalitarianism in the household codes, although they do go some distance in weakening the theological basis on which hierarchialism and complementarianism are built.

While the bulk of evangelical egalitarian arguments rest primarily on appeals to the temporality of culture and on direct assaults on the theological underpinnings of complementarianism, they have also engaged in direct exegesis of the household codes. This is the case with I. Howard Marshall's chapter. Marshall grounds the male/female relationship in the admonition to mutual submission in the Ephesian text and suggests that in spite of the cultural dynamics the pragmatic implications of Paul's admonition to the husband-father-master is an egalitarian community (Marshall, 2005:188-191). But Marshall's primary appeal is to the differences in the biblical and contemporary audiences. The modern ideas and institutions of parenting, gender advances in contemporary society, and the new relationship with work and labor mean that the text has to be filtered and its more antiquarian institutions revised in contemporary applications of the household code. But it is telling that when Marshall returns to the intention and world of the text, he is only able to go as far as saying that it affirms a kind of "love Patriarchy" (200) which is far from the egalitarian interpretation of the text he envisions. In the end it is difficult to distinguish Marshall's interpretation of the text from that of complementarianism when judged primarily on his interpretation of the intent of the text. Marshall (2005:186, 187), like other evangelical egalitarians, is forced to disregard much of the text as "merely" temporal, cultural and not theologically binding.

Evangelical egalitarianism seems to rest on just this view of the distinction between the cultural and the theological content of a text. While many contemporary biblical exegetes recognize the validity of culturally-bound textual elements and their non-applicability to modern circumstances, the question of when to accept or reject the teaching within a text always seems to be one of degrees. The decisions seem to rise and fall on methodological determinations of whether a propositional text has either temporal or eternal import. Among evangelical egalitarians the scholar who has most fully developed a method for distinguishing the temporal from the eternal is William Webb. Webb (2005:382-400) explores the cultural dynamics of gender roles in his chapter in *Discovering Biblical Equality* which is a summary of his earlier work, *Slaves, Women, & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (2001).

Webb (2001:30-66) describes his approach as a "redemptive hermeneutic" that seeks to show redemptive cultural movement both across the canon of Scripture and between the



scriptural canon and the larger cultural and socio-political context. The end result is a reading that is able to assess the redemptive movement of the text. Webb (2005:384) insists that “(w)hat we should live out in our modern culture is not the isolated or ‘on the page’ words of the text but the *redemptive spirit* that the text reflects when read against its original culture.” Webb views both the slavery and gender portions of the household codes as representing just such a redemptive spirit when compared to the greater culture’s treatment of women and slaves. Thus, the application of the text to modern culture would be toward a full egalitarianism for women. Thus, Webb (2005:398-400) is comfortable with a high degree of abstraction in the interpretation of the household codes because they exhibit a degree of redemptive value in relation to the culture at large.

Webb’s approach has much to commend it. He does at least begin his assessment in the cultural world of the text itself, before moving to a subsequent comparison with the larger cultural milieu. He identifies a methodology that sets parameters on the acceptance or elimination of cultural elements in the text which makes his assessment less subjective. In this way he merges a diachronic and synchronic view of the text, looking both for redemptive movement across the canon of Scripture and the culture at large. But Webb’s methods are still outside the text-dependent approach of this study.

First, Webb’s idea of abstraction has no clear check other than contemporary culture, which removes the interpretive authority/priority of the text in favor of a prioritizing of the culture. This is different from the hermeneutical equivalency used above to support Barth’s normative view of Romans 13. In the case of the latter, equivalency asks how the “obedience” required in the text is realized within a modern Western democratic society, whereas Webb abandons submission entirely for the sake of an egalitarian reading of the household codes.

Furthermore, while Webb merges diachronic and synchronic approaches to the text his emphasis is on the diachronic. Thus, the primarily synchronic approach to the current study makes it difficult to apply either Webb’s methods or his conclusions. Similarly, to move such a distance from the literary meaning and intention of the text would also diminish the usefulness of the text when placed in conversation with Luke 4:16-30, which is the primary objective here.

Egalitarian evangelicals are, therefore, somewhat problematic as interpreters of the household codes. They are primarily dependent on appeals to temporal versus eternal understandings of cultural elements of the text that lead them to either exclude portions of

the text (Fee) in ways similar although not identical to liberal and post-liberal feminists or to move beyond the text (Webb). It is also unclear how their ultimate analysis of the text, when they adhere to the intention of the text itself, differs from that of complementarians (Marshall).

So, if neither feminists, complementarians, nor evangelical egalitarians offer a wholly unproblematic interpretation of the household codes, is there an approach that might suggest a way forward? Yes, if one considers the work of Michelle Lee-Barnewall and other scholars who describe their conclusions as a “third-way” approach to the gender debate.

Lee-Barnewall (2016) suggests that the answer to the evangelical gender debate lies neither with the complementarian or the egalitarian perspective on gender roles. She argues that questions of authority, leadership, and power are not central to the household codes; the focus on power and privilege is in fact alien to the text and the result of modern ethical applications, not biblical intent. She suggests:

The key may be asking not so much whether Scripture promotes equality or authority as how—in a kingdom understanding—gender relates to love and unity between Christ and his bride. We may gain more not from merely asking what rights a person has or who has power but by seeing why unity matters and how it is accomplished by power manifested through weakness (2 Cor. 12:19), such as was exhibited through the cross (Lee-Barnewall, 2016:7).

Lee-Barnewall’s argument rests on an interpretation of the text centered around three central ideas of importance to the current study. First, the underlying context of the household codes is the need for unity among the people of God. At issue is a need for a growing multiethnic, multiclass, multi-gendered church to find unity in the midst of preexisting cultural divides that worked against the church. The clues to this come not from a cultural assumption but are part of the codes themselves. The one-flesh allusion in Ephesians, according to Lee-Barnewall, points to the theme of unity in Genesis 2, and the call to mutual service is an evident appeal to unity in the body (Lee-Barnewall, 2016:159-164).

Second, Lee-Barnewall (2016:76-81) builds on the biblical theme of reversal in both the Old and New Testaments to suggest that reversal is what Paul has in mind in suggesting mutual submission and requiring that the “head” surrender themselves in sacrificial service to the wife-child-slave. She also draws a direct connection between reversal and the sovereignty of God. “Thus, the concept of reversal,” according to Lee-Barnewall,

speaks to issues of identity found not in oneself, one's position, or personal power but in dependence on God. It refers to a profound willingness to sacrifice what gives people status and meaning in their current context for a value that comes from God alone. As such it causes the credit to be given to God rather than to flawed and sinful humanity. When applied to the community, it results in the deep unity of his people as they consider others before themselves and challenges leaders to be primary examples of this submission of God (Lee-Barnewall, 2016:81).

Reversal, therefore, is grounded on God's sovereignty, which explains Paul's insertion of Christ as head of all human relationships.

Finally, Lee-Barnewall (2016:148-164) applies the idea of reversal directly to the idea of headship in the household codes. She recognizes that *kephalē* does in fact have a connection to authority but insists, compellingly, that Paul actually disrupts the definition of the term in the household codes. She shows that in antiquity the idea of the authority of the head held a different meaning and practical outworking altogether. "It was," she says, "the body's responsibility to sacrifice itself for the sake of its head" (Lee-Barnewall, 2016:156-157). But Paul, by introducing the kenosis of Christ and applying it specifically to the responsibilities of the "head," reverses that expectation so that it is the head's responsibility to sacrifice themselves for the good of the body. Contrary to complementarianism, which affirms the authority of the head, this radical and disruptive view of headship requires the abandonment of power and privilege by the husband-father-master in the interest of sacrificial service to the wife-child-slave. In Lee-Barnewall's conception of headship the head surrenders to the sovereignty of God, and this requires a total surrender of self. Likewise, the head surrenders power and position in the interest of sacrificial service to the household. While Lee-Barnewall does not say so explicitly, she does certainly demonstrate that what Ephesians has in mind is a redefinition of headship that centers on the model of Christ's kenosis.

For Lee-Barnewall and other advocates of the "third-way," neither the complementarian focus on male leadership/authority nor the egalitarian focus on denying submission in the text are helpful in understanding the biblical world of the household codes. They wrongly insist on a modern obsession with power that the texts themselves are working to eliminate. The child, the wife, and the slave are asked, within the context of society, to serve. This is not a radical request when viewed in its own time and culture, for it would have been taken for granted. What is radical in Paul's text is the call for mutual submission and the redefinition of headship to ground it in the kenosis of Christ. Paul collapses power

structures without redirecting them to new systems of shared or redistributed power. He replaces power with radical submission and sacrifice in the interest of a radical unity.

This position, when considered in light of the others presented above, seems to present the best way forward in understanding the text. It is grounded in a textual analysis that, contra evangelical egalitarianism, does not preference culture over biblical analysis and does not minimize the centrality of submission within the text. Likewise, contra complementarianism and hierarchialism, it does not define authority or headship within the context of ancient culture but demonstrates the ways that headship is redefined within the text itself by way of Christ's kenosis. Finally, it extracts the interpretation of the text from the debate around authority and equality and asks the text to speak without taking sides on a superimposed, contemporary problem.

What then is to be made of this "third-way" interpretation of the household codes in relation to a consideration of Luke 4:16-30? There are at least three points of intersection. First, as Ringe points out in relation to Luke 4, and Lee-Barnewall in relation to the household codes, the sovereignty of God is a central component of both. Whether the Jubilee imagery of Luke or the image of Christ as the preeminent head of the household, the intent seems to be two-fold. God is sovereign and can demand and bring about liberation of the poor and marginalized, and God is sovereign over the household and can demand that the husband-father-master give themselves sacrificially in service to their wives-children-slaves. No less important is the idea that power itself rests with God alone and human-to-human exercise of power within the Christian community must defer to God's call to surrender power, place and position in order to honor God, just as God can demand the freeing of slaves, the clearing of debt and the returning of ancestral lands in the Jubilee. Regarding this point, a word should be said about the use of Ringe here. Ringe at this point in her scholarly career would affirm a feminist tradition, not a middle way, nor even an evangelical egalitarianism. She is offered here because of the connection she makes between Jubilee in Isaiah and Jubilee in Luke which is not dependent on a feminist reading of the text.

Second, both Luke 4 and the household codes seem to require an embrace of reversal. This is particularly true when Luke 4 is viewed as paradigmatic of the larger reversal motif throughout Luke-Acts. The implications, as Lee-Barnewall suggests, are a new community praxis whereby headship is redefined as surrender and sacrifice, and the role of a body that must sacrifice itself for the head is replaced with a head that must sacrifice itself for the body.

The general emphasis on reversal in the Lukan narrative finds propositional force in Ephesians 5. The “third-way” understanding of reversal also ties back to sovereignty. God is elevated when human power is surrendered and through God the poor and the marginalized are lifted up.

Finally, reversal requires a particular way of being in the world for those believers who hold positions of power and privilege. Sovereignty and reversal point to an ethic of self-denial and of solidarity with the poor and the marginalized, as well as with wives-children-slaves. This self-denial is predicated on Christ’s kenosis and exists on a practical level to promote the unity of the church.

It is important, given the less than authentic way that kenosis has been used to subject the oppressed, to make a clear distinction in the application of this principle. Kenosis is applied in the household codes not to subject wives-children-slaves but to redefine headship toward the sacrificial giving of the head for the body. And while the admonition to submission remains, it is important to recall the assessment of Marshall above that submission as used in the codes is a voluntary submission or giving of one’s self on behalf of the other. Submission seen in this light is less a command to obey as it is an admonishment to cultivate right relationships and an empowerment to take personal responsibility for them.

The requirements of surrender of status and reversal so evident in Luke and the requirement of a Christ-like kenosis on the part of the husband/parent/master in the household codes place a higher ethical burden on the rich, the powerful, and persons of status, requiring them to ascribe to an ethical norm not already prescribed by law or custom, whereas the message of Luke to the poor and marginalized is the good news of inclusion and the prescriptions to honor their husband/master/parent do not require anything that is not already a prescribed social norm. The highest ethical burden placed on Christian converts, therefore, is not placed on the marginalized or oppressed but on the rich and the powerful. It is the latter group that in light of Luke-Acts and the household codes are required to give up the most in response to the Lordship of Christ.

If one accepts this “third-way” reading of the household codes many of the contradictions between a liberationist reading of Luke 4:16-30 and the traditionalist/hierarchialist approach to the codes, so prominent in the views of Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry seem not to be as contradictory as first imagined. This “third-way” interpretation of the household codes removes much of the rhetoric that undergirds the traditionalist

hierarchy and that can subsequently lead to a spiritualized reading of Luke 4. While it does not require it, if the work of Lee-Barnewall and others is accepted there may be no need to look beyond a more literal interpretation of the Luke 4 text.

It has been shown that both a “normative” interpretation of Romans 13 vis-à-vis Barth and a “third-way” interpretation of the household codes both eliminate the need for purely spiritualized interpretations of Luke 4, and that these interpretations are found to support and further clarify the interpretations of Luke 4 offered above. It is now, therefore, possible to return to a consideration of the theological implications of these interpretations.

#### 4.2.3.3 Assess the text in light of its use by theologians (*Movement Three, Step Three*)

The next step in assessing the theological implications of Luke 4:16-30 is to examine the way it is understood and applied by theologians. Within the framework of this study that primarily means examining the use of the text by Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, Henry, Cone and other Black theologians.

##### 4.2.3.3.1 Use by Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry

It is important to understand the use of the text within the North American evangelical tradition identified in Chapter Three. How do Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry view the implications of Luke 4:16-30?

Calvin does not deal with the text in the *Institutes* but does address it in his *Harmony of the Evangelists*. There is little in Calvin’s treatment to suggest a liberationist interpretation of Luke 4. He has a tendency to generalize the redemptive aspects of the text beyond the immediate literal context of the poor and marginalized. Calvin’s commentary on “to the poor” in Luke 4:18 emphasizes that:

The prophet shows what would be the state of the church before the manifestation of the Gospel and what is the condition of all of us without Christ. The persons to whom God promises restoration are *called* (emphasis mine) *poor* (emphasis Calvin), and *broken*, and *captives*, and *blind* and *bruised*. The body of people was oppressed by so many miseries, that these descriptions applied to every one of its members (Calvin, 2005e:229).

Calvin does not say that those who are saved are poor, broken, captives, blind and bruised but that they are “called” that and he generalizes this condition to all the members of the early

church. Calvin's view of conditions outlined in Luke 4:18-19 is highly spiritualized and psychologized. Calvin continues his explanation of "to the poor":

We see who are invited by Christ, and made partakers of promised grace. They are persons, who are every way miserable, and destitute of all hope of salvation. But we are reminded, on the other hand, that we cannot enjoy those benefits which Christ bestows, in any other manner, than by being humbled under deep conviction of our distresses, and by coming, as hungry souls, to seek him as our deliverer (Calvin, 2005e:229).

Under Calvin's interpretive gaze poverty becomes a condition of the psyche instead of the body. The poor are those with hungry souls, convicted of spiritual and emotional distress and who take on humility.

It is interesting that Calvin cannot deny that God's sovereignty may lead God to embrace those generally outcast in society. "Hence, also, may be collected the general doctrine," he says, "that we have no right to prescribe any rule to God in disposing his benefits, so as to prevent him from rejecting those who hold the highest rank, and conferring honour on the lowest and most contemptible." He states further that "we are not at liberty to oppose him, when he entirely subverts that order, which would have approved itself to our judgement" (Calvin, 2005e:234). It may be telling that this comment occurs under his discussion of Gentile inclusion, not the poor, and that Calvin never goes as far as to suggest God's preference for the poor (see the discussion of synecdoche in 3.2.2.5 above). In the final estimation it is doubtful that Calvin would approve of a more liberationist/literalist interpretation of the text of Luke 4.

Understanding Edwards' perspective on Luke 4:16-30 takes some constructive work. There are no extant sermons on the text. He does have a short reference to Luke 4:18 in the *Blank Bible* (Edwards, 1730) that does not offer a literalist conclusion but does make some very literalistic references to what the text means by "captives" and "blind", tying both to the "eastern" custom of blinding prisoners. Three other sermons best illustrate Edwards' views on the elevation of the marginalized. These expound Luke 14:16 (Jesus' rebuke of those who coveted the seats of honor), Luke 16:24 (the parable of the rich man and Lazarus), and Luke 6:24 (the Sermon on the Plain).

In his sermon on Luke 14:16 Edwards' focus is on both the lack of humility on the part of the guests and the lack of inclusion, but not the elevation, of the poor. The sermon concentrates primarily on the need for spiritual humility but does make reference to the importance of including the poor. The latter in no way suggests that the poor are to be in

anyway elevated or that the roles between rich and poor should be reversed (Edwards, 1745a:86).

Edwards' exposition on the rich man and Lazarus is interesting for its almost total focus on the rich man and the need of the rich not to be secure in their earthly blessings. He does juxtapose Lazarus' elevation, but again the reference is to Lazarus' character, not to his social status. It is also telling that the majority of the sermon focuses on the torments of hell (Edwards, 1745b:87). Thus, Edwards seems to either not recognize, or prefer to downplay, the theme of reversal in this text.

In interpreting the Sermon on the Plain Edwards makes a slight concession to an understanding of God's concern for the poor but still insists on interpreting "blessed are the poor" in light of Matthew's "blessed are the poor in spirit." The focus is primarily spiritual and psychological and shifts the discussion from the blessedness of the poor to the spiritual condition of the rich who believe themselves to be blessed but in fact are poor and naked in the eyes of God. The fact that Edwards acknowledges God's preference for the poor but focuses his sermon on the souls of the rich indicates just how uncomfortable he is with the former (Edwards, 1745c:179).

Edwards seems to be slightly more open to the literal interpretation than Calvin but cannot bring himself to work out the full implications of God's preference for the poor. He prefers instead to focus the texts on the spiritual needs of the rich and to expound upon the consequences of favoring wealth over God.

There is no direct material where Charles Hodge comments on Luke 4:16-30, which itself may be telling. But his sermon on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus leaves little doubt as to how he views the idea of God's preference for the poor and a possible liberationist interpretation of New Testament texts.

The parable is not in any way about reversal for Hodge. He uses the class distinction in the text as a way to emphasize the need for the poor to be content in their poverty. "The parable should lead us to be content with our lot," Hodge says and continues, "we may be rich and yet perish, we may be poor and yet be saved. It is a small matter to Lazarus because he had suffered so much while on earth" (Hodge, 2011:165).

He also is insistent that the poor are to be seen as the "poor in spirit," ignoring the actual physical, bodily nature of Lazarus' poverty. Hodge suggests that "the great question when Christ was on the earth was to whom did the kingdom of God belong?" His answer as



regards the poor was, “not the poor as poor and because poor; poverty is not the condition of membership in this kingdom. Its blessings are not bestowed as a recompense for the evil of poverty” (Hodge, 2011:168). He concludes with a complete acquiescence to a spiritual interpretation of poverty in the Gospels. “But the poverty intended,” he says, “is a poverty as to the spirit.... The poor in spirit are those who are conscious of their spiritual poverty” (Hodge, 2011:168-169). Hodge, therefore, leaves little room for more directly liberationist approaches to the text.

Carl Henry’s approach to the text of Luke 4:16-30 is more nuanced than those of Calvin, Edwards or Hodge, but nonetheless spiritualized. Henry’s view of the literalness of the Jubilee references in Luke 4:18-19 makes clear his approach to the text.

In view of the silence about the Jubilee theme in the teaching of the evangelist, it hardly seems credible that it held such a central and literal place in Jesus’ message. The term *aphesis* occurs numerous times in the New Testament for God’s forgiveness and remission of sin, and the thought of forgiveness is in view even when it means liberation (Henry, 1983: Vol. VI, 526).

Henry therefore decentralizes a text that many scholars view as paradigmatic of the entire Gospel of Luke and deemphasizes the temporal importance of Jubilee symbolism in the life of Christ.

He also insists that Jesus did not promise political liberation in Luke 4:16-30. Henry maintains that “in contrast to one-sided political and nationalistic expectations, he (Jesus) restored centrality to neglected aspects of divine liberation by the messianic deliverer” (Henry 1986: Vol. III, 68). Henry is referencing spiritual salvation when he refers to the “neglected aspects of divine liberation.”

Even though Henry minimizes the liberation aspects of the text he does affirm the social concern of liberation theology while also attempting to discredit it as a viable theological position. Henry embraces an understanding of liberation to the degree that the concept can be viewed as supernatural. Christ is the liberator to the degree that he spiritually “unshackles the chains that enslave the human race” (Henry, 1984:193). For Henry, liberation is effective to the degree that a redeemed church forms a new community that challenges evil in the world. According to Henry, “Christ is active in history, leading his followers in resistance against sin and Satan which the wicked serve” (Henry, 1984:193).

Henry’s approach cannot be said to be merely spiritualized. He is instead advocating a supernaturalism with real second-order consequences on human society within the confines

of a redemption history. But he also is reluctant to accept liberationist interpretations because he sees them as replacing the “truth of the gospel” with Marxist social solutions. “Liberation theologians,” he asserts, “accept Marxian analysis of class struggle and proposed Marxian solutions as gospel” (Henry, 1984:197).

This ultimately ensures, according to Henry, that “liberation theology proceeds on the basis of a distorted Christian gospel.” Henry, in spite of his social focus, cannot be said to support a liberationist interpretation of Luke 4:16-30. He could, however, be seen as supporting a more limited, incidental notion of temporal liberation that emerges as a secondary consequence from the salvific mission Christ proposed in the Nazareth sermon.

Thus, to varying degrees, Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry work to mitigate the political implications of Luke 4 and subsume its interpretation in a redemption-historical message. But how does this differ from Cone’s interpretation?

#### 4.2.3.3.2 Use by Cone

Cone draws on Luke 4:16-30 as the centerpiece of a Christological extension of Old Testament liberation themes in the Exodus. In this way he defines Jesus’ mission and by extension the mission of the church in temporal, political terms. Cone puts it this way:

In the New Testament the theme of liberation is reaffirmed by Jesus himself. The conflict with Satan and the powers of this world, the condemnation of the rich, the insistence that the kingdom of God is for the poor, and locating of his ministry among the poor—these and other features of the career of Jesus show that his work was directed to the oppressed for the purpose of their liberation. To suggest that he was speaking of a ‘spiritual’ liberation fails to take seriously Jesus’ thoroughly Hebrew view of human nature (Cone, 2018a:203).

It is not that Cone denies the supernatural in the liberating work of God. The battle on behalf of the oppressed by Christians is in fact a spiritual battle against “Satan and the powers of this world.” But the battle has temporal consequences and makes political and social demands on the church.

It would also be difficult to suggest that Cone succumbs to Hodge’s accusation of salvation for “the poor as poor and because poor.” This is far truer of later liberationist theology, particularly Latin American liberation theology. Cone’s grounding in the Black church, as was shown in Chapter Two, does not allow him to deny the revivalist understanding of salvation that is part of the life and teaching of that church. He does work, however, to counterbalance an over-interpretation of spiritual salvation to the exclusion of

temporal political and social liberation and he grounds that insistence specifically in his reading of Luke 4:16-30 and the larger liberationist stream in Lukan theology and does so through a literal reading of these texts.

Cone (1997b:35) also has a radically Christocentric hermeneutic that further elevates the importance of Luke 4:16-30 in understanding God as the God of liberation. Cone insists that “as Christians we know God only as he has been revealed in and through Jesus.” Thus, Jesus’ life and mission become God’s life and mission and by extension the life and mission of the Church. Cone defines Jesus’ mission as breaking down those barriers to a relationship between God and humans that were a result of satanic power in the world. These barriers included slavery, oppression, hunger, poverty, and racism. Christ’s role in restoring humanity to its God-intended order included the elimination of these social and political problems. Cone suggests that Jesus “is God himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing man from ungodly principalities and powers that hinder his relations to his God” (Cone, 1997b:35).

Further, Cone believes that this mission, when embraced by the church, has the effect of shifting the believer from a focus on self to a focus on others that is central to the Gospels. “Indeed, the message of the kingdom strikes the very center of man’s desire to define his own existence in the light of his own interests at the price of his brother’s enslavement” (Cone, 1997b:35). Ignoring the oppressed becomes an impossibility for a church that understands Luke 4:16-30 as paradigmatic of not just Jesus’ mission but the church’s mission as well.

Cone’s view of Luke 4:16-30 is that it is to be read literally and emphasized as the central text of the New Testament which affirms the liberating mission of Christ and Christ’s church. But while the text has a purely temporal, political meaning for Cone, he should not therefore be read as saying that temporal liberation is the only work of God in view throughout the entirety of Scripture, even though he comes very close to this conclusion. He should be seen as suggesting that liberation is the most important work of Christ and the church while the church remains in its temporal state (Cone, 1997b:34-43).

Nor should he be seen as separating liberation from supernaturalism. While he does downplay supernatural intervention, he sees oppression, poverty, and hunger as manifestations of satanic power and the Christian struggle against oppression, poverty, and hunger as a battle against these supernatural powers. It is unclear from Cone’s work,

however, how he sees a role for either God or Christ apart from functioning as exemplars for human action. The battle against supernatural powers is a human battle in this present world (Cone, 1997b:61-71).

#### 4.2.3.3.3 Use by other Black theologians and biblical scholars

Cone, as it has already been suggested, as a founder of Black liberation theology in the United States often lays the foundations for arguments that are realized more fully in the work of other Black theologians and biblical scholars, including the work of Black scholars outside the United States. As it relates to his literalist view of Luke 4:16-30 there are at least three individuals whose work helps advance the application made by Cone. This includes the work of Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder (US) in *True to Our Native Land* (2007:158-185), Paul John Isaak (Namibia) in the *African Bible Commentary* (2006:1229-1276), and Brian Blount's (US) *Then the Whisper put on Flesh* (2002). Each of these individuals' scholarship furthers and expands Cone's argument in relation to Luke 4.

Crowder's (2007:158) approach to Luke recognizes in the Lukan focus on the poor and marginalized a conscious effort to "forefront" the oppressed. This forefronting represents an effort on the part of Luke to show "Jesus as a savior accessible to all people."

But, according to Crowder, the poor are not the only focus of Luke's Gospel. "Lukan theology," per Crowder, "is grounded in a Jesus who comes not just to offer compassion to those who are wounded but to speak to the evil of those who wound" (Crowder, 2007:158). This is an important nuance. A gospel that calls the oppressed and the oppressor to God and insists on the abandonment of oppressive power is a God who is active in both temporal and eternal liberation.

It is also important to note that Crowder recognized, along with the postcolonial scholars mentioned above, that the text of Luke also functioned as a coded narrative. Crowder grounds this not in colonialism but, in agreement with Cone, in the practices of American slaves. Luke's "imagery" according to Crowder is:

reminiscent of the coded nature of the spirituals and other slave songs. While these songs speak of a people's love and belief in the God of heaven, they are also replete with messages of a God who rules over the earth and who can do something about earth's sorrows and pains (Crowder, 2007:158-159).

Crowder's interpretations help advance a literal/liberationist view of Luke 4:16-30 while also grounding it in a textual rather than a theological strategy.

Isaak's (2006:1229-1276) view extends the political reading of Luke. He argues that "at the outset it should be noted that the political language of Luke 4:14-44 is unmistakable" (Isaak, 2006:1231). But he also sees Luke as combining the spiritual and ethical into a single message that requires a particular way of being in the world. Isaak (2006:1229) notes that Luke places a real priority on Jesus' love of the poor and marginalized while also emphasizing the power of the Holy Spirit to transform and reorient humanity to God. According to Isaak (2006:1229), "for Luke these two approaches are one. The same Holy Spirit who transforms people's lives also seeks to transform societies and nations to social justice."

Isaak also helps to recontextualize Luke's emphasis on the importance of living in community and caring for neighbors. By suggesting that what Luke had in mind in the Gospel was akin to the African concept of Ubuntu, Isaak is able to release the interpretation of Luke from the constraints of Western individualism. Isaak explains,

The concept of Ubuntu is derived from the Xhosa (South African) proverb *Ubuntu ungamnta ngabany e abantur*, which, translated roughly, means 'each individual's humanity is best expressed in relationship to others' or 'a person depends on other people to be a person.' .... People with Ubuntu will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to carry out courageous acts of good works, especially towards the poor and oppressed (Isaak, 2006:1230).

Thus, Isaak is able to expand Cone's understanding of the connections between the spiritual and temporal liberation while also suggesting that Western individualistic interpretations of the text miss the "communality" embedded in the cultural context of the text. Isaak draws on a cultural (non-Christian) concept that speaks to the importance of community and further enriches notions of the type of new covenant community envisioned in Luke while also emphasizing the importance of the spiritual, "empowered by the Holy Spirit" aspect of this community's work on behalf of the poor and marginalized. Isaak (2005:1229) draws this together in his summary of Luke's purpose: "the Holy Spirit who transforms people's lives also seeks to transform societies and nations to social justice." The spiritual has real temporal consequence in which the liberation of the poor and marginalized is not contradictory to the salvific power of Christ and the working of the Holy Spirit. In this view, in fact, the one (liberation of the oppressed) is dependent on the other (the working of the Holy Spirit).

Blount grounds the text of Luke in a clearer argument for Luke as an ethical text. Blount sees Luke's theology of reversal as anchoring this ethical teaching. According to Blount (2001:87), "reversal is in the air. It is a part of the fabric of kingdom life; it becomes

the modeling mandate for the kind of life expected of kingdom followers.” Blount (2006:78-80) recognizes that reversal in Luke is probably focused primarily on the unity of the community. Blount understands that this might “strike one as more a message of ethical maintenance than liberation.” But for Blount the mechanism of unity which calls for the surrender of power and status by the rich and privileged creates an environment that points directly toward liberation for the poor and oppressed. The reality of reversal in Luke is that,

In the Kingdom, societal insiders who dismiss God’s call will find themselves on the margins; those who have been societally marginalized, but who respond to God’s call and commands, will find themselves at the center of God’s consummate kingdom, God’s kingdom, which, according to the parable (rich man and Lazarus), attends to obedience not status” (Blount, 2001:82).

It is important to see the way Blount connects the importance of obedience and the abandonment of status. Blount insists that the poor are not saved because they are poor and that obedience is necessary for the poor and the rich, but the difference lies in the abandonment of power and privilege required of the oppressor as their first act of obedience to God and life in the community of God.

Additionally, Blount affirms that the text of Luke 4 recognizes Christ as both Messiah and prophet. But this aspect strengthens the political interpretation of the text. “Thus for Luke,” he argues, “Jesus’ messianic activity is the work of liberation, and the direct link of the gospel to the message of the prophets is to be found in the prophetic call to justice” (Blount, 2001:80).

Blount adds to the discussion of Luke 4 the identification of reversal in Luke as an underlying ethical thrust in the text as whole. He also emphasizes the importance of obedience for inclusion in the kingdom of God but insists that part of that obedience for the powerful and privileged is the surrender of power. Finally, he insists on the connection of the Gospel with the prophetic social justice tradition of the Old Testament. When this is added to the contributions of Crowder and Isaak what emerges is a view of the text that is consistent with the working interpretation of it that is suggested in the preliminary interpretations that have been suggested for Luke 4.

*4.2.3.4 Final analysis of the text's theological meaning and significance (Movement Three, Step Four)*

What can be said then about the theological significance of Luke 4:16-30 and subsequently Romans 13 and the household codes in light of the preferred interpretations suggested above? First, there seems to be limited reason to spiritualize the text of Luke 4:16-30. As Crowder, Isaak, Blount and Rowe have all suggested, the spiritual implications of the text do not negate, but perhaps rather strengthen, the social ethic in the text that is far more in view in the literal interpretation of the language of Luke 4.

Second, while Hodge is right that the kingdom is not for the poor because they are poor, there is a clear call to reversal that places a qualifier on what it means for the powerful to be obedient to God. Obedience for the powerful requires a specific commitment to abandonment and surrender of power and status as part of their role within the community of God. This is suggested by the work of Blount but also the “third-way” interpretation of the household codes.

Third, while traditional readings of Romans 13 and hierarchical readings of the household codes might suggest that they are at odds with the view of reversal and the insistence on the abandonment of power and privilege, it has been demonstrated that perhaps these texts have also been read incorrectly. If the normative interpretation of Romans 13 is taken seriously it suggests both that the church is forbidden from withdrawing from the public square and that the church, at least in the context of a modern Western democracy, has a responsibility to speak God's truth into society and work for the sake of Christian ideals, even those suggested by the ethic of reversal and mutuality of service to the poor and marginalized. Thus, it is possible to read Luke 4:16-30 as one of those divine truths that the church has the responsibility of modeling and suggesting to civil society. Thus, the liberation of the poor and the oppressed might be seen as something that the church should be supporting as a broader social ethic centered in the work of Christ.

Likewise, the “third-way” interpretation of the household codes suggests that the texts do not preserve structures of power and privilege but call for the radical surrender of power on the part of the head in sacrificial giving to the body. This surrender ensures a mutuality of submission within the body of Christ. This requires the embrace of the ethic of reversal suggested by Lukan theology and is predicated on the kenosis of Christ as applied not to the powerless but the powerful within households. It also suggests the requirements of a

covenantal relationality in which the poor, the marginalized and the Gentiles have achieved inclusion into the community and must be treated within the bonds of kinship.

If these interpretations of the household codes and Romans 13 are accepted, they go a long way in overturning any perception that these texts require a spiritual instead of a liberationist reading of Luke 4. In fact, when these texts are read in conjunction with Luke 4, they strengthen the theology of reversal, surrender, and a responsibly engaged social ethic within a new covenant community.

What then can be said of Luke 4:16-30 within the context of a larger Lukan theology? Within this context Luke 4 might be read as paradigmatic of a theology of social engagement which Luke prioritizes as central to the mission of Christ and by extension Christ's church. This does not suggest that a temporal political reading of the text necessarily excludes a supernaturalism that also is evident within Lukan theology. As Rowe suggests, these two elements are mutually present and never mutually exclusive. God's supernatural intervention has both temporal effects with eternal consequences and eternal consequences that have temporal effects.

Within the background of reversal and God's providential will in broadening the new covenant community to include the poor and the marginalized lie the dual objectives of inclusion and unity. These become necessary components, one might say strategies, within the providence of God for the expansion of God's kingdom. The kingdom expands as it diversifies and opens up to the poor, marginalized and previously excluded. This new diversity in turn requires an elimination of social status and privilege to ensure the unity of the new community.

Inclusion ensures expansion while reversal ensures unity. This also created a new obligation within a community for whom the new marker of inclusion was obedience not status. The powerful and the privileged had the special obligation of abandoning that power and privilege for the sake of God and the community. Under this arrangement power and privilege were disentangled from the blessings of God as signs of inclusion in the kingdom.

Fourth, underlying all of the texts considered here is the sovereignty of God. Ringe recognizes this in the Jubilee symbolism of Luke 4. This is a central element in Romans 13, which elevates the Christian God above Caesar, and in the household codes, which insist that God is the head of all, including the husband-master-father. The presence of sovereignty in Luke suggests both that it is God's prerogative to include the poor and the marginalized and



that it is God's requirement that people should execute God's understanding of justice with specific reference to the Jubilee symbolism of Luke 4. Thus, sovereignty in Luke requires both an acceptance of those God accepts and an active participation in the justice of God in the world.

The sovereignty of God over the government and the household point to the active supernatural work of God on behalf of humanity. While Cone downplays both sovereignty and the supernatural, both seem to better support his suggestion that God's primary work is the work of liberation.

What then is the theological significance of these biblical texts? Or perhaps better put, how does this understanding of the text potentially guide, enliven, or constrain the constructive doctrinal work envisioned in Chapter Five?

First, the focus on God's sovereignty suggests that the sovereignty of God exercised in the providence of God is a key component in understanding the place of the marginalized, the exercise of power by the powerful, and the church's relationship and responsibility within society. It is also true that according to Scripture God's providence does have a specific application that incorporates the inclusion of, and seeming preference for, the marginalized, that is worked out and signaled in the covenants. Therefore, doctrinal considerations in relation to power and privilege with specific reference to race must recognize God's exercise of sovereignty within his providential will as including a social justice thrust consistent with Luke 4 and the prophetic tradition that envisions justice as covenant renewal and as an outgrowth of the new, inclusive, covenantal community.

Second, within the context of God's providence rests a preference for inclusion, seen through God's determination to expand his covenant community. This understanding of inclusion must be in the forefront of any theology of power and privilege. The Gospels do not have in mind here an inclusion without obligation, or better put, a universal inclusion. The constraints placed on inclusion, however, are not social, political, racial, gendered or moral, but rest instead on the call of God and obedience to God's call. The fact that politics, race, gender, and morality are removed as factors for inclusion in God's community certainly has implications for dogmatic reflection on power and privilege.

Third, the texts examined here do suggest that inclusion manifests in social and political reversal and that reversal is at least a component of obedience for those who hold power and privilege. There is an ethic of kenotic surrender required of the rich and powerful

that forms the pragmatic basis for unity within a diverse community. This suggests implications for ecclesiology and the doctrine of sanctification. It also suggests that Cone may be right when he insists that the gospel makes different claims on different groups within the community of God. Exploring kenosis, the eternal submission of Christ to the Father, and their implications for the church seem to be in order in light of the prominence of reversal in the texts that have been examined here.

With these biblical concerns clearly in view, it remains to examine at least one particular doctrine with reference to power and privilege and then to explore a particular scheme and determine the ethical implications of this constructive doctrinal work. One might start with Cone's focus on Christology, but Cone's insistence that all we know of God terminates in Christ seems to present Christology as a kind of terminus that ends debate. Further, the suggestion of Chapter Three was that racist grammars seemed to center around questions of providence, revelation, and foundational issues of hierarchy, submission and obedience. Most of these themes seem to be grounded in the doctrine of God. This is also true of debates about the meaning of justice which seem to rest on understandings of the attributes of God.

Further, the biblical material considered in this chapter focused on God's sovereignty, God's plan, human authority and submission, covenant relationships, and the question of obedience. All of these again seem to suggest the need for their consideration within a discussion of the doctrine of God. Thus, at least with reference to extending the logic of this study, it seems responsible to focus the dogmatic work of Chapter Five on the doctrine of God.

## **5.0 Doctrine, schemas, appropriation (Movements Four and Five)**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Having completed an empathetic analysis of Cone, tested and concurred with Cone's assessment that White theology, at least in the data analyzed here, contains elements of racist logics, and having analyzed biblical material directly connected to the question of liberation and submission, it is now possible to proceed to a constructive engagement with doctrine. As stated above, the doctrine that has the most connection to racist grammars and that is most directly suggested by the biblical analysis in Chapter Four is the doctrine of God. This is not to say that other doctrinal positions might not be equally useful as points of analysis. But given the scope of the current work a detailed focus on the doctrine of God will provide an opportunity to advance the thesis.

This section will advance the proposed methodology of this project by submitting the work to two additional movements. Movement Four will begin the work of a constructive envisioning of a theology of power and privilege by bring into conversation the work of the five theologians under consideration here. It consists of two parts and five steps. Part One will examine the evangelical theological tradition related to the doctrine of God while Part Two will examine Cone's approach to the doctrine as an alternative to the traditional views. These steps will be used to place both the evangelical tradition and Cone in conversation and to formulate constructive proposals and decisions related to the doctrinal distinctives that advance toward a theology of power and privilege. Step Three will bring the biblical theological proposals in Chapter Four into conversation with the constructive decisions made in Steps One and Two to determine whether they are compliant with the findings of the biblical material. Part Two of Movement Four consists of two steps. Step One will analyze the systematic schemas of the five theologians under consideration and Step Two will advance a constructive proposal for a schema that would highlight issues of power and privilege in the construction of a coherent, logical connection between the various doctrines that compose the doctrine of God. Movement Five will analyze the degree to which the statement of doctrine proposed in Movement Four can be appropriated into ethical and praxial conclusions that forestall racist logics and positions the church ethically in an anti-racist posture.

There are a few limitations to the work below that should be acknowledged. First, the work will deal with those aspects of the doctrine of God that are deemed to be most relevant as material for a theology of power and privilege and so some aspects of the doctrine will not be emphasized in this study. By way of example, when dealing with the person of Christ, focus will be placed on the ontological Blackness of Christ, kenosis, and the meaning of the Cross because these issues are central in Cone and in some ways distinguish the five theologians under consideration. An attempt is being made to prioritize particular doctrines on the basis of their relevance to the debate between the five theologians under consideration. The limitation of this is readily admitted and accepted as a necessary part of this work. What is aimed for is logical consistency given the theologians and traditions under review.

Second, the constructive work is limited, most of the time, to theological engagement specifically with the five theologians. There are a few exceptions to this. Cone's Barthianism suggests Barth as a reasonable conversation partner in advancing the constructive work of the project. Flip Buys' work (2004:1-12) on the doctrines of grace represents the application of Reformed theology to questions of race that predate the work of this project and will be recognized as a positive example of the type of analysis this project hopes to advance; his work appears in summary at the point in the discussion below where it intersects with the doctrine of grace. Reinhold Niebuhr also is engaged, primarily because he is critiqued in Cone's work and advances discussions on kenosis. Bernard Ramm's analysis of Barth on ethics also enters into the discussion of Movement Five because Ramm ties Barth back to the evangelical tradition and creates a bridge between evangelical doctrine and ethics. Beyond this an effort is made to derive theological conclusions based primarily on the work of the five theologians under consideration here.

Finally, at this stage of the work constructive decisions have to be made to advance the work. These decisions represent the author's best efforts to form logical conclusions from the analysis of the material. What is aimed at is a presentation of the material that is logically consistent within the bounded and limited data set of this project, that remains consistent with Reformed evangelical orthodoxy, and that addresses racism as it has been identified by Cone and within the evangelical tradition. While the conclusions will be presented clearly, perhaps emphatically, the realization in the background of any conclusion is the limited scope of its application. The effort is made to assure that it is accurate given the materials explored only. With those caveats in mind, it is now possible to proceed to the work of the chapter.

## **5.2 Constructive considerations of the doctrine of God in Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, Henry and Cone (Movement Four, Part One, Steps One and Two)**

Steps One and Two are taken together in this section for practical reasons. It is easier to place Cone in conversation with the other theologians during the consideration of each doctrine rather than engaging the theological tradition on all doctrines considered, doing the same for Cone, and then returning to the constructive work. Therefore, the evangelical theologians and Cone will be considered simultaneously within discussions of various parts of the doctrine and constructive conclusions and decisions made at that point. The doctrines to be considered in this way, under the doctrine of God, include revelation, providence, and the person of God, which will treat the attributes of the Godhead and the work of the economy of the persons within the Godhead.

### **5.2.1 Revelation**

To understand the impact of the North American evangelical tradition under consideration here, on questions of power and privilege with particular reference to race and racism, it is important to understand the doctrine of revelation as it underpins both the doctrine of God and prolegomena in this tradition. It has been established that Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry use their understanding of Scripture and divine revelation to support a biblical hermeneutic that views both the household codes and Romans 13 literally while at the same time interpreting Luke 4 in light of a broader salvation narrative that makes “the poor” metaphorical of those who come humbly to God. This has the effect of providing a biblical underpinning for potentially racist logics as it provides a racist vocabulary for personal power and hierarchy (the household codes), structural power and dominance (Romans 13) and the downgrading of God’s mandates related to the poor and marginalized (Luke 4). It is therefore important to answer three questions through the course of a more detailed analysis of revelation in Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry and an assessment of their views in conversation with those of Cone. First, what are the view(s) of revelation within North American evangelicalism as typified by these theologians? Second, are the views of these theologians consistent with the way they handle the texts under consideration? And third, do Cone’s views on revelation and Scripture challenge evangelical views of the same in any way that might alter or challenge an evangelical approach to Scripture, and just as importantly,

not create a theology that is so compromised as to fully abandon evangelical identity? All of these questions will be answered in turn through the course of the broader analysis. Because there are some slight nuances in their views it will be important to look at Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry to understand each in their own right.

#### 5.2.1.1 Calvin on revelation

Calvin (1993:38-39) organized his theological schema in the *Institutes* under two primary headings: the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man. He argues in Book 1, Chapter 1 that the two, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man, are so interdependent that it is difficult to decide where to begin the theological conversation. This does not mean that Calvin in any way implies an interdependence between God and man: he would categorically deny this. It only means that when theologians begin a systematic treatment of the doctrines of the faith it is difficult to know where to start. For Calvin this is a question of schema not doctrinal content. Calvin settles on the primacy of the doctrine of God, insisting that “man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God and come down after such contemplation to look into himself” (Calvin, 1993:38). Thus, the knowledge of God is central in Calvin’s theology. He (1993:40-42) then moves on to define first what the knowledge of God is that should be sought, and second, in what ways this knowledge is made visible in nature (Calvin, 1993:43-63) and Scripture (Calvin, 1993:64-89).

Calvin’s discussion in Book 1, Chapter 2 centers on an exposition of what knowledge of God should be sought. He both outlines certain a priori understandings of God, stating primarily that whoever God is, God is both perfectly good and supremely authoritative (Calvin, 1993:40, 41). God’s authority, per Calvin, is evidenced in the majesty of creation and in God’s place as creator, the creature owing its existence and allegiance to the authority of the creator. God’s goodness is evident in God’s sustaining God’s creation. For Calvin (1993:41), therefore, the knowledge of God to be sought centers not on who God is in God’s essence but who God is in God’s nature (authoritative and good). The attempt to understand the essence of God is for Calvin (1993:41) an attempt to “delude us with frigid speculation.” Later in Calvin’s discussion of scriptural revelation he will assert, “that in enumeration of his (God’s) perfections, he is described not as he is in himself, but in relation to us, in order that our acknowledgement of him may be more a vivid actual impression than empty visionary

speculation” (Calvin, 1993:88). Calvin (1993:41) also insists that the reason for pursuing a knowledge of God is to gain a proper “fear and reverence” and to ask from God good things and ascribe the good things that are possessed by humanity to the goodness of God.

This way of viewing the knowledge of God has some very important implications. Calvin’s preference for “nature” over “essence” and God as seen in relation to humanity shifts the focus from theoretical knowledge to the actions of God with a specific reference to humanity’s response and relationship with God. The practicality of the knowledge advanced is critical to Calvin. God is only understood within the divine human relationship with which God has chosen to reveal God’s self.

Calvin moves from a discussion of what knowledge is to be sought to a discussion of avenues from which the knowledge of God is obtainable. Calvin divides the knowledge of God into two types of revelation: general/natural (Calvin, 1993:43-63) and specific/scriptural (Calvin, 1993:64-89).

He views natural revelation as two kinds: the knowledge of God that is “implanted in the Human Mind” and the knowledge of God discoverable from both the creation and God’s providential maintenance of that creation. As regards the former, Calvin (1993:43-49) affirms that God placed in the minds of humanity “some idea of His Godhead.” He describes this understating as both a “natural instinct” and a “memory of deity” (Calvin, 1993:43). Natural revelation has a particular purpose for Calvin as well: to make all persons culpable for their rejection of God and forestall any defense to the ignorance of God on the part of humanity. The practical outcome of this is that humanity was created with the “express purpose of learning to know God” but also seeks every opportunity to “throw off the knowledge” and in so doing “fail to fulfil the law of their being” (Calvin 1993:45). Humanity by its nature attempts to deny the knowledge of God either through “ignorance” or “malicious” means. Calvin (1993:40-47) claims that both are the result of human pride and vanity that either elevates self or creates God in their own distorted image. Thus, the impression of God in the heart fails to serve as knowledge adequate for salvation.

Calvin (1993:50-60) also sees the knowledge of God as evident in creation and God’s maintenance of that creation. He (1993:51) is convinced that creation serves “as a kind of mirror” projecting “the invisible” in the “visible.” The right study of “astronomy, medicine, and all the natural sciences” makes clear that the creation has a creator. Not the least of these “mirrors” of creation is mankind, who serves as a microcosm of the entire creation.

Calvin (1993:56-57) also believes that God is actively engaged in maintaining the operations of creation through God's providential intervention in every aspect of the world, including the maintenance of its natural laws. For Calvin, all things hold together in God. Far from a God who has created and left creation to the operation of its own set of governing rules, God is evident in that God continues to be fully, actively engaged in those processes. This idea will be considered further in discussions of providence below; for now, it is important to note that God is visible in the natural laws and the sustainment of creation.

Human depravity is central in Calvin's limiting of the salvific possibility of the knowledge of God in the mind or in creation. Humanity's sinful nature makes access to salvific knowledge impossible. "(N)o sooner do we, from the survey of the world, obtain some slight knowledge of Deity," Calvin insists, "then we pass by the true God, and set up in his stead the dream and phantom of our own brain, drawing away the praise of justice, wisdom and goodness from the fountain-head, and transferring it to some other quarter." This inability to see God in creation can only be overcome through faith, which is possible only through a specific knowledge of God. Calvin (1993:60-61) calls this a "distinct, solid, or certain knowledge" and he passes by the idea of general revelation making this specific knowledge the only true access to the knowledge of God.

For Calvin specific knowledge rests in Scripture. For this reason, he devotes the entirety of Book 1, Chapters 6 to 10 to a discussion of his understanding of Scripture and its relationship to God. Calvin makes nine distinct claims about Scripture that are worth listing. First, Scripture expands on the general knowledge of God as creator to provide a specific revelation of God's relationship to humanity as both creator and redeemer (Calvin, 1993:65, 66). Second, Scripture expounds the true character of God, which should be understood in relation to Calvin's distinction between the essence of God and the nature of God (Calvin, 1993:65). Third, Scripture is a word written by humans, but they "knew that the things which they learnt came from God, who invariably accompanied his word with sure testimony, infinitely superior to mere opinion." Thus, Scripture bears the testimony of God and is the Word of God (Calvin, 1993:65). Fourth, Scripture has the purposes of speaking to creation, redemption, and distinguishing the true God from false gods (Calvin, 1993:66). Fifth, Calvin (1993:66) affirms that all "right and sound doctrine" is to be drawn from Scripture which bears the testimony of God to God's self. Sixth, he views God as incomprehensible without Scripture as a guide to God's nature. He compares God to a labyrinth and Scripture to a string



laid out as a guide through it. Seventh, the authority of Scripture rests not in its authorization by the church but in the Spirit's witness to its authority "through an inward testimony" (Calvin, 1993:68-73). Eighth, Scripture's authority and credibility is attested by way of its own inherent unity, rationality, and beauty. "For the truth is indicated in opposition to every doubt, when unsupported by foreign aid, it has its sole sufficiency in itself" (Calvin, 1993:75). Finally, Scripture is superior in every way to notions of contemporary revelation that appeal to the Spirit's inspiration apart from Scripture (Calvin, 1993:84-86).

Therefore, Calvin sees Scripture as containing the authoritative revelation (testimony) of God and recognizes its ability to reveal God in God's nature and in the attestation of this authority through the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit in the life of the elect. Calvin's reference to the Holy Spirit's inner testimony is an answer to Roman Catholicism's assault on Protestant views of the individual's ability to interpret Scripture without the aid of the instruction of the church. He also makes Scripture the basis of authority for all doctrinal truth.

But Calvin does not cling to an unyielding literalism in his understanding and use of Scripture. He also ties revelation in Scripture more to the acts of Scripture than to set biblical propositions. Calvin lacks the kind of narrow defense of plenary, verbal inspiration that characterizes both Hodge's and Henry's views. Calvin's distinctions here may be understood in two ways. First, Calvin's precritical view of Scripture means that he had a different relationship to foundational truth than modern theologians. Therefore, a doctrine of plenary, verbal inspiration may have been either unnecessary or assumed in Calvin's approach to Scripture. Or, secondarily, perhaps Calvin's emphasis on the unity of the Scripture subsumed any discussion of the specifics about the inspiration of the parts. God was working through inspiration to ensure a unified message and that overarching message, not the individual parts, is critical in the knowledge of God. The parts are secondary to the whole. While Calvin would have assumed, as stated in the first argument, that all of Scripture equated to truth, the second argument seems to be more consistent with the exposition of Calvin's hermeneutic above. Calvin works to syncretize individual Scriptures one to another in a way that makes them consistent with his particular understanding of redemptive history (see Stroup, 1990:163 and discussion at 3.2.2.5 above). Thus, Calvin is less concerned to maintain the literality of any given verse and more concerned with the broader unity of the salvation story in the canon.

While this answers the “what” question regarding Calvin’s views of revelation and Scripture, it is also important to ask the consistency question. Are Calvin’s views consistent with his treatment of Romans 13, the household codes, and Luke 4? The short answer is, yes. Calvin ignores the question of the literal treatment of the poor in the interest of relating Luke 4:16-30 to a broader redemptive history inclusive of individuals beyond the poor. He assumes a literal interpretation of Romans 13 and the household codes and relates them to God’s desire to maintain order in creation and as part of God’s overarching providential plan. In both cases providence and redemption history play decisive roles in the interpretation of the individual texts. This is consistent with Calvin’s view of revelation and Scripture. As to Calvin in relation to Cone’s view of revelation, that discussion will be reserved until after the treatment of Edwards, Hodge, and Henry.

#### *5.2.1.2 Edward’s view of revelation*

How then is Edwards’ view of revelation and Scripture to be understood? Edwards’ lack of a systematic theology makes it harder to fully assess his doctrine of revelation and Scripture. His theology has to be pieced together with reference to his theological notes found in his *Miscellanies* and the *Religious Affections*. But there is enough there to make some tentative observations.

Edwards’ views of general revelation differ slightly from Calvin’s. He moves beyond Calvin’s to engage in more detail with the workings of the Holy Spirit in granting spiritual knowledge, but he shares Calvin’s view of Scripture.

Edwards does not hold to Calvin’s strict understanding of the inaccessibility of general revelation. While he does concur that “sin blinds the mind” (Edwards, 1722:248) and that the unregenerate “can see no manner of excellency or beauty in the things of God” (Edwards, 1723-1729) he also states that unregenerate humanity can understand “faintly” good from evil (Edwards, 1737:754). The latter claim could be more an elaboration of why humanity is convicted of sin than a nod to the affective nature of general revelation. Edwards’ tone, however, seems more generally disposed to accept natural theology as more clearly evident in the minds of the unregenerate. He sees general revelation as evident in nature, even to the point of allegorizing natural objects (Edwards, 1714a).

Edwards even extends his analogy to natural human attributes. He (1722:119) sees general revelation as evident in humanity’s inclination toward order, in the human conscience

and longing for justice, and in humanity's rational instinct to seek a cause for every effect. While Edwards does see the influence of God's natural revelation in humanity, it is unlikely that Edwards would see any of these as leading to a salvific knowledge of God apart from the work of the Spirit and specific revelation.

Edwards' understanding of the work of the Spirit in the operation of spiritual knowledge is one of the areas where Edwards adds detail to Calvin's understanding of revelation. Edwards sees the practice of holiness, the Spirit's work in conversion, and the enlightenment obtained of the Spirit as paramount in our ability to understand spiritual truth. Thus, the work of the Spirit is preliminary to humanity's access to the knowledge of God and is central in understanding specific revelation.

Edwards (1722:141) suggests that, "'Tis doubtless true that holiness of heart doth from any immediate guidance of the Holy Spirit, keep men from errors in judgement about religion and directs them to truth." Edwards suggests further that through "holiness" people "try doctrine" and are led in degrees to long for God. It is uncertain what Edwards means by "holiness of heart" as this passage is a note for some later work and lacks a context. But it might be read to suggest that right living can lead to a desire for the things of God. This interpretation would put Edwards at odds with Calvin, Hodge and Henry as it encroaches on giving place to works. At the least it seems to give preexistent holiness a place in Edwards' understanding of conversion if not directly in his soteriology. But again, the fact that this appears in a single isolated reference and lacks context makes it difficult to say anything definitive in this regard other than that holiness has some place in Edwards' view of spiritual knowledge and the attainment of spiritual truth.

Edwards is very clear in both the *Miscellanies* and *The Religious Affections* that access to spiritual knowledge is the result of the transforming work of the Holy Spirit that illumines and guides the human will toward "religious affections." In order to understand this, it is important to understand what Edwards means by "affections." To Edwards (2001: 24) "the affections are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercise of the inclination and will of the soul." Edwards views the soul as mind or heart and, more importantly, that place where rationality, decision-making and action abide. For him it is "the soul only that thinks" (Edwards, 2001: 26). Within the soul the will and inclinations work together to determine both human desire and human action (Edwards, 2001: 27). Thus, the work of the Spirit in transforming the soul creates religious affections that alter the will and inclinations

of the converted toward God. God and godly actions become “the practice and business of his life” (Edwards, 2001: 308). In arguing in this way Edwards makes inward “conversion” the mark of “true religion” that has a secondary but required relationship to the outward practice of holiness.

In the *Miscellanies* Edwards expands on the spiritual knowledge accessible to those who through the work of the Spirit have had their souls transformed and who evidence religious affections. He (1722:397) joins his disparate thoughts on spiritual knowledge with his fuller account of conversion in the *Religious Affections*.

We learn that the prime alteration that is made in conversion, that which is first and the foundation of all, is the alteration of the temper and disposition and spirit of the mind: for what is done in conversion is nothing but conferring the Spirit of God, which dwells in the soul and becomes there a principle of life and action. This is the new nature and the divine nature; and the nature of the soul being thus changed, it admits divine light. Divine things now appear excellent, beautiful, glorious, which did not when the soul was another spirit.

It is important to note that for Edwards it is this spiritual process alone that allows individuals to “distinguish truth from falsehood.” Spiritual knowledge allows those who possess it to see clearly the harmony and order of God’s revelation in the world while the mind that is “not spiritually enlightened beholds spiritual things faintly, like fainting, fading shadows” (Edwards 1722:408). This spiritual knowledge, to Edwards, is not “notional” but is experiential. Knowing right doctrine or even imitating religious practice does not provide true spiritual knowledge, which is only available to those who experience the work of the Spirit on their affections. Edwards illustrates this point by emphasizing the difference between someone who has read a description of how honey tastes and someone who has actually tasted honey (Edwards, 1723-1729).

Spiritual knowledge is also practical knowledge, “that which is accompanied with the practice of what is known” (Edwards, 1723-1729). He also distinguishes spiritual from general knowledge. The former, he says, is focused on God and makes the converted humble, while the latter, because of its focus on self, makes the unregenerate proud (Edwards, 1723-1729). Spiritual knowledge also opens up the mind to reason.

It is therefore important to note that in Edwards there is little distinction between spirituality and intellect, or put another way, the mind and the soul. The soul is the mind and the seat of the will and inclinations. Therefore, access to truth and real knowledge is dependent on the work of the Spirit in sanctifying the mind.

Edwards' exposition of a theology of conversion and its consequences gives his understanding of the knowledge of God an expanded view that differs somewhat from Calvin's. For Calvin the unregenerate cannot see God and only through the Scriptures as specific revelation can God truly be seen. Edwards demonstrates the role of the Spirit, through conversion, in giving access to both general and specific revelation. Thus, his understanding of the knowledge of God is more detailed than, but not necessarily discordant with, Calvin's view.

Edwards' views on Scripture are also evident, though not fully realized, in the *Miscellanies*. He suggests that in order to reveal God's self, God had to use human language and in doing so condescended to the limitations of humanity in revealing God's self through the Scriptures (Edwards, 1722:229). God works, through the power of the Spirit, to both inspire the writing of Scripture and illumine the readers of Scripture toward God's intended revelation (1731:68). God has, according to Edwards, placed a meaning in the text beyond the plain words of the writers. Edwards (1722:229) asserts that "God had a design and meaning which the penmen never thought of, which he makes appear these ways: by his own interpretation, and by his directing the penman to such a phrase and manner of speaking, that was a much more exact agreement and consonancy with the thing remotely pointed to, than with the thing meant by the penmen." While Edwards preserves the work of God in determining the "phrases" and "manner of speech" as intentional and inspired, he wishes to emphasize the importance of the broader spiritual meaning for which they are a referent.

In this way Scripture has a broader unified message that points directly to God, and it is this divine self-revelation that both lends authority to Scripture and gives it harmony, beauty, and a unified message. Edwards (1722:238) argues that since God is perfect, God's view of God's self is perfection and the basis of all truth. Thus, God's revelation of God's self in Scripture must in turn be a perfect revelation. This perfect revelation is demonstrated in Scripture by way of the unified work of God across the canon of Scripture which shows the work of a unified divine mind (Edwards, 1722:333). This unity and consistency is found in the Bible's covenantal theology (Edwards, 1731:754).

Thus, for Edwards, Scripture is both authoritative and inspired while also functioning as a means for God's self-revelation. It is important to note that Edwards also believes that Scripture, when it agrees "with plain reason," does reveal doctrinal truth. But Edwards also insists that there are things we know of God apart from Scripture, although certainly not in

contradiction to it, and that not all doctrinal truth may be made explicit in Scripture (Edwards, 1722:426).

Edwards (1714a), perhaps more so than Calvin, Hodge or Henry, utilizes typology and allegory and draws spiritual insight directly from nature. He is less cautious about natural theology and places more emphasis on the illumining work of the Holy Spirit. But he is also a literalist when it comes to the interpretation of moral and ethical matters from Scripture. His views of revelation and Scripture are characterized by a deeper focus on the work of the Holy Spirit and an expanded account of the development of spiritual knowledge, both general and specific. The rational mind illumined by the Spirit is central in Edwards' thought.

When considering Edwards' consistency in regard to the texts considered here, it is important to state that while Edwards writes a great deal about broad unifying themes like covenant, the lack of any treatment of Luke 4 in Edwards' work makes it difficult to assess whether he would have moved beyond the literal meaning toward a more allegorical interpretation. This would certainly be consistent with his understanding of Scripture, but because he does not treat the text it cannot simply be assumed that he would have done so. Certainly, his literal interpretations of Romans 13 and the household codes are consistent with his tendency to interpret moral and ethical texts literally. They also evidence his focus on common rationality where the literal truth of the text would be affirmed by the common practices of New England Puritans. Thus, it would be difficult to say that Edwards is inconsistent. What is certain is that Edwards' openness to rational demonstration, Spirit illumination, and the unity of the text will need to be brought into conversation with Cone.

#### *5.2.1.3 Hodge on revelation and Scripture*

Hodge's view of revelation and Scripture is also important. He in fact formulates the specifics of the doctrine of revelation that will be typical of the views of many North American fundamentalists and evangelicals up to the current era. Hodge (1997, vol. 1:15) understands theology in its parts and its totality to be equitable with spiritual knowledge. He admits the existence of both general revelation and specific revelation, but like Calvin denies the possibility of a general knowledge of God that leads to salvation. Unlike Calvin, he finds very little use for general revelation, believing that because God cannot contradict God's self, general revelation and scriptural revelation must agree (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:15). He is also insistent that every truth that is evident through nature or religious experience is "recognized

and authenticated in Scripture” (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:15). Ultimately, Hodge recognizes the truth of natural revelation but subjugates, and in fact subsumes it, under scriptural revelation (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:24-26). For Hodge (1997, vol. 1:26) scriptural theology is the only means to saving truth.

Hodge, in a way that would be particularly uncharacteristic of Edwards, both claims an important role for the Spirit and subordinates the inward teaching of the Spirit to Scripture. According to Hodge, the Spirit may guide the believer to inward truth. But this inward truth will always be truth revealed in Scripture and not new truth (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:15). Furthermore, this inward truth must be shown to agree with Scripture (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:16). But Hodge does make some concession to the working of the Spirit and “religious experience.” He states that “the true method in theology requires that the facts of religious experience should be accepted as facts, and when duly authenticated by Scripture, be allowed to interpret the doctrinal statements of the Word of God” (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:16). But again, religious experience must be shown to be in agreement with Scriptural teaching.

Additionally, Hodge also affirms a dual role for the Spirit in regard to the Scriptures. The Spirit both *inspires* the original authors and *illuminates* the contemporary reader. The former ensures the authority of the text and the latter ensures that all persons can understand and interpret Scripture without an intermediary (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:154). He also draws a sharp distinction between, not just inspiration and illumination, but also inspiration and revelation. Inspiration, according to Hodge, is the “method of controlling against error,” while revelation is “the imparted knowledge” (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:154). While the Spirit is central to both the authority and infallibility of Scripture, it is Scripture, itself inspired and authoritative, that is the central conveyer of God’s revelation. The Spirit plays a supporting role in Hodge’s theology of revelation, while the Scripture is the supreme source of God’s revelation.

What then is Hodge’s view of Scripture? Hodge (1997, vol. 1:152) outlines three principles that summarize his understanding of the doctrine of Scripture. It is important to quote these at length because his word choices are important distinctions in subsequent North American evangelical theology. According to Hodge:

- (1) The Scriptures are the Word of God, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore infallible, and of divine authority in all things pertaining to faith and practice, and consequently free from all error whether of doctrine, fact, or percept.
- (2) That they contain all the extant supernatural revelations of God designed to be a rule of faith and practice to his church.
- (3) That they are sufficiently perspicuous to

be understood by the people, in the use of ordinary means and by the Holy Spirit, in all things necessary to faith and practice, without the need of any infallible interpreter.

Through this statement on Scripture Hodge is affirming the full authority, total inerrancy, and the verbal plenary inspiration of Scripture. For Hodge, each and every word is inspired and without error because the word and the thoughts of Scripture are “inseparable” (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:164-165). He places more emphasis on a view of Scripture that is more pronounced in its focus on the authority of the parts and percepts of Scripture than is evident in either Calvin or Edwards. Calvin’s and Edwards’ concern with the parts was in the interest of a unified whole, whereas Hodge’s interest was in the inerrancy of each word that then insures right thought and doctrine. This seems to be the case because in Hodge’s modernist perspective what was critical was defending against secular assaults on various parts of the Christian Scriptures. This focus on the inerrancy of the parts as a defense for the inerrancy of the whole will also find a prominent place in Henry’s theology.

What then can be said about Hodge’s consistency with his own understanding of revelation and Scripture? Again, the lack of a full exposition on Luke 4 makes assessment difficult. His literal interpretations of Romans 13 and the household codes have to be seen as consistent in light of the first of his three principles of biblical interpretation, “the words of Scripture are to be taken in their plain historical sense” (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:152). That is, “they must be taken in the sense attached to them in the age and by the people to whom they were addressed” (Hodge, 1997, vol. 1:155). But this same principle would, if Hodge had considered Luke 4, require him to justify any attempt to understand “the poor” as a stand-in for believers universally. The tighter the focus on inerrancy in the interpreter the higher the burden of proof for moving beyond the literal meaning of the text. All that can be said is that Hodge is consistent in his interpretations of Romans 13 and the household codes. Speculation on Hodge’s avoidance of any comment on Luke 4 would be an inconclusive argument from silence.

#### *5.2.1.4 Henry on revelation and Scripture*

Hodge’s fundamentalist understanding of revelation becomes the basis upon which Henry builds. In his monumental six-volume work, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry outlines 15 theses related to divine revelation that encompass the entirety of volumes two through four, more than half of Henry’s total work. For the sake of the current work, it will be



important to consider theses 4 and 10-12. Thesis 8 on Christ as revelation and thesis 14 on the church as an approximation of God's revelation in the world will be taken up later when Henry is put in conversation with Cone.

Henry's fourth thesis posits the unity of divine revelation while affirming both general and specific revelation and also allowing for revelation in the person of Christ and a future disclosure of God in eschatological completion. Henry (1976, vol. 2:70) bases the unity of God's revelation in God's monotheism. As a single unity God cannot contradict God's self. He also makes a distinction between the unified content of revelation and the various forms of revelation (Henry, 1976, vol. 2:72). While there are various forms or means of revelation, all are "interdependent" (Henry, 1976, vol. 2:74). This is also true of the progressive nature of revelation in Scripture, which according to Henry (1976, vol. 2:74) "is in no way destructive of unity." Henry sees the unified content of Scripture as focused on "the electing God and his covenant people." This Henry sees as "central to the whole Bible" (Henry, 1976, vol. 2:75).

The tenth thesis is concerned with the nature of revelation as "rational-verbal communication" (Henry, 1976, vol. 3:455). Specifically, it intends to demonstrate the propositional nature of divine revelation and in doing so asserts that divine revelation makes a specific truth claim connected directly to the words of the revelation. Henry (1976, vol. 3:456) sees "a proposition as a verbal statement that is either true or false: it is a rational declaration capable of being either believed, doubted or denied." It is important to note that in affirming propositionalism Henry is fighting against higher criticism, neo-orthodoxy, and modernist liberalism's tendency to view revelation as more attached to an idea or concept which exists beyond the truth claims of the literal text (see Henry, 1976, vol. 1:44-70). For Henry it was important to establish, contra Pannenberg and others, that God is a God who literally speaks, that in speaking necessarily speaks intelligibly, and as the author of truth necessarily speaks truthfully (Henry, 1976, vol. 3:407). Henry also affirms that the revelation of God contains one meaning, referring back to the unity of God's revelation, and not multiple meanings. According to Henry (1976, vol. 3:408), "if the Word of divine revelation carries an infinite variety of meanings, then none can be normative, and no meaningful hermeneutic is possible." Divine language has a single meaning and is without error. Even though Henry concurs with Calvin's understanding of God's condescension to the limits of human language, he emphasizes that in doing so God does not accommodate the divine

revelation to untruth (Henry, 1976, vol. 3:419-420). Bringing his understanding of propositional truth into conversation with his understanding of revelational unity, he insists that “revelation in the Biblical understanding involves not isolated concepts or words but units of thought” (Henry, 1976, vol. 3:429-430). Henry also suggests that it is important to remember that not all forms of revelation are propositional. A good example of this, per Henry, is a command, which makes no truth claim but leans on the authority of the one making it, not on any universal rational truth claim (Henry, vol. 3, 1983:477).

Henry’s back and forth between the unity of the whole and the truthfulness of the parts mitigates against the tendency to overemphasize the parts over the whole. For Henry a single propositional truth is evident in the parts of Scripture and the totality of the divine revelation. But Henry’s understanding of truth is, like Hodge’s, based primarily and necessarily on the plain, intelligible truth claims of the actual word-laden propositions of the biblical text.

The biblical text is central to Henry’s understanding of divine revelation. So, understanding how he views the text is also critical to understanding Henry’s theology. His understanding of the text forms the bulk of thesis 11, “The Bible as the authoritative norm,” and thesis 12, “the Spirit as communicator and interpreter.” In these sections he affirms Scripture as authoritative, inspired, illuminated, and inerrant. Henry also insists on the literal interpretation of Scripture, and makes room for the fallibility of the exegete.

Regarding the authority of Scripture, Henry (1976, vol. 4:68) affirms that “Scripture is authoritative, because divinely inspired, and as such is divine truth.” God by inspiring the biblical authors presents God’s own revelation and as such the teachings of Scripture bear the weight of God’s authority. But Henry also clarifies that God is the authority and the Scripture’s authority is “derivative and contingent” (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:42). He also concedes that the authoritative teaching of the Scripture is limited in that the authors do not deal with every category of knowledge and while the knowledge they do address is without error it may not be complete. But ultimately Henry insists on the total authority of Scripture.

He also affirms the role of the Holy Spirit as both inspiring and illuminating Scripture. For Henry there is no statement or word in Scripture that was not intended and that does not function as inspired and authoritative. As regards the former, Henry, in agreement with Hodge, holds to the “plenary inspiration of the Scripture” and insists that “inspiration extends to the writings in their totality, in the whole and the parts” (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:162). There

is no statement or word in Scripture that was not intended and that does not function as inspired and authoritative. The caveat to this is Henry's affirmation that revelation is "not to be sought in isolated words but rather in truths" (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:46).

The Holy Spirit also illuminates the believer, leading to proper understanding of Scripture. This idea is shared with Calvin, Edwards, and Hodge. But in his context Henry also felt a need to clarify, contra Barth, that the Scriptures held meaning and truth apart from the faith community. Truth, embedded in the text of Scripture through divine inspiration, precedes and is independent of illumination. This distinguishes Henry's view from Barth's assertion that the Bible has meaning only within the context of faith (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:259).

Henry is, like Hodge, a biblical inerrantist. He quotes affirmatively the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:211-219). He leaves the statement without comment, with the exception of a mention of the article that limits inerrancy to the original autographs. This clarification on the part of the Chicago statement has little practical effect on Henry's views of Scripture because Henry believes in the comprehensiveness and infallibility of the received text (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:220-255).

The Scriptures are not only authoritative, inspired, illuminated, and inerrant, but they also are to be interpreted literally. Henry insists, "the evangelical rule has been to opt for the literal sense of the Bible where the language does not preclude it" (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:120). By "literal" Henry appeals to Ramm's definition that a literal interpretation is "the basic, customary social designation of the word" and he also concurs with Barr that it "is the historical sense of the text" (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:104). He wants to eliminate, in opposition to Bultmannian mythologizing, any attempt to find "cryptic" meaning outside the literal sense of the text.

Henry is also the only evangelical theologian considered here to emphasize the "fallibility of the exegete," devoting an entire chapter in his discussion of thesis 12 to it (Henry, vol. 4, 1983:316-352). While God cannot err, and the text of Scripture does not err, the exegete can fail to properly interpret Scripture. The individual interpreter and interpretations of Scripture bear truth only to the degree that they properly transmit the truth intended by God.

Henry, therefore, envisions revelation and Scripture in much the same way as Hodge. He affirms the existence of various forms or means of revelation but insists on its unity and

the primacy of scriptural revelation. He also advocates for the authority, plenary inspiration, illumination, inerrancy and literality of Scripture while maintaining the potential fallibility of the interpreter. He further insists on the truthfulness of both the parts and totality of the Bible and maintains that it has a unified, singular theological voice and only one possible meaning. Finally, Henry affirms the intentionality of the words of Scripture but insists that truth is found in the larger logical units. With this in mind it is possible to ask whether Henry's view is consistent with his understanding of Luke 4, Romans 13 and the household codes.

Henry's treatment of Romans 13 is consistent with his understanding of the plain meaning and literal interpretation of the text. Henry would also see his treatment of the household codes as compliant with these principles. Henry does address contemporary concerns for gender equality and downplays the explicit hierarchy in the text by asserting an early form of complementarianism (see Henry, 1982:531 and discussion in 3.5.2.2.1 above). His reading of Luke 4 is complex. He seems to affirm a literal reading, while also focusing on a metaphorical or spiritual interpretation. Nowhere is this tension more apparent than in Henry's engagement with Yoder on the prominence of the Jubilee motif in the Gospels, particularly Luke 4. Henry denies that such an ethic exists, insisting that "in view of the silence about the Jubilee theme in the teaching of the evangelists, it hardly seems it held such a central place in Jesus' message" (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:526). He also points to those places in the New Testament where *aphesis* clearly means forgiveness and suggests that "even where it means liberation (Luke 4:18 quoting Isa. 61 and 56:1)" it has forgiveness of sin in mind (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:526). But Henry seems uneasy with his own assessment because not more than one paragraph below this argument he affirms that Yoder's instincts that Jesus message has "sociopolitical" implications is correct (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:526).

Henry seems to desire to hold on to the literality of Luke 4 consistent with his understanding of literal interpretation, but he gravitates instead toward a broader redemption-historical reading of the text. Henry believes that while Jesus in Luke is engaging in "liberation" that is both "a reality and a sign" (Henry, 1976, vol. 2:66) it is a sign and a symbol as opposed to any real politically liberative act. He also references Christ's victory over oppression but ties oppression closely to moral failings and the bondage of sin (Henry, 1976, vol. 2:68).

Henry's reluctance to fully embrace a literal reading of the text seems to stem from his apologetic against Marxism, revolution theology and liberation theology. Henry argues that these "ideologies" abandon the supernatural in the pursuit of a social solution to what is in fact a spiritual problem (sin) with social symptoms (oppression) (Henry, 1976, vol. 4:578-592).

Not wishing to run afoul of his own criticism, Henry tends toward a more spiritual explanation of Luke 4 while also not completely disallowing a literal, plain meaning of the text. Thus, Henry can be said to deal consistently with the text in relation to his principle of the unity of the canon but appears less consistent in relation to the application of his understanding of literality.

#### *5.2.1.5 Constructive engagement with Cone, Calvin, Edwards, Henry and Hodge on revelation and Scripture.*

Now that Calvin's, Edwards', Hodge's and Henry's views of revelation and Scripture have been made clear it is possible to place all their views in conversation with each other and with Cone toward some constructive conclusions related to revelation. It is important to make clear that while Cone's views will be critiqued alongside that of the evangelical tradition the critique is not of Black theology as an alternative system, but the degree to which it can be integrated into evangelicalism and the subsequent theology produced continue to be called evangelical. It is not being asked whether Black theology or evangelical theology is superior. Instead, a determination is being made on how Black theology, specifically Cone's, might help shape evangelical theology on questions of power and privilege which differs greatly from a straight critique of Cone's work. An assessment, therefore, that Cone's views are so diametrically opposed to those of evangelicalism as to be unhelpful is not a judgement that evangelicalism is correct and Cone is incorrect, but simply a judgement in regard to the core identity of evangelical theology. It is not the intention here to revisit long-standing differences between liberal/neoliberal and conservative theology. The intent is to ask what is of use in Cone's theology that challenges errors or absences in evangelical theology within the context of its own theological structures. With this in mind, Cone can be placed in conversation with Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry.

Cone's view(s) on revelation and Scripture are difficult to articulate because, by his own admission, they changed throughout his scholarly career. The material that addresses

these issues directly are *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed*. It should be remembered from Chapter One that these books, along with *Black Theology and Black Power*, formed Cone's earliest attempts to define a separatist Black theology while also speaking directly to the White church and White liberal theologians about the racist nature of White theology and culture. As such, Cone is attempting to remain faithful to the importance of the biblical narrative in the Black church while also addressing liberal and neo-liberal biblical criticism. He is not intending to address conservative biblical scholarship at all. This can at times leave Cone, as will be demonstrated below, speaking at cross purposes when he attempts to build a case for liberation in Scripture while also conceding points on the historical accuracy of Scripture to accommodate more liberal exegetical expectations.

There is also another problem when it comes to understanding Cone on revelation and Scripture. In the prefaces to the rerelease of both *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed* Cone challenges his own views on revelation and Scripture. In the new preface to the 1986 release of *A Black Liberation Theology*, Cone questions his use of a theological schema that was dependent on Western doctrinal categories and that began with an a priori understanding of revelation as the natural starting point for theology. His assessment in 1986 was that "there is no 'abstract' revelation, independent of human experience, to which theologians can appeal for evidence of what they say about the gospel. God meets us in the human situation, not as an idea or concept that is self-evidently true" (Cone, 2018a:xxiii).

Likewise, in Cone's 1997 preface to the rerelease of *God of the Oppressed* he criticizes his own use and understanding of Scripture (Cone, 1997b:73). In these instances Cone is responding to the ongoing criticism of feminist and womanist theologians and their insistence on the difficulties posed by the Bible, particularly the "texts of terror" which these scholars believed Cone's liberation theology ignored in its appeal to Scripture (Cone, 1997b:xi, xii). Cone (1997b:xii) insists that he had "never believed that the Bible is above criticism or that it serves as an absolute judge in faith and practice."

Cone adapts his theology of revelation and Scripture to the times. In his original writings his views of Scripture move between the views of the Black church tradition and the biblical criticism of the liberal theological tradition. In the late 1980s he adapts his view of revelation to accommodate the critique of other emerging Black theologians who attack his work for too readily adopting White theological categories. In the 1990s Cone affirms the

further distrust of Scripture that emerges as part of feminist and specifically womanist critiques of the biblical narrative. But even when affirming these changes in his own views, Cone chooses to leave unchanged his original arguments and does not produce later work that contradicts these original views (Cone, 1997b:xi).

When engaging constructively with Cone on these issues the theologian is left with a dilemma. Does one access and apply Cone's views according to the prefaces or according to the original work? As regards the current project the latter appears as the logical choice, primarily because Cone's opinions, as expressed in the prefaces, are unsupported by clear application to his own theology and are left unrealized as part of his theological agenda. Additionally, even if some speculative means of extending these views to Cone's work were imagined, his later views are so diametrically opposed to the North American evangelical tradition explored here that these later views would seem to eliminate any hope of engagement with Cone in a way consistent with evangelical identity. The original views, as will be seen below, at least present a limited intersection that keeps open a degree of conversation between Cone and evangelicalism. Given the constructive, as opposed to historical-theological, nature of this chapter, Cone's original work appears to be best suited to advance the current project.

What then can be said about Cone's understanding of revelation and Scripture as it is evident in his original work, and how does this understanding inform, rebuke, or enlighten evangelical theology? These questions will be addressed simultaneously.

Cone, like each of the other theologians, recognized the traditional division between general and specific revelation, although Cone approaches these divisions differently.

General revelation, according to Cone (2018a:52-53), has a bifurcated nature. General revelation "is primarily applicable to oppressed peoples," while the sin that impairs access to the divine through general revelation is "especially applicable to oppressors" (2018a:53). Cone holds in tension, he would say dialectic tension, Calvin's, Hodge's and Henry's view that sin distorts humanity's understanding of general revelation with a desire to make liberation, freedom and justice aspects of general revelation understood by the oppressed. Cone does so in direct opposition to the views of Barth and Brunner. He disallows Barth's total rejection of natural theology (Cone, 2018a:51-52) and affirms Brunner's imposition of sin on general revelation only in relation to oppressors (Cone, 2018a:53) while

adding his own assessment of the accessibility of general revelation to the oppressed (Cone, 2018a:52-53).

Given that Brunner, as presented by Cone, is primarily affirming the basic understanding of Calvin, it would be easy to see Cone's bifurcated approach as wholly antithetical to evangelical theology were it not for Edwards' direct engagement with the idea that justice and injustice are inherently embedded and understood within the human soul by way of a "memory of divinity." If Edwards' work is applied to the oppressed, then what Cone describes as the natural instinct to freedom in the oppressed and what Edwards understands as the natural human offence at injustice coalesce to make the pursuit of justice a sign of divinity imprinted on the human soul. That is not to say that Edwards would take this to the extreme to which it appears in Cone. And it should be noted that Cone comes close to affirming a possible salvation for the poor by means of general revelation for the oppressed.

The critical issue of bifurcation needs to be addressed. Is it fair to say that the oppressed have access to knowledge that is denied the oppressor? There is at least a possibility of considering the imprinted nature of justice on humanity as obscured by the specific sin of oppression in the oppressor, while the oppressed, unburdened by this particular sin, have access to the general revelation of freedom, justice and liberty.

But what then of the sin of the oppressed? If Cone's assessment of Brunner is to be taken seriously, sin is a universal state. But Cone does not believe that the oppressed are exempt from sin, although he plays loosely with the concept. He (2018a:53) does wish to limit the discussion of what constitutes Black sin to the Black community but does provide his own definition of Black sin. For Cone, "the sin of the oppressed . . . is that of trying to 'understand' enslavers, to 'love' them on their own terms. As the oppressed now recognize their situation in the light of God's revelation, they know they should have killed their oppressor instead of trying to 'love them'" (Cone, 2018a:54). Beyond the rhetorical aspects of Cone's definition of sin in the oppressed seems to be the idea that while the oppressed clearly see freedom as inherent in general revelation they are unable to act to bring about justice and freedom; this ability or unwillingness to act on divine revelation constitutes the sin of the oppressed.

In the end there is perhaps room for Edwards' understanding of a general knowledge of injustice and perhaps that knowledge is distinctly missing in the oppressor because of the specific nature of the sin of oppression. But Cone's bifurcation of sin comes too close to



making the oppressed immune from total depravity and weakening the entire doctrine of original sin for it to be useful for evangelical theology. What is useful for evangelical theology in Cone's understanding, apart from any discussion of sin, is the idea that justice and freedom are elements of general revelation whether one agrees with Edwards and Cone that they are generally understood, or with Calvin, Hodge and Henry that they cannot be understood by anyone other than the elect; freedom, justice, and liberty can still be seen as inherent in the revelation of God.

But what about Cone's understanding of specific revelation? He (2018a:40) sees specific revelation as resting in the historical Jesus. Cone insists that "there has been a self-revelation of God in biblical history and decisively in Jesus Christ. . . God has been fully revealed in the man Jesus so that the norm of all existence is determined exclusively in him. He is *the* revelation of God" (Cone, 2018a:54). Cone also goes as far as to affirm Christ as *the* truth. "Jesus Christ," he believes, "is the Truth and thus stands in judgement over all statements of truth." This for Cone is different from truth found either in Scripture or even the Black church tradition. While they both possess truth, Jesus is Truth (Cone, 1997b:31). While Scripture and the Black church tradition serve as sources pointing to revelation, Jesus is revelation (Cone, 1997b:30).

But it remains unclear who Cone's Jesus is. Cone, even in his preface to *The God of the Oppressed*, wants to affirm Christ as the "starting point" of his understanding of God. However, he also wants to clarify that this Jesus is not the Jesus of Western theology, not even the Jesus of "Nicaea and Chalcedon." Cone's Jesus is the Jesus of "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John" and Jesus as he has been understood within the Black church and cultural tradition (Cone, 1997b:xiii). Cone denies much of the Scripture's historical witness to Christ. He is skeptical about the virgin birth and allegorizes the miracles. He also downplays the specific witness of Christ's life in the Scripture. "We cannot use Jesus' behavior in the first century," he says, "as a literal guide for our actions in the twentieth century. To do so is to fall into the same trap that fundamentalists fall into. It destroys ... the freedom to make decisions patterned on, but not dictated by, the example of Jesus" (Cone, 1986:34).

Cone would insist that revelation rests in the actual historical Jesus, that the Scriptures point to, but do err in regard to their description of Christ, and that human interpreters make their best determination about which parts of the biblical witness are applicable to a description of Jesus. Besides the obvious problem of having no clear means of determining

what part of the witness to Christ to keep and what part to reject, the failed search for the historical Jesus being the prime example of this problem, Cone also provides no clear methodology by which he constructs his own understanding of Christ. The other problem with Cone's assessment is that his own liberationist interpretations of Christ are dependent on a literal, historical interpretation of Scripture. Cone's assertions that Jesus was born poor, that his crucifixion was a political lynching, and that Christ's ministry was focused on the poor all require an actual historical account of Christ in the texts of the Gospels. But by bringing into question parts of the Christ narrative Cone diminishes and brings into question the whole of the historicity of those same narratives and in so doing weakens his own argument. The argument that the parts of Scripture that affirm Christ's solidarity with the poor and his mission of liberation are the true, authentic witness to Christ derives from a circular argument in which liberation is a predetermined conclusion. Despite his protest that a literal, inerrant understanding of the Christ narratives is problematic, his own affirmation of the truth of the liberationist texts would be strengthened by just such a view.

Evangelical theology does not deny the revelation of God in the person of Jesus. Henry's thesis 8 in *God, Revelation and Authority* in fact makes clear that "the climax of God's special revelation is Jesus of Nazareth, the personal incarnation of God in the flesh; in Jesus Christ the source and content of revelation converge and coincide" (Henry, vol. 3, 1979:9). Henry's views insist on the Christ of Scripture, as an historical figure, truthfully portrayed and only knowable in his particularity in Scripture itself, which does not err in what it says about Jesus (Henry, vol. 3, 1979:75-98). He also would affirm that Jesus does not just reveal God, but as God is the revelation itself (Henry, vol. 3, 1997:48-62).

Henry's attack on Brunner also serves to illustrate the difficulties with Cone's position. Henry criticizes Brunner for dialectically opposing faith and history in favor of the faith that he and other neo-orthodox scholars "overtly or covertly subscribe to the faith and mysticism or idealism with its downgrading of Christianity to 'religion in general'" (Henry, vol.3, 1979:48-49). Cone can be said to also engage in this dialectical use of faith and history. But in Cone's case, as seen above, he tends to spend less time correlating the two and more time in utilizing what seems to best fit the argument he is currently engaged in so that the historical political situation of Christ's crucifixion becomes the basis of liberation theology, whereas the Black church experience is allowed to redefine original sin apart from the narratives of Scripture as an appeal to faith. The crucifixion texts are treated historically and

the creation texts are discounted as myth and only valuable in terms of the faith community's use of the texts, not as historically accurate events. Cone does at least make room for grounding some portion of theology in historical events, but he does not sustain this view of the historicity of the biblical account across the entirety of the canon.

The obvious problem in Cone's denial of some portions of the biblical narrative might be reason enough for evangelicalism to move past his theological conclusions. But to do so would be to ignore the challenge that his insistence on the theological significance of Jesus' historical context offers to evangelicalism, if it insists on moving quickly past the socio-political context of Jesus' incarnational particularity toward the soteriological mission of Christ. While the significance and even priority of the latter cannot be ignored by evangelical theologians, the former also requires consideration. This is particularly true given Henry's and Hodge's insistence on the plain, literal reading of the text read in relation to the historical context of the original audience. The intentionality of the incarnation, including where Jesus was born, to whom, and the socio-political context that he was caught up in are critical considerations in any Christology even if they do not form, as Cone would have it, the totality of that Christology. Cone's critique in this way is taken seriously for that portion of his argument that is significant to evangelicalism.

This is what Henry seems almost forced to admit in his analysis of the revelation of Christ in thesis 8. Taking seriously the biblical witness to Jesus, he characterizes Christ as "taking up in himself the cause of the oppressed and aggrieved" (Henry, vol. 3, 1979:65), as applying "to himself the Isaiah prophecy of liberation by the messianic liberator," and as stated above, this "liberation is becoming a reality in fact and sign" (Henry, vol. 3, 1979:66). Henry does not stop with describing Christ as the liberator, he also ascribes to this characterization ethical consequences. He believes that Jesus "is even now active in the rise and fall of nations" (Henry, vol. 3, 1979:66) and that "Christians bear a special duty in relation to civil government as a divinely purposed instrument for justice in fallen society." In fact, Henry exclaims, "it is an intrinsic aspect of Christian obedience." And further, "Christ anticipatively overcomes not only the sin and death but also the injustice and incoherence that deluge the fallen life of man" (Henry, vol. 3, 1979:69).

But as has already been demonstrated above, Henry's acquiescence to liberation is also couched in language favoring a more metaphorical or symbolic use of that language. Henry contends that Jesus challenges the political understanding of the liberator in favor of

a broader definition (Henry, vol. 3, 1979:68). He also transforms the recipients of Christ's liberative work from the literal poor and oppressed to those suffering from "moral poverty and spiritual death" (Henry, vol. 3, 1979:68). Henry does not deny Christ a liberative work but creates a back and forth between social and spiritual implications, creating a tone in his work that elevates the latter over the former.

Neither Henry nor Cone presents a fully satisfactory view of Christ the liberator. Cone's arguments read, despite some limited equivocation, as "either/or" arguments: Christ is either the temporal liberator of the literal oppressed or God is nothing at all (see Cone, 2018a:1). Henry's arguments, on the other hand, read as "yes, but" arguments. There are social implications for Christ the liberator, but this is always in the background of the spiritual implications, which are universal and without consideration of social situations (Henry, vol. 3, 1976:65-69). While for evangelicals the primacy of the spiritual, or as Henry would say, the supernatural, must always be in view, it might also be argued that God's revelation in Jesus is a "both, and"—that when evangelical theology considers the historical manifestation of Christ in his birth, ministry, death, and resurrection both the literal, socio-political, historical events and the spiritual significance should be considered as cohering realities in God's revelation in Christ. This of course does not change any of Henry's conclusions, it simply changes the tone. To deal with the coherence between the socio-political realities and the spiritual is to recognize the role of the supernatural in the temporal and to provide ethical significance for the Christ event beyond the eternal destiny of souls. Scriptural interpretation would in this way see the supernatural in the natural and the temporal consequences of spiritual reality.

While Cone affirms Christ as the revelation of God, he also sees the Black experience and the Scriptures as sources of God's revelation. It is important to understand his positions on each of these sources. Understanding Cone's view of revelation in the Black experience is a necessary first step to understanding his views on Scripture. In order to understand how Cone sees Black experience as a source of revelation it is important to consider his views on the nature of Black experience, God's acts, history, and truth.

A good starting point is Cone's 1986 preface to *A Black Theology of Liberation*. For Cone, "there is no 'abstract' revelation, independent of human experiences, to which theologians can appeal for evidence of what they say about the gospel"; he is insistent that "God meets us in the human condition" (Cone, 2018a:xxiii). For Cone, because human

perceptions of God are caught up in human culture and history, God's revelation is intimately interdependent on the human experience for its intelligibility. Humanity cannot perceive of God beyond the limitations of its own experience. It is important to understand that for Cone, experience is to be distinguished from inwardness (Cone, 2018a:25) and connected instead to transcendence (Cone, 1997b:29). The former is seen in relation to a Schleiermacherian inwardness where God can only be understood through a direct, individual, inward encounter with the divine. Cone does not see the Black experience as an individual experience of encounter with God, but affirms instead the encounter with the God of the community; this is a transcendent encounter of the community across time in which God is made known in the worship and life of the community. The importance of the communal experience cannot be overemphasized when considering Cone's understanding of what he means by the Black experience. Experience then is an actual transcendent encounter with God as conveyed and understood by the community as it has existed across time and place to form a coherent understanding of God's revelation for the experiencing, encountering community. But it is important to ask how Cone defends this activity as a necessary, and at times he seems to say primary, source of God's revelation.

Cone grounds his main argument for the importance of Black experience as a source of the revelation of God in a hermeneutical argument relating both the findings of the sociology of knowledge and his understanding of the axiological distance of the Black community and the biblical witness, the latter of which is central to Cone's understanding of truth in theological discourse (Cone, 1997b:36-56).

For Cone, formulation of revelation is not possible apart from human language and human experience. But, as emphasized above, Cone is careful not to make this the language and experience of individuals, and so this revelation to the community is verified by the community (Cone, 2018a:43). Humanity's "finite existence" means that humanity is incapable of "postulat(ing)" absolute value judgments (Cone, 2018a:43). Thus, the best that can be achieved is a process whereby the community of faith determines the validity of revelation within the context of faith. Cone concludes that "revelation, then, is the epistemological justification of the claims of a community about ontological reality" (Cone, 2018a:43). Thus, Cone brackets truth within the particular context and experience of each unique community, asserting that Black truth and Black understanding of God is distinct because it arises out of the particularity of the Black experience: "There is no truth for or

about Black people that does not emerge out of the context of their experience” (Cone, 1997b:16).

But this line of reasoning creates a problem for the emphatic nature of Cone’s insistence that the Black community has the truth of God and that the White community represents a wrong or heretical perspective on God. How can truth be said to be specific to the community’s understanding of it without succumbing to a relativism that makes the prioritization of Black truth over White truth impossible?

Cone attempts to resolve this difficulty by claiming that the oppressed community’s truth is closer to the true revelation of God because the oppressed community is axiologically closer to that truth than is the oppressor. First, Cone asserts that revelation itself is pointed and intended for the oppressed and as such only the oppressed can rightly understand it (Cone, 2018a:48). Second, he makes a distinction between ideology/subjective interpretation on the one hand and revelation/truth on the other. Ideology is interpretation that distorts the truth toward the political and economic self-interest of the interpreter (Cone, 1997b:84-86). Cone equates this with the theology of oppressors who do not affirm the entirety of the biblical witness to liberation, especially those who deny the importance of Exodus and covenant as “God’s liberating deeds in history” (Cone, 1997b:85). Cone’s own views, in keeping with the views of the oppressed Black community, are socially determined but not ideological. To prove his point Cone uses definitions that are inherent in the sociology of knowledge, which does not view a social *a priori* as an impediment to truth. Social determinism simply assumes that communities have a particular axiological grid by which they filter and formulate thought. This process has a value-neutral starting point. Thought becomes ideological when it is distorted by self-interest (Cone, 1997b:83-84). Thus, the closeness of a community’s axiological grid to the truth of revelation the freer it is from distortion. For Cone the oppressed community is axiologically closer to God’s revelation than the oppressor is. While Black reflection on God’s revelation is not exempt from error, its relationship to truth is closer than is possible for oppressors (Cone, 1997b:86). Cone can, therefore, speak of Black truth and White heresy in a way normally prevented by appeals to relativity and social determinism.

As has already been demonstrated, Cone affirms neo-orthodox and liberal theology’s move away from the propositional nature of revelation, following Barth, Brunner, and Tillich in placing revelation in the person and event of Jesus Christ as a manifestation of God in

human history (Cone, 2018a:45). Cone (2018a:47) says that “Black theology agrees with contemporary theology,” and elaborates further “that God’s self-disclosure is the distinctive characteristic of divine revelation which is not the rational discovery of God’s attributes, or the assent to infallible biblical propositions, or an aspect of human self-consciousness. Rather, revelation has to do with God, as God is in personal relationship with humankind effecting the divine will in history.” This is critically important in understanding both Cone’s views of revelation and his use of Scripture. It is not the words about God or even spoken by God that form the revelational content of Scripture but the actions of God in the Exodus, the covenant, in God’s concern for the oppressed, and in Christ’s incarnational solidarity with the poor both in his ministry and his political death. The Bible is a revelation of God in that it records God’s actions in history (Cone, 2018a:49-50). The God who acted in history, according to Cone, is still acting and revealing God’s self in the historical and contemporary experiences of the Black community (Cone, 2018a:28). These twin ideas, the revelation of God as evident in his historical encounters with humanity as recorded in Scripture and God’s ongoing participation in history in solidarity with the Black community, allow Cone to link the biblical witness to the experience of the Black community. The God who revealed God’s self to the slaves in Egypt as their liberator is the God who is revealing God’s self to the Black community as the liberator.

What then is to be made of Cone’s views of Black experience as a source of divine revelation? Most evangelical theology would not eliminate experience entirely from theological reflection, but it seems likely that Cone’s emphasis on the priority of the Black experience in revelation would be rejected by evangelical theologians. This does not mean that Cone, in the course of defending his point, does not raise important questions that should be considered by evangelicals. There are at least five that need consideration. These include: 1) whether thought about God begins by reflecting on God or humanity, 2) the importance of transcendence in connecting experience to biblical revelation, 3) the definition of truth, 4) the importance of axiological distance, and 5) God’s acts as opposed to God’s speech as revelation.

First, does reflection on God’s revelation begin with reference to God in God’s self or by reference to God as God has shown God’s self in human history? Cone of course affirms the latter. God is only visible through God’s interaction with humanity and only relatable in culturally governed human language. Because humanity cannot escape its finite condition its

understanding of God is bound within its humanity. Abstractions about God qua God's own self are impossible. Humanity can only see God in relation to how God has interacted with humanity in human history.

Henry, as has been demonstrated, would disavow any idea that God cannot be known as God is in God's self. God's existence is not defined in any way by human (mis)perceptions of God. Further, God is knowable in God's self through the propositional truths and statements about God in Scripture. Henry recognizes the limitations of human speech but believes God was not limited in expressing all of God's self that God wished to convey in human language.

It is important to note, however, that Calvin, even if he would concur with Henry's opinion related to the knowability of God (and Cone's understanding of cultural determinism would be alien to him), affirms the interconnection and difficulty in knowing whether theology begins with God or humanity. Calvin, of course, begins with God, believing that humanity cannot know itself apart from seeing itself in relation to God. His views are not, however, used as a discussion of revelation as necessarily determined by the human condition, they are primarily a determination of theological schema. Therefore, Calvin's discussion is unhelpful in resolving the differences between Henry and Cone in either direction. Ultimately the difference cannot be decided without consideration of the debate over truth and axiological difference.

Second, it is important to consider Cone's poorly developed understanding of transcendent encounter and to do so in relation to Edwards' fuller development in the *Religious Affections* and *Miscellanies* as analyzed above. Cone makes room for transcendent encounter as a check on and connection between the experience of the Black community and biblical revelation. But his reference is so brief and so poorly developed that it has only limited overall value in advancing his argument. Cone has no clear understanding of how the work of the Spirit engages in revealing God through the transcendent encounters of the Black community. Cone's entire theology in fact lacks a developed pneumatology and any use of the idea of illumination. This might be explained by virtue of Cone's insistence of avoiding abstract Western doctrinal categories. But Cone does use these categories in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, and it is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit is conspicuously absent from the list of doctrines treated. Cone also does not make any distinction between illumination and revelation. Illumination is not a category that Cone uses. Contemporary encounters that



would be characterized within evangelical theology as the illumination of the Holy Spirit are characterized by Cone as the revelation of God within the experience and encounter of the Black community. Thus, illumination is made to carry the full weight of the revelation of God, making it of equal importance, particularly in Cone's latter thought, to the revelation of God in Scripture.

This is problematic for evangelical theology on two levels. First, the tradition under review here, particularly in Hodge and Henry, insists on a sharp distinction between revelation and illumination and makes illumination subservient to the revelation of God in Scripture. Second, an appeal to transcendence without some clear pneumatological scheme would be inadequate. How the Spirit works to bring meaning and encounter in the context of human experience is a necessary piece to understanding how God continues to work in contemporary contexts. For Cone's understanding of God's revelation in the Black experience to have any resonance within evangelical theology, it would need a clearer view of the Spirit's work, similar to Edwards' work on the religious affections, and Cone would have to concede a point of distinction between illumination and revelation which is absent in his work.

Further, a comparison with Edwards is instructive at another level. Edwards, in a more detailed way than Calvin, Hodge, and Henry, demonstrates the necessary work of the Spirit in sanctifying the minds of the elect. Although Edwards has a higher view of natural theology, he would concur that divine knowledge is only possible through the illuminating power of the Spirit. Not only does Cone not develop this idea in relation to the Spirit, but he limits interpretation of the revelation of God to the community in total and includes in his concept of Black community the Black community beyond the Black church. Given the understanding at the beginning of this study that one of the two central tenets of evangelicalism is the necessity of the "born again" experience evident in the pietistic arm of the movement, Cone's belief that the revelation of God is evident in the fullness of the Black experience apart from any requirement of faith or conversion is antithetical to evangelical theology. But again, conclusions in this regard also require the engagement of Cone's understanding of axiological difference.

Third, Cone draws on modern understandings of the sociology of knowledge and literary hermeneutics to claim that all human understanding and, therefore, the articulation of truth claims, are culturally bound. To say that Cone recognizes no absolute truth would be

to misread him. He does believe that finite humanity cannot access truth and that it will always be filtered through human culture, which makes human understanding of truth derivative, but Cone does see truth as resting in the person of God in Jesus Christ. Therefore, humanity's understanding of truth, while flawed, could achieve some measure of resemblance to actual truth or may totally distort it. This is how Cone is able to speak of Black truth and White heresy while maintaining cultural boundedness.

Henry, while recognizing the limitations of human speech and the fallibility of the contemporary interpreter, does not give as much power to the cultural boundedness of the human understanding of divine revelation. For Henry, absolute truth exists beyond human thought or language; it rests in God's self and is accessible through divine revelation. God has communicated truth through biblical revelation in such a way as to be intelligible to humanity through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's work, in inspiring the original authors towards writing that presents God in ways that are sufficient for human understanding and in guiding the believer to an understanding of the text, means that truth is fully accessible to the believer. While Henry does not deny contemporary hermeneutical challenges in the interpretation of the text, he downplays the importance of these issues in the final analysis. Through the Spirit humanity has access to the truth of God. This truth is a single unchanging truth and therefore is universal and has no distinct or different cultural manifestations.

So, for Henry any statement of "truth" is universal and the process toward the recovery of truth is superintended by the guidance of the Spirit so that truth is fully knowable without distortion. Of course, the distinction between Cone and Henry is in focus. Cone places the focus on human fallibility while Henry insists on the supernatural work of God through the Holy Spirit. Also, Cone's work takes more seriously cultural claims of modern hermeneutics, whereas Henry chooses to diminish these claims.

What has to be emphasized at this point is that Cone's approach places so little focus on the work of God as to almost deny or certainly diminish revelation as God's self-disclosure. While his definition of revelation recognizes self-disclosure as central, his actual work places no emphasis on this self-disclosure as comprehensible outside of human experience. Thus, for Cone, God has spoken, and humanity is left to its own human ability to understand this revelation. Henry, on the other hand, has so placed his understanding on the movement of God in human understanding as to make truth and its attainment an abstract

process operating outside of human intellection. Henry fails to adequately account for the varying and sometimes contradictory interpretations of God's revelation and Scripture even among those who claim to be believers. Where in Henry's understanding of revelation is there allowance for the believer being more guided by their own self-interest instead of by the Spirit of God? The degree to which he both affirms and downplays the fallibility of the human interpreter notwithstanding. While Cone, as will be shown below, demonstrates an understanding of revelation that rests on communal subjectivity, Henry grounds his understanding of revelation in the text of Scripture. This means Cone lacks a firm authoritative grounding where Henry, despite his supernatural "guardrail", subjects revelation to the strictures of literary hermeneutics. But Henry has no clearly articulated hermeneutical theory that supports his text-laden understanding of truth apart from his theology of inspiration and illumination.

Cone, to be useful for evangelical theology, needs an expanded understanding of the divine role in the move from divine self-disclosure to the human articulation of truth, while Henry needs a clearer understanding of the hermeneutical issues at stake between the Spirit's guidance and the human tendency, even in believers, to interpret texts in light of their culturally grounded self-interest. Again, Cone's discussion of axiological difference is critical in this regard, and it is now possible to consider that in light of Cone's understanding of truth, transcendence, and human finitude.

Cone's claim, in relation to the truth of God revealed in the Black experience, is that while the Black community is also finite and still prone to error, they are axiologically closer to the truth of God's revelation than are the dominant White oppressors. Cone is of course, without drawing attention to it, referencing Gadamer's understandings of the interpretive horizon between the reader and the original author (Gadamer, 2004:435-492), which plays such an important role in Thistleton's (1980) work. Of course, Gadamer and Thistleton are focused on a Western philosophical tradition that emphasizes the distance in time, in the interests of a distinction between the horizon of the biblical author and the horizon of the contemporary interpreter, suggesting that historical and chronological distance make the biggest difference in the ability to understand the text, not cultural distinctions, which are absent in Gadamer.

What this work does not address is exactly what Cone insists on: the difference in the various cultural, ethnic, and class horizons of various contemporary interpreters. While all

contemporary readers stand at a chronological distance from the biblical text, there are cases where the class, political, or cultural experience of the contemporary interpreter may in fact be closer to that of the biblical author than that of other contemporary interpreters, thus placing the better positioned contemporary reader and their interpretation closer to the truth of the text than those who are socio-economically at a greater distance from the text.

This is a critical distinction, and the primary way Cone is able to assert that the Black community possesses a truth that is closer to the biblical horizon than Whites, who by and large read the text from their own position of power and privilege and in ways that reflect their own self-interest. This is particularly true when White scholars have historically emphasized the literal interpretations of texts that advanced the oppression of the Black community while deemphasizing the literalness of texts that favored the liberation of the oppressed—the type of approach that was evident, for example, in the theology of Hodge outlined above.

What Cone's work highlights for White evangelicalism is a gap in its hermeneutical self-assessment. It emphasizes the degree to which not only chronological differences but also power, privilege, cultural, and political distance from the text may affect the ability of White evangelical theology to bridge the gap between its own horizon and that of the biblical text. This also means that there should be some allowance within evangelical theology for privileging interpretations of the text by those positioned closer to the socio-cultural and political realities of the text and original audience as potentially having a greater degree of correspondence to the meaning of the original author than their own interpretations. Certainly, it highlights the degree to which power and privilege can motivate self-interested interpretation.

This suggests a need to expand discussions within evangelical theology to consider the effects of power and privilege on accessibility to the truth of God's revelation, particularly when it is grounded, as most evangelical theology is, in the primacy and authority of Scripture, which requires interpretation. Henry's acquiescence to the fallibility of the interpreter notwithstanding, evangelical theology needs a firmer grounding in its understanding of interpretive fallibility. Perhaps one suggestion might include a deeper integration of the understanding of Reformed spirituality (Ferguson, 1989:54-78). Reformed spirituality insists that even believers remain subject to their fallen natures and that the work of sanctification is progressive in the believer. This suggests that even believers have the

ability to interpret in light of self-interest as opposed to divine illumination. This connection between illumination and progressive sanctification identifies a clear spiritual, pragmatic concern to an otherwise theoretical idea of the interpreter's fallibility and heightens the degree of concern for the effects of self-interest in the interpretation of believers.

#### 5.2.1.5.1 Concluding observations on revelation and Scripture in the evangelical tradition

Cone's understanding of experience as a source of Black theology and as a location of divine revelation, while at places problematic, does suggest needed refocusing of evangelical theology in some areas. Cone's focus on the cultural boundedness of all human God-talk leads him to emphasize that God can only be understood in light of human experience. What this means is that his views on transcendence and divine truth become enmeshed in understandings of relativity that are only partially rescued by his discussion of axiological distance. He also lacks a clear pneumatology and distinction between illumination and revelation, and this makes any connection between God's self-disclosure and human interpretation tenuous at best. Cone's work on axiological difference does speak to a deficiency of focus in Henry's doctrine of revelation and illumination that challenges evangelical theology to propose a caveat to the Spirit's work of illumination. The proposal made above is that evangelical theology should intentionally emphasize the Reformed tradition of progressive sanctification as a caveat to evangelical appeals to spiritual illumination and as a reminder that even the believer may be guided in interpretation by their power, privilege, or political standing toward a self-interested interpretation/distortion of the text. Ultimately, experience cannot be integrated as a source equal to biblical revelation in evangelical theology. That said, some of the aspects of Cone's discussion of revelation in the Black experience do speak to gaps or lack of emphasis in the evangelical tradition.

Apart from revelation in Black experience, Cone also forces a conversation on revelation as act or speech. This is true of both Cone's insistence on using act over speech in scriptural revelation and his insistence on God's continuing revelation as a sign that God has entered into and remains engaged in history. In regard to the former, Cone affirms revelation in the acts of God in Scripture over the propositional words of Scripture in determining the way God is seen to reveal God's self. This of course allows Cone to focus on the liberating acts of God in the Exodus and to insist that liberation of the oppressed is the central aspect of what God reveals about God's self. This also allows Cone to draw selectively on those

acts of God that most clearly make God a liberator to the exclusion of those parts of Scripture that might portray God differently. Cone signals this issue with his doctrine of revelation in his preface to *God of the Oppressed* mentioned above, noting that womanist and feminist theologians have drawn his attention to the texts where God seems to do harm to women instead of liberating them. While Native Americans have pointed out that the Israelites' occupation of the promised land could be read from the perspective of the Canaanites as an occupation by a colonial power (Cone, 1997b:xi-xii). The evangelical tradition represented by Hodge and Henry on the other hand would object to the selective elevation of some texts above others, insisting instead that the Bible be accepted as authoritative in all its parts (see 5.2.1.3 and 5.2.1.4 above).

Henry's entire six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority* expands the overall premise that God both shows and speaks. So, while Henry affirms revelation in the acts of God, he wishes to emphasize revelation in the way God speaks through the totality of Scripture. Henry's work is an attack on the Barthian focus on act, and this is also evident in Cone. Henry, as stated above, insists that the truth, revelation, and words of Scripture are not separable from the works of Scripture. But there is a sense in which, in his attempt to defend the truth of the words, he diminishes the importance of the historical acts of God in favor of elevating the literary pronouncements of those acts. This of course is the very problem that Cone tries to avoid, insisting on the reality of God's literal engagement in acts of liberation in the past that are mirrored in contemporary acts of liberation in the present, which together reveal God as the God of liberation.

Both approaches lack a balanced assessment of the content of Scripture, although it should be noted that Henry gives more credence to act than Cone does to speech. Evangelical theology's doctrine of inspiration means that Scripture in its totality is the Word of God, so God speaks even in the less direct meaning of God's actions in Scripture because the Spirit of God has inspired and superintended the original authors to relate these actions. The actions themselves have meaning, as do their historical, social, economic and political contexts. Thus, evangelicalism, in its defense of the propositional truths of Scripture, cannot neglect the historical literal nature of the acts of God. The historical fact of God liberating slaves from Egypt, and Jesus' life among the poor and marginalized, and the political significance of Jesus' death on the cross, must factor into how God is to be understood. God's specific acts in specific historical circumstances cannot be seen as incidental to God's revelation,

particularly in propositional evangelical theology. If the meaning is only identifiable in the words, as Henry suggests, those words in conveying historical, social, and political realities also embed socio-political meanings in the historical literal understanding of the textual truth. It is ironic that Cone, who argues against the literal interpretation of the text, argues for the literal interpretation of the context, while some evangelicals who insist on the primacy of the literal meaning of the text, like Henry and Hodge, make the historical context secondary. Logically, evangelical theology is strengthened by reference to the meanings found in the historical literal context and unless it provides clear textual evidence for doing so, it weakens its own understanding of the clear meaning of the text when it resorts to metaphorical or spiritual interpretations or claims that the circumstances and context of the text are insignificant for its understanding.

It must also be admitted that the difficulty with using Cone does not rest only in his selective use of text and contexts but in his theological assumption that the God who is revealed in the political liberation of Israel from slavery is the God who is revealed in every act of political liberation of the oppressed in the contemporary world. This diminishes the uniqueness of biblical revelation and suggests a purely sociological revelation of God evident in the act of political liberation. Both would be inconsistent with an evangelical view of revelation, but not necessarily with an evangelical view of providence that emphasizes the ongoing immanence of the work of God in the world apart from any suggestion of a contemporary revelation; this will be dealt with in more detail under Providence below (5.2.2).

Cone's view of revelation then includes the revelation of God in Christ, God's revelation in Black experience, God's revelation in his ongoing liberative acts in history, and God's revelation in Scripture. God in Christ, for Cone at least early on, represents the norm for theological reflection, while God's revelation in the Black experience, history, and Scripture serve as important sources but not the norm. Cone's later reflection elevates Black experience to the level of norm and makes Christ, history and Scripture sources. Because Scripture itself is a critical point of contention between Cone and evangelical theology it is important to deal with it separately before moving to the discussion of Providence within the doctrine of God.

It has already been suggested that Cone's views on Scripture shift between his original writing of *A Black Theology of Liberation* and *God of the Oppressed* and his

republication in 1997 of the new preface to *God of the Oppressed*, where he voices concern about his original understanding of the doctrine of Scripture in his preface to that work (see Cone, 2018a:48 and 1997b:xii). But while Cone expresses some concern for the importance of Scripture in his early work, he has never affirmed the kind of concern for the authority of Scripture representative of Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry. What then is Cone's view of Scripture?

First, Scripture is fallible. Cone affirms both the fallibility of Scripture and its verbal inspiration (Cone, 2018a:33). This is compounded by the fact that Cone offers no alternative view of inspiration to counter evangelical understandings of verbal inspiration. How Cone views the role of the Spirit in relation to the original authors is unclear. What is clear are Cone's reasons for setting aside both verbal inspiration and literal interpretation. He believes that biblical infallibility and literalism allows racists to point to the authority of Scripture and to advance oppressive views of Scripture which they then claim are the authoritative Word of God (Cone, 2018a:33). He also appeals to the Black church tradition about which he says, "Blacks show little concern about the abstract status of the Bible, whether fallible or infallible; their concern is with Scripture as a living reality in the concreteness of their existence" (Cone, 1997b:53). Black church apathy notwithstanding, the authority of Scripture is central to evangelical theology. It is one of the two defining features of evangelicalism. The fact that Cone gives Scripture no authority makes his views of Scripture incompatible with evangelicalism. Further, while Chapter Three has shown examples where Cone is correct that literal interpretation and infallibility are leveraged by evangelicals to support racist views, this is not a necessarily foregone conclusion. It is possible to see a view of infallibility and literality as affirming a more liberated stance towards the oppressed. In fact, interpretations that deemphasize verses that speak directly about injustice towards the poor are equally problematic for liberation interpretations; a position on the literal interpretation of these texts would create a defense against their omission. Cone's view on Scripture, unsupported by any other theory of inspiration or authority, has limited ability to present a cogent critique to the evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

Second, Cone does see Scripture, if not as authoritative, as at least an important source of theology, but with the equivocation that when looking to Scripture it is not the words of Scripture but the Word in the words that matter. Cone is clear that Scripture itself is not



revelation, but points beyond itself to the revelation of God which is exterior to the text (Cone, 2018a:34). The extent to which Cone moves meaning outside the text is clear from a discussion of Black preaching in *God of the Oppressed*: “The Word and its proclamation in the Black church,” Cone affirms, “is more than the conceptualization of theological doctrine. The word is more than words about God. God’s word is a poetic happening, an evocation of an indescribable reality in the lives of the people.... Here the preacher is not only affirming his freedom in relation to the text, he is also making a sharp distinction between the words of the text and the Word disclosed in the text” (Cone 1997b:18). Cone emphasizes freedom in relation to the text, maintaining that the Bible is neither a “blueprint” or “guide” (Cone, 1997b:7); instead, it points to the ambiguous transcendence mentioned previously. The reader exercises full freedom in decision-making in regard to the text.

This view is completely antithetical to the evangelical tradition under consideration. While both Calvin and Edwards, and even to an extent Henry, would see meanings as lying beyond the individual words of the text, both Calvin and Edwards would not affirm a meaning that was independent of the text, and certainly Hodge and Henry would agree. Within the evangelical tradition the reader does not exercise freedom in relation to the text of Scripture. In fact, Scripture is intended to exercise authority over the reader, and meaning, centered as it is in the authority of the text not the interpreter, constrains the reader to seek meaning that is constrained by the text itself. But that also means that evangelical readers do not have the right to take liberties with the text and are constrained to begin with the literal meaning and context of the text and to provide clear textual reason for moving away from the literal interpretation. This is no less true of liberation-focused texts than it is of those texts that have been emphasized to support racist positions. Further, Cone’s appeal to freedom in interpretation and from ethical application of the text has the opposite effect than he intends in his attack on infallibility and literalism. An abandonment of biblical infallibility and literalism in favor of interpretive freedom leaves racist interpreters unbound by the texts that oppose racist views. Thus, evangelical views properly understood and enforced provide a better vehicle for challenging racist and self-interested interpretations.

But if Cone’s views are so antithetical to evangelical views, is it then possible for evangelicals to set aside Cone’s arguments altogether? The short answer is no, primarily because there is a sharp distinction between what Cone says about Scripture and how Cone uses Scripture. Cone’s doctrine of Scripture is wholly inadequate, but when Cone

leverages the biblical witness in defense of liberationist interpretation he almost always does so with reference to the historical literal interpretation of the text. This approach, while wholly contradictory to his own theological system, fully challenges evangelical theologians to, at the very least, defend why they do not share Cone's interpretations, which are in turn responsive to their own insistence that this historical literal meaning of the text be given priority consideration in interpretation. Thus, Cone's interpretations cannot be ignored by evangelical theologians, and they force these theologians to evaluate the extent to which their own interpretations pull the text away from historical literal meanings and how these interpretive movements might be the result of their own positions of power, privilege, and self-interest. The text itself might affirm a broader interpretive meaning different from Cone's but evangelical theologians have the higher burden of textual proof by virtue of their own understanding of Scripture.

That said, Cone's views of Scripture and revelation point him to a singular doctrine of God's work; for Cone this is liberation, which he expresses in much the same way as Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry might express their understanding of the context of providence, although the latter will do so with an appeal to some version of a salvation-historical view of providence. Our study in Chapter Three also identified the way the doctrine of providence itself was used to advance racist ideas. With this in mind it is necessary to consider the providence of God within the doctrine of God with reference to both its theoretical conception and its content.

### **5.2.2 Providence**

Unlike revelation, the doctrine of Providence was considered in detail in Chapter Three in discussions of Calvin (3.2.2.1), Edwards (3.3.2.1), Hodge (3.4.2.1) and Henry (3.5.2.2.1). So, a specific discussion of each is unnecessary. A composite survey of their distinctions will suffice, followed by a consideration of their views in conversation with Cone.

#### *5.2.2.1 The evangelical tradition on providence: differences and continuity*

For Calvin providence was more than God's initiating eternal laws that hold together the universe. God was in no way absent, for God guides fully the ongoing work of creation, all the affairs and fortunes of humanity, including guiding the evil acts of evil actors, and all time past, present, and future. There are no causes that could not be ascribed to God. Calvin

also held to the idea of the fixity of the human condition, and believed in the idea of distributive justice. The poor were poor because God willed it, the will of God was not to be questioned, therefore the poor should be content, and while the poor should expect to be treated with benevolence, they had no right to expect to be treated in the same way as the wealthy (see 3.2.2.1 above).

Edwards builds his understanding of providence on Calvin's doctrine but with an innovative approach. While Edwards wishes to deny the culpability of God for the evil actions of evil actors, his inability to tie these actions to a cause outside of God means his efforts are ultimately unsuccessful. If anything, Edwards, through his notion of providence, as God's continual creation and his tying of providence to the relational Trinity, makes God's engagement with the minutiae of daily affairs more intimately realized in Edwards' theology. He also furthers Calvin's notion of distributive justice and social hierarchy and considers both as existing within the providence of God. But Edwards is distinct from Calvin in another way. Edwards' understanding of the knowability of the providence of God in human history, including contemporary history, is a prime way in which providence was leveraged to support racist views. The history of conquest, colonization, White supremacy, and even genocide could be explained by narrating these events within a story of God's providential intervention in the world either as acts of judgment or missional expansion. These narratives propel racist logics in both Edwards and Hodge. Edwards also sees ordered society defined by adherence to authority, particularly governmental authority, as part of the temporal providential provision of God. Edwards' views of providence as creation, governmental authority as part of God's providential plan, distributive justice, and the knowability of God will all need to be placed in conversation with Cone below (see 3.3.2.1 above).

Hodge, unlike Edwards, does not leave unchallenged the idea of God as the only cause of all human action. As noted above, Hodge makes room for secondary actors and causes in events and actions not related to salvation. By this means Hodge relieves God of direct culpability for the evil actions of evil actors. Hodge also leaves room for human rebellion, under very limited circumstances, to overthrow and replace human government, but maintains that government is given by God through God's providence to maintain proper order. More on this below. Hodge inherits from Edwards the knowability of God's providence and history and maintains the notions of distributive justice and hierarchy as inherent features within the providence of God (see 3.4.2.1 above).

Henry reverts to the denial of secondary causes and believes that God moves and is involved in every aspect of personal human experience and action. While Henry uses the language of equality his attacks on Marxism and communism elevate his support for capitalist systems that allow for class distinction and inequality of property and wealth. Henry affirms distributive justice, at least with contemporary qualification, but opposes the idea of fixity. Through the power and providence of God individuals could rise above their station. Also, contra Hodge, Henry denies the possibility of rebellion against governmental authority, vesting the government, alongside Calvin and Edwards, securely within the divine providential will of God. Henry also affirms a view that would be in line with Calvin, Edwards and Hodge, that God can and does bring judgment upon immoral nations as part of God's ongoing providential plans (see 3.5.2.2.2 above).

#### *5.2.2.2 Placing Cone in dialogue with evangelical tradition on the doctrine of providence*

##### *5.2.2.2.1 Cone's views as antithetical to evangelical theology*

What then can be said of Cone's views, and what is to be made of all five views when placed in dialogue? When it comes to understanding Cone on the doctrine of providence there is very little to engage. Cone insists that "it is difficult to talk about providence when men and women are dying and children are tortured" (Cone, 2018a:83). Then he demonstrates his point by providing only three pages of commentary on providence in his entire theological corpus. Cone's statement has a double meaning. He sees any notion of providence as problematic and he sees time spent on abstract reflections on providence as wasted while "men and women are dying and children are tortured."

He recognizes that the primary issue with the doctrine of providence lies in the question of theodicy, or more specifically, "the difficulty of recognizing human suffering and divine participation in history" (Cone, 2018a:84). Cone disallows any solution to the question of theodicy that points to a progressive providence that shifts God's responsibility for action into an eschatological future or that, like Hodge, shifts culpability for evil actions off of God and onto secondary evil actors. Cone is quick to point out that God's permissive will creates the same level of culpability as God's participative acts (Cone, 2018a:84), but he has no answer for these problems, which create very real problems for him. Cone's insistence on the actual historical, literal involvement of God in the Exodus and God as actively engaged in

the ongoing liberation of Black people in contemporary society is logically dependent on divine participation in history.

Cone's own views of God's action create additional problems. Cone's vision of divine involvement in history lacks the progressive understanding of redemption-historical views of providence. God is engaged in the singular act of liberating the oppressed and there is little practical distinction between that act in the Exodus and in Jesus. He also denies the full liberation inherent in eschatological culmination as an explanation of the certainty of freedom in the completed work of Christ on the cross (Cone, 2018a:86). The problem with Cone's reasoning is that it cannot account for the overarching historical reality of oppression. While it is clear that Cone's arguments are aimed at defeating the use of providence by White theologians like Edwards and Hodge to claim that God not only allows slavery and the conquest of Native Americans but these events are part of God's providential will, it is also the case that he has weakened his own argument for liberation.

Cone cannot reconcile the theodicy question and so he is forced to relegate providence to the status of an existential ideal that also weakens substantially his doctrine of God. He begins by accepting Tillich's understanding that providence is the availability of the divine "under any circumstance, under any set of conditions." God's providence is the potentiality of God to be present in any circumstance (Cone 2018a:86). "Black theology interprets this to mean that in spite of whiteness a way is open to blackness and we do not have to accept white definitions" (Cone, 2018a:86). So, the providential will is God's existential potentiality to point the Black community toward an embrace of blackness that results in black liberation. But this perception limits God's divine actions to an existential encounter in the individual lives, not to God's direct actions in human history. It should be admitted, however, that there is little logical difference from the evangelical missiological argument that sees the only means for social transformation as the salvation of individual souls and the transformation of society through the cumulative effect of the transformation of each individual life. Both make God's action a matter of internal, individualistic response and human interiority. But in Cone this has the result of weakening his argument related to God's direct, ongoing participation in human history towards liberation. Cone is not content with making providence an existential event; he also directly attacks God's omnipotence.

"Omnipotence," according to Cone, "does not refer to God's absolute power to accomplish what God wants. As John Macquarrie says, omnipotence is 'the power to let

something stand out from nothing and to be” (Cone, 2018a:86). Thus, the power of God in Cone’s thought is seriously diminished and made only operable as a condition of Black consciousness. God’s power has no agency independent of the Black experience, no will of its own, and no end beyond that made of it by the Black community. Besides being contradictory to remarks Cone makes about God’s sovereignty, it also makes God a product of the Black consciousness without a clear perception of God’s omnipotence as a part of who God is in God’s self.

Cone’s efforts here are expended in an attempt to so bracket both the providence of God and the omnipotence of God, within the experience of the oppressed, that as a category of theological argumentation they become inaccessible to White theologians. Abstractly, if one can make God’s providential acts into existential encounters within the consciousness of Black individuals only and the omnipotence of God as God’s power used only to awaken Black consciousness, the definitions become too narrow to create space for White theological use in other areas, and they do redefine these traditional categories in ways that support Cone’s singular focus on liberation. But they also weaken his arguments, making God’s power and will more potentialities instead of ongoing realities. They also replace or leave impotent a theology of immanence necessary to carry the weight of Cone’s overarching argument and replace it with the notion of a transcendent God only awakened in and through the emerging consciousness of the Black community. Traditional views of providence and omnipotence do a better job of emphasizing God’s immanent presence and regard for human reality than is possible in Cone’s existential redefinition.

While Cone’s definitions may work within the internal logic of Black liberation theology, they are problematic for Reformed evangelical theology. Cone’s definitions would not simply challenge evangelical theology but would replace it altogether. The difficulty, though, is that the work of Chapter Three, based on Cone’s critique that racism is embedded in White theology, suggests that views on providence within the evangelical tradition have been used for racist ends. Since Cone’s reformulation of these doctrines is unavailable as a corrective, it is important to examine where the evangelical tradition goes wrong and whether there are ways of formulating the tradition that eliminates or forestalls its use for racist ends. With that in mind, a close examination of causality, knowability, relationality, fixity, as well as the realization of the divine will in societal patterns of government, hierarchy, and

authority with reference to distributive justice, must be pursued by way of the evangelical tradition independent of, or with slight reference to, Cone.

#### 5.2.2.2.2 Correctives inherent within evangelicalism itself

The question of causality—is God directly responsible for the evil actions of evil actors?—is critical to any understanding of God’s role in an acquiescence to oppression. It has been noted that Calvin, Edwards, and Henry answered this question in the affirmative. For all three God superintends all human actions and all human actors towards God’s divine will and divine plan for humanity. Thus, Henry is able to reach the conclusion that even the Holocaust was part of God’s plan to restore the nation of Israel. Besides the degree to which the views of Calvin, Edwards, and Henry ascribe evil actions and oppression within the will of God, they more importantly make the state of the oppressed the explicit will of God and at least in Calvin and Edwards this state is to be endured and accepted without complaint. This deterministic perspective becomes an intellectual tool that has been used by persons in positions of power and privilege both to maintain power and to justify the subjugation of others (Harvey, 2016:67-92).

Besides the degree to which this understanding of poverty ascribes culpability for evil to God, it also blurs the distinction between God and the evil operable in the world in a way that makes evil so impotent that it functions only as a puppet of divine action. While it is true that evil, like all creation, must be seen as having an existence subordinated to and under the judgment of God, the inclusion of the evil actions of evil actors in the will of God inherent in Calvin’s, Edwards’, and Henry’s understanding of providence has the ability to be used within racist logic in a way that ascribes evil actions to God’s will, even if doing so was not what Calvin, Edwards and Henry intended by their understanding of providence. Thus, evil within this view is seen as a burden to be borne, not as an adversary to be overcome. It also has the result of, at least to a degree, nullifying the full force of the doctrines of fall and original sin to be dealt with below as it regards the racist application of these views of providence.

Hodge does offer an alternative to this view. His understanding of the distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata* and the absolute control of God in the acts of grace inherent in salvation and sanctification, and the efficacy of secondary causes in the ordinary events of life, provide a distinct means by which God’s providence is preserved but

causality for the evil acts of evil actors is ascribed more directly to the evil actors, not God (Hodge, vol. 1, 1993:615). This move provides a Reformed understanding of providence that does not diminish the temporal power of evil but does preserve the view that evil is ultimately subjugated under the providence of God and has no power of its own to subvert God's will or God's redemptive historical plan for humanity. The natural conclusion of Hodge's views on secondary causes is that those in positions of power and privilege cannot necessarily ascribe the positions and circumstances of their subordinates to a divine ordering of society but must submit to a critique of the secondary role of evil in producing those conditions. They also cannot naturally view their own position in the world as an act of divine fiat but must assess any role that evil played in their status, as well as any personal culpability for those evil acts. This would include the role of structural as well as personal evil; this will be addressed within a discussion of the doctrine of creation below. This view creates a possible explanation for suffering outside any consideration of divine involvement. Thus, evil becomes an adversary to be sought out and rooted out.

Armed with this view of causality, Hodge could have identified race-based slavery and White supremacy as the result of evil secondary causes. But he instead places the subjugation of African slaves within the category of *potentia absoluta*. The enslavement of Africans was part of God's plan for the salvation of the African continent. This raises another critical problem within the evangelical understanding of providence. Hodge, Edwards and Henry all believed that one can identify, with reference to contemporary and historical events, God's ongoing acts of providence in the world. This of course means that for Edwards, Hodge, and Henry God's providential activities in the world are knowable.

Knowability, or the exposition of God's providence within historical and contemporary events, is not a part of Calvin's doctrine of providence, which sees the outworking of God's providence as a mystery. Why some are poor and some wealthy, some sick and some healthy, and even some elect and others unregenerate is not knowable and must be ascribed to the hidden counsels of God. Of course, Calvin combines this with absolute divine causality in a way that means all that is, is of God. So, for Calvin the only thing accomplished by mystery is to absolve him from talking about why God allows suffering and inequality. It is not for humanity to ask why but to accept that God has God's reasons.



For Edwards, Hodge, and Henry knowability creates the opportunity to define suffering in relation to providence. Providential explanations seem to take two forms in Edwards' and Hodge's theology. Either forms a subordination and inequality are the result of God's working out a specific plan for the salvation of the oppressed or judgment for some form of moral depravity or structural inequity in a people or nation. Henry is more likely to preserve the latter without reference to the former. While Henry does admit that even nations who succumb to immorality suffer the judgment of God, he is more likely, given his more individualistic perspective, to ascribe poverty and suffering to individual moral failures than to systemic evil problems (see Henry, 1966:65). Even the former is more of a result of the cumulative effect of individual immorality than any inherent systemic evil. These arguments were advanced extensively in 3.5.1 and 3.5.2.1 above and do not bear repeating here.

It has already been suggested that the acceptance of secondary causality requires distinguishing between the effects of evil and the effects of divinity in relation to any given circumstance, but particularly in relation to subjugation, inequality, and human suffering. What is absent in Hodge and Edwards is any full analysis of the relationship between what they ascribed to God and a full understanding of the attributes of God. Is the race-based enslavement of Africans consistent with the nature of God? Is the displacement and acculturation of Native Americans or the genocide of millions of Jews in Germany consistent with the nature of God? The fault in their historical commentaries is not the attempt to understand historical and contemporary events in light of God's providential will, but their positing of conclusions without reference to a fuller proof grounded in a clear exposition of the nature and attributes of God.

Here Cone can be heard more clearly. His suggestion that the social must be clearly understood before any explanation of God's involvement can be ascribed is directly applicable (Cone, 1997b:15). But Cone also moves so far away from traditional definitions of God's nature that his work can read more sociologically than theologically (see, for example, Cone, 1997b:36-56). If evangelical theology is going to engage in reflection on social situations, envisioned within conversations of divine providence, it requires both a clear understanding of the social condition and a clear exposition of the nature of God that moves beyond a simple expression of God's providence. The social must be understood in relation to its historical manifestation, economic and political motivations, individual and collective self-interests, and sociocultural components. It must also consider the physical,

psychological, and spiritual trauma inflicted. This understanding should be leveraged and placed in conversation with a clear understanding of the nature and attributes of God to ask if the ascription of a condition of suffering or oppression is consistent with the nature of God. This will be elaborated on in the section on ethical appropriation below, but for now it is enough to mention that this approach is what Bernard Ramm, following Barth, envisions when he argues that neither command theory nor Kantian rationalism create an appropriate basis for Christian ethics. Ethics per Ramm must be reintegrated into a theology proper with direct reference to the doctrine of God (Ramm, 1983:144-150). Thus, providential knowability is only adequate when it is part of a broader theological ethical analysis that is embedded first in a discussion of the attributes of God, not God's providence. This of course is not the case when following Calvin's, Edwards', and Henry's notion of causality. If God is responsible for all actions, then any action can be defined as within the providential will of God, which begs the question, why then do Edwards and Henry not adopt Calvin's notions of mystery? Regardless, for reasons cited above, Hodge's view of causality is to be preferred. Within this view a differentiation between absolute and ordinary providence or a differentiation between evil, good, and neutral acts within ordinary events is necessary and possible. This requires that acts within the ordinary providence of God employ a particular method of ethical analysis—that the secondary actions of evil, good or neutral actors be examined to determine to what degree they align with the nature and revelation of God. Cone's refusal to engage, beyond a brief discussion of God's wrath in his analysis of the nature of God, means that he ends up with a social, not a theological analysis. An entire lack of a method by which to analyze the social in direct conversation with the theological means that Hodge is left to subjective ascription of social events to God without any clear distinctions that would warrant these ascriptions. What Ramm offers is both a way of thinking about God's role in the social and an ethical-theological method that offers some basis for ascription. Specific ethical analysis will be taken up below, but for now it is enough to recognize the ways that evangelical ascription of historical and contemporary events to God has lacked any safeguards against self-interested analysis and as such has become a tool capable of use for racist reasons by persons in positions of power and privilege.

If causality and knowability create difficulties for evangelical notions of providence, Edwards' insistence on relationship may create a possible opening. If, as Edwards believes, the providence of God is the act of recreation and within this process God maintains an

intimate connection to humanity that is paradigmatic of God's relationship within the Trinity, then God's providential act is a deeply unifying and a deeply equalizing act (see Gerstner, vol. 1, 1991:285 and full treatment of relationality in providence in 3.3.2.1 above). This is particularly true of divine-human and human-human relationships within the new covenant community. This means that unity and equality must be seen as motivating factors within the providence of God as God works to create a community that personifies God's own intimate relationship within God's self. While some may argue that Edwards goes too far in equating providence with re-creation, that does not negate the implications of his relational observation. God, it could be argued, would not pursue a providential cause that operates at cross purposes from God's own nature and person. When relationality is accepted as a component of providence the degree to which any event or act coheres to God's interest in relationship is directly proportionate to the ability to ascribe or not to ascribe it to God. This will be considered further under discussions of God's nature and person below. This does, however, raise questions about the specific ascriptions of fixity, authority, hierarchy, and governmental order to the providence of God by Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry. All of these are predicated, to one degree or another, on an understanding of distributive justice. Tied up in distributive justice is the idea that society is of necessity unequal and hierarchical, that every member of society has value, and that they are entitled to certain expectations related to their treatment; these expectations are defined not in terms of universal human rights but in terms of what is due their situation and position. This idea can be tied directly to Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. It is also the central philosophy that underpins Calvin—see the arguments in 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.1.2 above citing Bouwsma (1988:81) on social determinism and Kayayan (2013) and Sytsma (2020) who directly connect Calvin's positions to Aristotle's notions of distributive justice. Edwards advances the same understanding of distributive justice as Calvin, outlined in 3.3.1.1 and 3.3.2.2 above and in Marsden's (2003:3) assessments of Edwards' views of social hierarchy. Hodge's views on distributive justice are outlined extensively in 3.4.1.1, 3.4.2.2 and 3.4.2.6 above, and Henry directly affirms and ties this stream of distributive justice within the evangelical tradition to Aristotle (Henry, vol. 6, 1983:405). While their work references the household codes and Romans 13, these references serve as proof texts for this broader social philosophy. There are a few distinctions. Calvin and Edwards believe class, position and status are fixed within the providence of God and any change is an exception to the rule. Both

Hodge and Henry deny fixity of an individual's temporal position but still allow for the necessity of inequality within social structures. None of these men hold political positions that approach a socialist vision of the communal that is sporadically mentioned by Cone. Calvin and Edwards would espouse a hierarchical understanding of the sovereignty of rulers or the law under the divine mandate of God. Hodge is a federalist republican elitist, whereas Henry is a capitalist individualist with tendencies toward libertarianism. All four believe that governmental authority and the rule of law is a divinely ordered structure and that any subsequent inequality arising from the system is also within God's divine order; total human equality of wealth, position and status is not in view.

The application of distributive justice in Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry, as cited above, affirms an equality of value but not an equality of social order, possession, or social standing. Slaves are to be valued for their work, but they do not receive the same standing as their masters or the same reward for their efforts. All are treated fairly according to their station, place, position.

This argument of course is central to the logic of oppression. The problem with this argument is that literal interpretations of Romans 13 or the household codes do not require the defense of free market systems over more communitarian forms of social order. Per the evangelical tradition examined in Chapter Three, there is no specific political system in view in Romans 13. Perpetuation of distributive justice is the perpetuation of a political philosophy, not the exposition of a biblical theology, and therefore it is not logically necessary to embed it in evangelical political theologies or in explanations related to God's providential will. Evangelical theology has no biblical mandate to perpetuate systems of social inequality and certainly no clear biblical mandate to ascribe social inequality to the providence of God. Governmental order per Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry, not governmental structure or social outcomes, is what is in mind in passages like Romans 13. There is no mandate in the Bible that would deny or require a political structure that perpetuates inequality.

Both Calvin and Henry affirm this when they apply Romans 13 to government without regard to its structure or political orientation. Hodge (2020:414) affirms it when he says that citizens have the right to rebel and re-form the government if it is not working for the interest of the governed. If there is no structure or objective sort of order prescribed for government that requires the establishment of social equality, there is also nothing that

forbids it. Thus, the perpetuation of inequality under principles of distributive justice cannot be directly attributable as part of God's divine plan for humanity, at least without considerable ethical reflection.

The evangelical theological social ethic seems to break apart when pushed against distributive justice. Inequality as a result becomes necessarily equated to God's providential plan for the ordering of humanity. The best evangelicalism can offer as a defense to Cone's argument is the ascription of value to the oppressed and an offer of equality only as it pertains to salvation. But this vision is philosophical and pragmatic, not a theological vision. There is potentiality within the tradition for at least the possibility of real equality and the abandonment of notions of distributive justice for a restorative justice model.

Beyond theoretical and philosophical understandings of providence it is important to understand the specific details of God's plan. What exactly is God's plan and how does God relate that plan through his revelation? Cone and the other evangelical theologians differ greatly in their understandings of God's providential will. For Cone (2018:59), God's purpose is the liberation of the oppressed and the overthrow of the oppressor. For Calvin (see 3.2.2.1 above), Edwards (see 3.3.2.1 above), Hodge (see 3.4.2.1 above), and Henry (see 3.5.2.2.2 above) God's purpose is the salvation of the elect and is a progressive redemptive history identified within the structure of covenant (all) and existing between creation and recreation (Edwards). It is important to understand these competing, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, views of providence and the doctrinal implications of salvation, covenant, creation, and liberation.

#### 5.2.2.2.2.1 Constructive consideration of salvation and covenant in relation to providence

All of the four evangelical theologians in the study see the providence of God as pointed towards a redemption-historical work of God that culminates in the salvation of the elect through the work of Christ and is executed within a divine covenant. Hodge and Edwards in particular held to a federalist covenantal view of providence (Edwards, *Miscellanies*, 2, 21, 25, 30, 165, 222, 235, 252, 202, 299, and 401; Hodge, Vol. 2, 1979:354- 377). Burger (2019: 271, 272) summarizes and draws attention to several deficiencies in federalist covenantal theology. Burger sees federalist theology as a constructive theology of the covenant with three primary covenantal movements. First, the covenant of redemption between father and son is focused on the salvation of the elect and Christ's reward in receiving the elect as his

own as a condition of the covenant. Second is the covenant of works, made with and broken by Adam, and third, the covenant of grace, in which the elect are saved as a result of the free gift of faith through the mediation of Christ.

Burger also identifies five specific issues with federalist understandings of covenant. He believes that the overfocus on election in federalist expositions of the covenant of redemption creates an imbalance where covenant is utilized as a defense of election rather than as a vehicle for identifying God and God's plan. He also points out that federalist views of the covenant of works also makes work, merit and obedience central to the divine-human equation. This is true in regard to the covenant with Adam and the necessity of Christ's fulfillment of the covenant of works as the mediator of the covenant of grace. Thus, he is led to ask whether work, obedience, and merit "is so important in the relationship between God and humanity" (Burger, 2019:272). He also points out that this three-covenant scheme is highly susceptible to supercessionism, since none of the three primary covenants is made with Israel and the scheme/focus ignores or minimizes the biblical covenants with Abraham, Israel at Sinai, and David. Finally, federalist theology creates an ontology where "the optic distance between creator and creation has to be bridged by a covenant" (Burger, 2019:272); this distance works to eliminate relationship as a critical component of God's providence in favor of a legal contract.

Burger's critique offers both difficulty and opportunity. Taking into consideration the biblical covenants with Abraham, Israel, and David, despite Burger's attempts to move federalist theology away from works, does in fact force a reckoning with work, obedience and merit in God's covenantal providence. But while these additional covenants hold on the one hand clear moral and ethical requirements that demand work, obedience, and consequences related to merit, on the other hand they contain relational aspects that suggest that relationality is the central and primary motivation of covenant. This dual aspect places a focus on relationality above a purely judicial contract. The tendency in federalist theology, however, has been to affirm the judicial nature of covenant while disallowing works, obedience, and merit within the doctrines of grace. This has led to a hyper-focus on election within federalist theology. While election cannot be denied, Burger's observation that it plays a disproportionate role in defining God's providential actions is warranted, especially in relation to Edwards and Hodge.

Edwards couches his discussions of the covenant of grace in ways that over-emphasize contractual and judicial obligations to the exclusion of relational pursuit (Edwards, 1722:235). Hodge deals with covenant in an argument against merit-based salvation and with an eye to defining the requirement of faith as a gift, not a condition of salvation, and as such not a work, because Christ has already fulfilled the conditions required in the covenant of redemption (Hodge, 1979, vol 2:354-377). The obligations of work, obedience, and merit are magnified when covenant is considered in isolation from the rest of Edwards' and Hodge's theological system. Edwards, for example, has already been shown to have a highly relational structure embedded in his ideas regarding the relationality of the elect with the divine and God's ongoing act of re-creation.

But Burger is correct in stating that the context of the discussion does privilege the doctrine of election over ideas of inclusion evident in both the Abrahamic covenant and in the new covenant. Thus, ideas of relationality more dependent on God's love and mercy than on God's judicial justice are minimized in federalist constructions.

The implications of Burger's assessments above are that covenant changes, by way of federalist theology, from a biblical covenantal framework holding together the doctrine of providence to an overarching theological construction that diminishes the actual biblical/historical event of covenant, obscuring salvation history in the interest of dogmatic construction. The three-fold structure of covenant in federalist theology moves beyond the biblical sequence in positing a prelapsarian contractual agreement between the Father and the Son. This has the effect of simultaneously emphasizing the judicial over the relational while ironically also downgrading the conditions of the covenants with Abraham, Israel, and David so that they strip providence of any primary social and ethical concern. Providence becomes so transcendent that any providential action within the imminent historical divine-human relationship has a substantially decreased meaning. Every encounter with God within the federalist system apart from Adam's fall and Christ's atonement becomes minimized to the point that the only pivotal event of salvation history is the covenant of redemption and eschatological completion. This would explain the Reformed evangelical tendency towards spiritual interpretation. Both theology and biblical exegesis that begins within the framework of this federalist system has a logical tendency to emphasize and hyperfocus on a future eschatology as the plan of God and to downgrade the importance of God's historical engagement with God's people between the fall and the new creation. This manifests either

in minimization or typology. Edwards is a prime example of the former in making a distinction between the new covenant in Christ with whom the covenant was made and the old “which promised Canaan” (Edwards, 1722:165). Only the covenant of redemption promises life while the remainder of the covenants promised only Canaan. This of course makes Edwards susceptible to Burger’s claim of supercessionism, which has been identified by Jennings (2010) as a form of racist logic. The typological tendency is evident in Hodge, who makes Moses a type of Christ in his role as the mediator of the covenant at Sinai, which derives directly from his defense of the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son (Hodge, Vol. 2, 1978:864).

Furthermore, Burger is also correct in his belief that the focus on election over relationship in federal theology minimizes inclusion and hyper-focuses covenant on exclusion. It also makes relationship, both within the Godhead and between God and humanity, primarily transactional. Cone (2018a:144-151), without the extensive analysis and focus on covenant found in Burger, recognizes that these types of notions of providence are problematic in the way they focus White Christian theology away from God’s direct involvement in the present and toward a predetermined eschatological future for the elect that justifies a social apathy within White theological systems. It also ignores the historical immanence of God in favor of a spiritual transcendence that replaces ethical action with ethical passivism. But, as has already been noted, Cone’s response is to reduce providence to an existential reality in the lives of the oppressed. This has the effect of stripping providence of any direct divine intervention on behalf of the oppressed in a way that undermines Cone’s own moves toward the immanence of God. It replaces the supremacy of the spiritual with the supremacy of the consciousness of the oppressed. While Cone would argue that an enlightened conscience moves toward liberty of action, it is also true that it relieves God of any direct action on behalf of the oppressed that is not merely internal to the human condition. It appears, then, that both federalist theology and Cone could benefit from a view of providence that emphasizes the actual historical work of God in salvation history.

This would need to give special consideration in the formulation of covenant theology to the ongoing work of inclusion over exclusion. This is evident in God’s promise to Abraham, to make him the father of nations (Gen. 17:1-11) and in Christ’s inclusion of the poor, the marginalized, and the Gentiles in the new covenant community (Luke 4: 16-30). This inclusion, however, is not without consideration of God’s election. The poor are not



saved because they are poor but because of the free gift of faith. Likewise, the idea of universal salvation, which is countered with reference to election, makes room for the judgment and wrath of God on oppressors. Cone seems to directly recognize this and reframes election on the basis of oppression. God has elected the poor and the oppressed and made reprobate the oppressors (Cone, 2018a:83-86) but Cone's almost nonexistent soteriology means he leaves, perhaps unintentionally, a categorical universal salvation. All the oppressed are saved because they are oppressed.

What this means is that the doctrines of grace that are essential to evangelical Christianity are set aside in the interest of social liberation. Evangelical theology, on the other hand, in the interest of denying any merit in relation to salvation, has a tendency to so randomize God's election as to make election seem either the supreme mystery or at its worse a cosmic lottery. Evangelicalism needs a consideration of both the revelation of God as to whom God has chosen to elect and a consideration of the innate goodness of God that would mitigate against the arbitrary nature of God's election, while also focusing on the pattern of inclusion, particularly of the powerless and marginalized in God's election.

But the doctrines of grace are too central to evangelicalism's theological understanding to be challenged. Without them evangelical theology would cease to be evangelical theology. Is there then a view of the doctrine of grace that emerges out of covenant theology and providential history and redemption that would address God's providential intentions and also address the very real conditions of oppression, particularly racial oppression, in relation to the doctrines of grace? The work of Buys (2004:1-12) goes a long way in illustrating the incompatibility of the doctrines of grace with symptoms of oppression.

Buys' (2004:1) primary thesis is that "Reformed doctrines or the sovereignty of God should kill racism." Buys addresses the Calvinist doctrines of grace by way of the five points of Dort Calvinism, illustrating the way in which each point applies directly to the question of racism. Buys' primary objective is to demonstrate the ways in which each of these doctrines works against ideas of privilege or preferential treatment based on racial superiority. For example, in discussing total depravity Buys (2004:2) states, "no one has in himself a higher standing before God." Likewise, in his (2004:4) understanding of unconditional election he says, "faith in our unconditional election will always humble us and prevent us from thinking that our racial background in any way makes us more acceptable

to God.” He (2004:6) also states in relation to limited atonement that ethnicity is never a determinant of God’s atoning grace. As for irresistible grace, Buys (2004:8) emphasizes that there is no one beyond God’s redemption and no one that cannot be led to repent, including oppressors and racists. In this regard Buys insists on a primary role for God in the transformation of oppressors through the power of the Holy Spirit. He (2004:11) concludes with observations on the perseverance of the saints that apply the doctrine, which usually references an inability of the elect to lose their salvation because of God’s persevering grace in their life, to suggest that the elect also must persevere in relation to the pursuit of racial harmony. Buys states, “if the pursuit of racial harmony is woven into the very fabric of God’s sovereign grace, and if therefore racial harmony is part of what it means to be a Christian, then the promise of perseverance is a promise to keep us pursuing it till we die or Jesus comes.”

In this way Buys shows that in spite of the tendency of Calvinism, particularly in its understanding of providence and election, to lean toward authoritarianism and the support of the powerful and the privileged, the doctrines of grace themselves can be seen in ways that support the oppressed and condemn the oppressor. This is in complete contradiction of the use of providence and election to support the interests of the powerful through their connection to colonial manifest destiny (Edwards; see Goen, 1995:38) or racial superiority (Hodge, 16/48:562). It is not necessary to abandon either the covenant of grace or its individual doctrines in order to propagate an anti-racist or even a liberative theology. Abandoning these doctrines in fact creates a weakened soteriology that either affirms a universal salvation that limits God’s judgment on the oppressor or, in the case of Cone, a categorical universal salvation (the universal salvation of the poor) that limits God’s ability to transform and make demands on the oppressor on behalf of the oppressed. The standard Reformed evangelical doctrines of grace, when seen as Burger suggests, with greater emphasis on inclusion without a full abandonment of election, place a focus on God’s intent of including in the new covenant community the previously excluded while judging or transforming the powerful and privileged through the ethical demands of life in the new covenant community. But this is only possible when election’s exclusionary side is not allowed to dominate over God’s inclusionary plan.

Burger (2019:297-298) also suggests that covenantal theology needs to shift in focus from the transactional nature of covenant towards the relationality of God’s covenant work.

The idea of a transaction between the Father and the Son embedded in the over-focus on the covenant of redemption in federalist theology, as has already been suggested, creates issues for relationality within the Trinity. The focus on the transactional analysis of the covenant of works also ignores the relationality that existed between God and humanity. Relationship is implied in the covenant of works through the law and personified in the two tables of the decalogue that make relationship with God and with neighbor central conditions of the covenant (Deut. 5:6-21). Jesus makes this interpretation in the Gospels when he insists in Matthew 26:36-40 that the greatest commands are to love God and love neighbor, and then in Matthew 28:18-20 that the disciples teach the nations to do all that he has commanded. Abandoning relationship for transaction creates within covenant theology a tendency to deemphasize social relational responsibility in favor of individual moral behavior. Transaction and conditionality, whether they are the condition placed on Israel in the covenant of works or the responsibility owed by believers to Christ who elected them through fulfilling the conditions of the covenant of redemption, turns mutual love into contractual agreements.

That said, the opposite could also be true. Relationality could be so overemphasized that it places constraints on God to love regardless of human action. This is Cone's (1997b: 199-206) contention in regard to White theology's insistence that the oppressed should love the oppressor and endure their oppression with grace. There has to be some level of conditionality on love within divine-human and human-human relationships; or perhaps better said, relationships within the new covenant community must continue to bear some degree of responsibility both to God and humanity. This exists not as a merited condition for inclusion but as an outgrowth of organic relationship in Christ.

Thus, there is a need for covenant theology to elevate inclusion while maintaining a role for election, to elevate relationality while not losing sight of responsibility, and, per Buys, to connect the doctrines of grace to their necessary social implications while not losing sight of their application to the lives of individuals. This view would place an emphasis on God's work from creation to new covenant with a focus on God's immanent presence and engagement in a real and immanent way, thus moving from the dogmatic construction of federalist theology to a biblical theology of covenant which highlights the divine-human relationship. Taken together, this would preclude the use of providence and election as a means to support notions of election in providence as explanations for the conditions of the

oppressed, as justification for oppression, or as an excuse for racial, class, or gender superiority. It also opens up the opportunity to think theologically about a Reformed evangelicalism that emphasizes the doctrinal and social implications of relationship and inclusion within the Reformed ideas of providence and election.

While redemption history understood within covenant is central to outlining God's providence within the evangelical theological tradition, it is also important to understand the role that the doctrines of creation play. While space does not permit a full treatment of the doctrine of creation, for the purposes of this study it is necessary to emphasize four aspects of the doctrine that are particularly important for understandings of power and privilege. It is important to highlight here Cone's views on creation, Edwards' views on creation and recreation, and Hodge's view of a single humanity deriving from a single creation.

#### 5.2.2.2.2 Constructive view of creation in relation to providence

Cone's view of creation, like his view of providence, is more existential and philosophical than biblical. He begins his discussion of creation with reference to a documentary, diachronic analysis of the creation story and a discussion of God's aseity. Cone's (2018:79) primary negative assertion in relation to creation is that "the biblical view of God as creator is not a paleontological statement about the nature and origin of the universe, but a theological assertion about God and God's relationship to the oppressed of the land." He reads the text, following a documentary diachronic process, as derived from the Priestly tradition, which had its origins in the Babylonian captivity. The creation story is, therefore, the story of liberation written by an oppressed people (Cone, 2018a:78-79). This of course is at odds with the synchronic approach to the biblical text envisioned by the current project, as it places the interpretation of the text outside the text itself. It is also unclear how Cone's exegesis carries the weight of his interpretation. Other than a statement about authorial origins, he does not engage the text itself and none of his conclusions are drawn directly from the text. The problem with this approach will become apparent in the discussion of Hodge's view of creation below. Proceeding from the basis of the creation story as a liberative text Cone moves directly into an existentialist and theological application of the text. He (2018a: 79) draws on the theological concept of aseity to draw two conclusions about the importance of creation to Black theology. First, because God creates *ex nihilo*, he is not dependent on any other thing and as such exists beyond Whiteness and is untouched by it. Second, because

God is creator, the creation owes all its allegiance to God alone, not to oppressors or oppressive systems. These views, drawn as they are from Reformed views of divine sovereignty, would be difficult for White theologians to argue against, particularly Cone's views on the allegiance owed only to God. But his lack of a full treatment of the biblical story of creation and fall impoverishes Cone's view of creation in ways that a further elaboration of both the broader implications of creation and a more detailed discussion of fall and the oneness of humanity in Adam might rectify. In this instance the work of Edwards and Hodge might provide a way of extending Cone's thought into a direct critique of power and privilege that is absent from Cone's account of creation.

Edwards' (1722:346) view of creation and recreation as essential to providence is an important consideration in relation to a theology of power and privilege. Edwards sees creation before the fall as the ultimate state of perfection to which the new creation at the culmination of God's providential plan points. God's work between the fall and the new creation is a sustaining re-creative work in which God is moving creation towards its ultimate perfection. But until completion in the new creation there is yet work to be done in God's providential plan. "The scheme," Edwards says of providence, "will not be finished, nor the design fully accomplished, the great event, fully brought to pass, till the end of the world and the last revolution is brought about" (Edwards, 1731:557).

This dynamic view of creation and providence suggests two things in relation to a theology of power and privilege: that God remains at work, and that there is work left to be done. The nature of the work rests in the restoration of that perfect state in the prelapsarian created order in which all were created in the image of God and stood equally one to the other before God. If the aim of the providence of God is a new creation in which all stand equally before God, then perhaps the ongoing work of providence means that believers have to engage in creating communities that honor this priority in the re-creative act of God. It is illogical to suggest, for example, that God would either not use the elect toward these plans or that God would desire the church to work to preserve structures of power and privilege that are not evident in either the original or the coming creation. The implications of this would be that the elect, caught up in the work of providence, are called to abandon ideas of power and privilege towards those principles evident in the eschatological realities of a new creation. This of course is part of the implications of Cone's (2018a:144-151) views of

eschatology as exemplar. Of course, Edwards fails to realize this application of his views to the idea of distributive justice deeply ingrained in his views of hierarchy and authority.

Edwards (1722:301) advances ideas of original sin in the fall that are also of benefit in consideration of a theology of power and privilege. Cone (2018a:110-115) is reluctant to deal with sin in the context of the fall or notions of original sin, particularly in relation to any idea of total depravity. He has no clear definition of sin or view of the fall. This leaves undiscussed in Cone's theology critical issues of the nature of evil and the human propensity to evil acts. Evil and sin have no origin stories in Cone's theology. In Cone, evil and oppression simply are and should not be. While this may work within the internal logic of Black liberation theology, it would be a critical omission for evangelical theology. The ideas of the fall and original sin are central to the nature of redemption and a prime factor in a redemption-historical understanding of providence. Edwards, however, creates a bridge that allows the conversation of sin to both sustain its universal state and to also provide a specific definition of sin that gets directly to the heart of power and privilege, particularly as they relate to racism.

Edwards (1722:301) gives evil and the human inclination to evil an origin story in the biblical narrative of the fall and the resulting Pauline theology of original sin. Because Adam sinned, as the federal head of humanity, Adam's sin is imputed to all humanity. Humanity by nature is inclined to evil. But what is more important is Edwards' identification of this sin nature is his definition of original sin. Edwards says,

The best philosophy that I have met with of original sin and all sinful inclinations, habits and principles, is undoubtedly that of Mr. Stoddard's, of this town of North Hampton, that it is self-love in conjunction with the absence of the image and love of God ... that natural and necessary inclination that man has to his own benefit together with the absence of original righteousness.

Edwards defines sin as the inclination to act purely from a place of self-interest and contrary to the righteousness of God. While Edwards would not have understood the full implications of this definition for issues of power and privilege, there are implications that resonate with a constructive contemporary effort to understand power and privilege as they relate to race. The definition of sin as self-interested self-love has direct implications. It directly connects the self-interest inherent in racism and White supremacy to human depravity, since racism and White supremacy are rooted in the self-interest and self-love of the White community. This has the effect of identifying the evil that Christians are called to fight against in the

world. This grounds Cone's call for Christian direct opposition to evil in a definition of evil that is connected to racism and White supremacy and roots them in human depravity. Additionally, Edwards' definition provides a means whereby the presence of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer can be tested. Believers governed by the power of the Spirit, according to Edwards, have their self-love and self-interest checked by the love of God. Racism and White supremacy become impossibilities for those who claim to possess the Spirit of God. This is true whether like Cone one wishes to state that the Spirit is absent in those who maintain racist and supremacist views or if one only wishes to state that the believer has failed to achieve the full sanctifying power of the Spirit in their lives. Either way racism, White supremacy, self-interested power and privilege are deemed alien to the Christian life and connected directly to human depravity. Further, when one combines Edwards' understanding of the ongoing work of recreation with his distinction between self-interest in the fall and God-tempered love in the original righteousness, it is clear that the elimination of self-interested structures of power and privilege is a critical part of the believer's fight against evil.

What Edwards' definition does that Cone's lack of one fails to do is to give place to the spiritual aspect of the fight to overcome racism. Racism defined as the self-interest originating in human depravity requires a spiritual "fix" that is only possible through the supernatural, superintending power of the Holy Spirit. But the implications are not merely supernatural. Understanding self-interest as the root of human depravity creates a required response to its social manifestations in political, economic, and social structures. The social manifestation of racism as rooted in the evils of human depravity requires an ethical response on the part of the church, which is called to challenge evil. That response has both natural and supernatural components, which of course is the primary argument of Henry as well (Henry, 1967:53-79).

Cone's theological intuition that racism is evil and that humanity is called by God to fight evil is correct, but it lacks the necessary definitions of sin and evil that would place racism and White supremacy in intimate proximity to human depravity. Thus, Cone's intuition is more easily minimized. But when evangelical theology takes seriously Edwards' understanding that self-love and self-interest are defining and original features of human depravity, then racism and White supremacy become more intrinsically related to the working of original sin in social structures. While there is no contested definition of

original sin agreed upon in the theological corpus, it is important to note that Edwards' definition is consistent with the evangelical theologians under review here and therefore its use is justified given the parameters of this study. Calvin (1993:213) sees "pride as the beginning of all evil." Calvin indicates a series by which Adam gives vent to his own interests: "Infidelity opened the door to ambition, and ambition was the parent of rebellion, man casting off the fear of God, and giving vent to his lust." So, in Calvin it is not rebellion but infidelity and ambition that are the root cause of sin from which rebellion arises. This seems at least consistent with Edwards' definition. Hodge (vol. 2, 1979:230-237) shares Edwards' view that original sin is the total absence of original righteousness that disconnects humanity from God and each other and results in the selfish acts of sin. Henry's (vol. 6, 1983: 249) account, though brief, describes the act of original sin as "the story of self-willed man who by seeking independence from God loses his divinely intended life." Each of these definitions is consistent with Edwards' understanding, or at least in no way contradictory to it.

Edwards, of course, never realizes this special aspect of his own definition. This illustrates the way individualistic notions of morality predominated in New England Puritanism. But taken to its natural conclusions in contemporary theological construction, Edwards' definition and Henry's discussions of the interactions between social action and supernatural transformation support an anti-racist theology in ways that are deficient in Cone.

Cone's discussion of original righteousness, minus the definition of original sin, works against his anti-racist agenda if it is carried over to evangelical theology in a discussion of human freedom. Cone (2018a:99) insists that "whatever we say about sin and the human inability to know God because of the fall, it must not in any way diminish the human freedom to revolt against oppression." The problem is that Cone grounds this argument in Von Rad's (1961:57) belief that the image of God is best understood in terms of its function, which Von Rad defines as dominion over the world. Cone equates dominion with liberation through rebellion, but this same principle brought forward in isolation into White evangelical theology might just as easily affirm dominion as the right of the majority to impose order on the minority, even when doing so is not in the best interest of the minority. This concept of the image of God, devoid of any understanding of universal human depravity, creates a possible support for the exercise of self-interested power. What may be gained in the interest of a theological defense of revolt is lost in the potentiality of the approval of racist and



supremacist domination. The latter, of course, is defeated in Calvin's understanding of the diminishment of the benefits of the *imago Dei* in the fall and curse of original sin. Cone's desire to champion action against racism and White supremacy is upheld in Edwards' definition of original sin without the necessity of reaching for a theology of dominion. Ultimately, Cone's desire to challenge White theology seems better served by way of Edwards, Henry and Calvin.

Hodge also has something to add that moves the discussion of power and privilege in the direction of Cone. Again, Hodge never realizes the full implications of his own work and actually uses this particular view as an opportunity to affirm White supremacy (Hodge, Vol. 2, 1979:78-90). Hodge, in the midst of attacking now antiquated theories of the distinct origin of various races, insists on a common parentage of all the human race and as such the unity of the race. There is very little in Hodge's (1979:77-91) analysis that is focused on the direct theological implications of his conclusions. Instead, Hodge focuses on defending the literality and inerrancy of the Genesis account against scientific arguments that propagate a theory of multiple origins. But despite Hodge's neglect of the theological implications that all humanity shares a common parentage in Adam and therefore are a common "brotherhood" there are direct implications. This doctrine means that all races are equal and equally the creation of God. Supremacy of any race cannot be maintained, even though Hodge (see 3.4.2.8 above) does so, because the idea of races themselves has to be abandoned on the grounds of singular origin. The unity of humanity in God, as descendants of Adam, points towards the need for restoration of this unity which was lost in the fall and stands in direct contravention to separation, injustice, and supremacy. Of course, Cone's denial of the historicity and literality of creation makes this argument unavailable to him and it is likely that as a proponent of Black nationalism he would ignore this principle because it fights against any separation on the basis of race. Thus, the unity of humanity works against doctrines of separation regardless of the just nature for demanding separation.

So, creation is a category of the work of God within the providence of God that adds to evangelical understandings of redemptive history and covenantal structures within the providence of God. But Cone is insistent that liberation, not spiritual salvation, is central to the providence of God. What then is to be made of Cone's views of liberation?

#### 5.2.2.2.2.3 Constructive views of liberation as it relates to providence

Cone (1997b:127) makes clear that the liberation of the oppressed is central to the providential plan of God. He states clearly that “Jesus Christ in his past, present, and future, reveals that the God of scripture and tradition is the God whose will is disclosed in the liberation of oppressed people from bondage.” While Cone’s exact theology of liberation has to be pieced together across various parts of his theological corpus and separated from his use of liberation as an a priori assumption, careful work does suggest that Cone sees at least three operative principles in God’s plan that points to God’s intent to liberate the poor. First, it has already been pointed out that Cone sees the oppressed as having license for rebellion. This is the case because for Cone the true image of God is freedom. According to Cone, “human freedom in this sense must now be seen as the very heart of the theological concept of the image of God” (Cone, 1975c:57). God created humanity in God’s image and that image for Cone is freedom. In this way the very image of God in humanity is oriented to fight against oppression. Servitude according to Cone is counter to God’s own creative order.

Second, liberation is central to the very nature of Christ. Jesus came to achieve salvation, which Cone defines as political liberation, for the oppressed. This is evident in his incarnational mission in the past, it is evident in his presence in the present in the Black church, moving it towards its own liberation, and it is evident in the new heaven and new earth brought on by Christ’s future. But for Cone what defines Christ in the present and future is who Christ was in the past. The Jesus who healed the sick, ate with sinners, and ministered to the poor and marginalized in his earthly incarnation is about the same act of liberation in the present and the future. Christ evidences God’s preference for the poor and marginalized in his life, death, resurrection, and second coming. Thus, God’s work in Christ is revealed to be the liberation of the poor (Cone, 1997b:99-126).

Third, there is an eschatological element in Cone’s understanding of liberation. Cone is skeptical about the over-emphasis of eschatology in contemporary theological discourse, particularly when the focus is on eschatological culmination to the exclusion of temporal social justice. However, Cone does insist on at least two roles for eschatology as part of any understanding of the providential will of God. Eschatology is a source of hope for the oppressed that God is working for their liberation. Eschatology in this regard functions as a secondary, dogmatic consideration, serving his doctrine of freedom. He describes this eschatological hope as “freedom’s transcendence, the soul’s recognition that what is ain’t supposed to be” and history as “freedom’s eminence, the recognition that what is, is the place

where we have been called to bear witness to the future, the not yet of human creation” (Cone, 1982b:128). This hope is centered on the fact that what is not yet but should be is possible through God’s liberative providential intent.

There is also a second aspect to Cone’s use of eschatology that is understood in the first. Eschatology serves as a model and example for the social relationships that need to be brought into reality in the present world. Cone insists that, “viewed from the perspective of oppressed peoples’ struggle for freedom, the holy becomes a radical challenge to the legitimacy of the secular structures of power by creating eschatological images about a realm of experiences that is not confined to the values of this world” (Cone, 1982b:129). Thus, Christians are left without excuse once they understanding the fallen, inequitable social structures of this age; they have an obligation in light of the eschatological vision of equality and justice to pursue that vision in the present. This means that engagement with liberation struggles in the present are made non-negotiable by the eschatological vision available to all Christians.

How might Cone’s view of providence as liberation be brought into conversation with the evangelical tradition? There are at least five ways that Cone’s construction of providence as liberation is deficient as a source for evangelicalism. First, Cone focuses on election as exclusion in very similar ways to the federalist theologians. Cone of course wishes to exclude the possibility that Christianity can in any way be identified with oppressors. He (1997b:35) also wants to emphasize that the biblical record shows God’s preference for the poor and marginalized. But, as suggested above, this means that there is no role for divine intervention to transform oppressors on behalf of the oppressed.

Second, Cone’s view of providence as liberation is, with the exception of two incidences mentioned below, highly dependent on theological abstraction, in the form of existentialism, and less dependent on the biblical structures of covenant and redemption history. This was also Burger’s critique of federalist theology above. Liberation is evident in Cone’s thought in the image of God in humanity at creation in dominion and freedom, in the person of Christ, and in the end times, but again the remainder of the covenantal material in Scripture is ignored or utilized as examples of God’s preference for the poor without any critical connection to the ongoing work of providence.

This leads to a third observation; providence in Cone is flat and without any connection to a progressive plan. God’s intention from creation to eschatological completion

is the liberation of the oppressed. The pivotal event in Cone's analysis of providence is the Exodus. This is in spite of his insistence on the Christological event as determinative. But in Cone's view of liberation Christ is interpreted in light of the Exodus, the Exodus is not interpreted in light of Christ. The Christ event for Cone takes on no new significance that is not already achieved by the Exodus event. Every event in the biblical narrative and the providential acts of God recorded there serve as examples of God's ongoing work of liberation and preference for the oppressed. While Cone does not rule out a salvific role unique to Christ's death and resurrection, he has no clear doctrine of atonement and an insubstantial soteriology. Because of this Cone's Christ becomes more an exemplar than a savior.

Finally, the lack of a sustained doctrine of fall or original sin in Cone's understanding of God's work leaves the presence of oppression without a clear enough explanation of how God is working to defeat it. It also creates the impression that the *imago Dei* remains fully functioning in the lives of the elect, which in Cone's case is the oppressed, apart from any necessary work of atonement, justification or sanctification through the Spirit. This disconnection creates a dualism in humanity to be worked out by humanity, not as a result of the supernatural work of God but out of a moral obligation and obedience to God. Humanity is to overcome evil that God in God's solidarity with the poor has made evident. The actual role and place of God in liberation is minimized by Cone's theological conclusions. God's place is primarily the actualization of an existential consciousness for freedom in the oppressed and a moral judgment on the oppressor.

All four of the views are problematic and unhelpful in the creation of a constructive evangelical theology of power and privilege. But there are two insights to be gleaned from Cone's exposition on providence that hold potential if taken seriously by evangelical theologians.

First, as has already been suggested in the discussion of revelation above, Cone's insistence on the theological implications of Christ's historical biblical connections to the poor and marginalized challenges evangelical theology at the point of its own high view of Scripture. Evangelicals are open to criticism that they do not take seriously all aspects of the biblical narrative if they dismiss as secondary Christ's relationship to, and teaching about, marginalized communities in his incarnation. This challenges the primarily soteriological aspect of Christ's work (see Calvin 3.2.2.5, Edwards 3.3.2.7, Hodge 3.4.2.5 and Henry

3.5.2.2.5 above). Christ's life has theological significance that, even if it does not take precedence over his death and resurrection, is not diminished by them. Christ's incarnation cannot be seen to exist without a degree of divine intentionality, and therefore is part of God's providential plan and will. Cone's (1997b:106-122) statement that Christ is who he was, who he is, and who he will be, presents a clear challenge to evangelicals to take seriously the historical reality of the incarnate Christ.

Second, Cone's understanding of eschatology offers an enlarged view of its function that could revolutionize evangelical social ethical theology. The tendency in evangelical theology of either the covenantal or dispensational type is to push the significance of the eschatological vision to a future spiritual reality with limited impact on the present. This creates a theological fatalism that says, "this cannot be that." Cone on the other hand suggests an embrace of the eschatological vision so that "that critiques this and pushes towards correction in the present period." The use of eschatology by persons of power and privilege to demand patience on the part of the poor and marginalized has been documented throughout this study. Cone's approach provides a way to address this abuse of doctrine. If the perfection of the new creation has been revealed by God, it stands as God's critique on the present. What God has critiqued, God desires to see changed. It is therefore an act of nihilism for Christianity to ignore possible change in the present in the interest of a perfected change in the future. The new heaven and earth, where there is "neither male nor female, slave nor free, Jew nor Greek" is a vision that effects a temporal social ethic as important for the "now" as it is for the "one day."

#### 5.2.2.2.3 Constructive conclusions on providence

What then can be said in way of summary about the significance of providence in light of a conversation between Cone, Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry? First, by way of theological understandings of providence, evangelical theology needs to strongly consider issues around causality and specifically Hodge's understanding of secondary causes in relation to the evil actions of evil actors. Second, for evangelical theology to remain evangelical, the focus on a covenantal redemptive history remains critical to the theological system. But evangelicalism needs to think critically about its understandings of covenant, particularly as it drifts towards federalist theology. The overemphasis on election as exclusion and covenant as contract rather than relationship are critical faults in theology

evident in both Edwards and Hodge. Cone's understanding of providence as liberation is equally not useful because it draws on many of the problems identified with federalist theology, even if applied towards different ends. What Cone's thought does offer evangelical theology is a need to understand Christ's incarnational reality as a component of God's providential will as well as an expanded eschatology that offers the eschatological future, both its hope and its exemplary nature, as critical sources for temporal ethical reflection and behavior.

For its part evangelical theology has much to offer in relation to doctrinal applications that exclude racist theological understandings as they intersect with the doctrine of providence. This includes the doctrines of fall and original sin that provide an origin story for the existence of evil, especially when original sin is defined as self-interested power and privilege devoid of the image and guidance of God. This provides a prime place for a critique of power and privilege within the evangelical tradition and the exclusion of racist logics. Further, election viewed primarily in light of a bounded inclusion and to the minimalization of exclusion holds promise in reclaiming Reformed evangelical theology as central to ideas of the inclusion of the poor, marginalized, and oppressed as part of the elect, with the caveat that they are not universally elected as a result of their condition. With this understanding of providence, and keeping in mind the previous discussion of revelation, a clearer understanding of the work of God as it applies to questions of power and privilege has been established, but there still is the matter of understanding how the doctrine of the person of God speaks directly to this question. That is the work of the next section.

### **5.2.3 The Person of God**

Like the work of God, specifically revelation and providence, the person of God has direct significance for a theology of power and privilege. A full engagement of the doctrine is not intended or possible here. Instead, what is envisioned is a focus on aspects of the doctrine that includes their specific relevance to questions of power and privilege and their specific use in the theology of Cone, Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry, as well as their specific misuse in the evangelical tradition to support racist logics. With that in mind, the study will focus on the essence and attributes of God, as well as specific points of consideration related to the persons of the Trinity. Therefore, the intention is to deal first with the nature of the

Godhead or triunity of God and secondarily with the triune economy of the persons of the Godhead.

It is important to note that all five theologians under consideration here would affirm a Nicaean trinitarianism as the basis of their theological understanding. How this gets worked out in their particular doctrine of God is of course a matter of individual emphasis. Cone (2018a:58-86), for example, limits his discussion to those aspects of the doctrine of God that present direct problems for a unique Black liberationist perspective, while Hodge (1997, Vol. 1:191-534) provides a fuller, more systematic treatment of the doctrine. Their varying emphases lead to a unique focus with unique opportunities for constructive engagement. They will therefore be considered in dialogue rather than individually. Perhaps the greatest point of departure is their various understandings of the essence and attributes of God.

### *5.2.3.1 The nature and essence of God*

#### *5.2.3.1.1 Cone's view of the nature and essence of God*

Cone (2018a:60-66) begins his discussion of the doctrine of God with a discussion of language or God-talk. He affirms that there is nothing special about the English word "God" in itself. What is important is the dimension of reality to which it points. The word God is a symbol that opens up depths of reality in the world. If the symbol loses its power to point to the meaning of Black liberation, it must be destroyed (Cone, 2018a:60-61). Cone's primary reason for asserting this is to deny that White theological perceptions of God, governed by racist understandings, proclaim the reality of God, but that they distort ideas and that those ideas are in turn antithetical to the truth of the nature of God. Cone also does well in describing the language as symbolic while pointing to the substantive reality of God. Cone's view is problematic, however, in his support of Tillich's conception which, according to Cone, "describes God as being itself, which provides the only answer to human estrangement from self and neighbor... Therefore, God is a symbolic word pointing to the dimension of reality which is the answer to the human condition" (Cone, 2018a:63). God is understood in relation to the way God provides the answer to human being and nonbeing. This weakens, but perhaps does not entirely discredit, Cone's assertion that God is actually a substantive reality.

This perception supports Cone's larger objective of equating God with the liberation of the oppressed. But while God is revealed in God's acts towards humanity, the latter is a

causality not a determinant of God's essence and attributes. Cone makes God an answer to the existential question of being and non-being and in doing so jeopardizes the fullness and independence of God from humanity, going so far as to state that "the sole purpose of God in Black theology is to illuminate the Black condition so that Blacks can see that their liberation is the manifestation of God's activity" (Cone, 2018a:90). God becomes bound up in humanity in a way that at the very least weakens God's distinctness. This weakened view of God would be ill at ease in an evangelical doctrine of God.

Further, Cone fails to develop a complete enough account of the essence and attributes of God to sustain his Tillichian definition. Apart from discussions of the relationship between the love and wrath of God, Cone stays out of the more detailed debates on the divine nature and attributes that are characteristic of evangelical theologies of God. Cone would of course fall back on his assertion that Black theology is not interested in dealing with theoretical discussions of this type. While this might be a consistent approach within the logic of his own system, it is not an approach that is consistent with White evangelical theology. If, as Cone argues, the racist distortions of White theology exist within theological systems, a reorientation of these systems requires engagement with traditional constructions. Black theology may be able to avoid discussions of the nature and attributes of God as a particularist theological alternative, but it cannot hope to effect reconsideration of evangelical theology apart from engagement with theological discussions on the nature of God. What Cone does not supply, therefore, must be sought out in conversation with the tradition itself. That will be done by framing the question in reference to the work of Calvin, Hodge, and Henry, with reference to Barth's definition of power, and allowing Edwards to speak into possible solutions.

#### 5.2.3.1.2 The evangelical tradition and the nature and essence of God

Calvin's (1993:108-139) treatment of the doctrine of God proper is entirely trinitarian. He is careful not to stray too far into speculative discussions related to the essence and persons of God, preferring to remain close to a Nicæan definition. He sees the unity of the persons in the Godhead as the essence of God, indicating that this unity is marked by the simplicity of God, which is a mark of the Godhead proper, not a distinction in the economy of the Father. "For the essence of God being simple and undivided, and contained in himself entire ... full perfection, without partition or diminution, it is improper, nay ridiculous to call it his (the



father's) express image" (Calvin, 1993:110). Most of Calvin's discussions of the Trinity are spent in defense of the broad trinitarian question of the unity of God in three persons with more attention given to the three persons than to the divine essence. Thus, Calvin spends proportionately less time in discussing the various attributes of the Godhead than in discussing the distinctions of the persons in the divine economy.

Hodge, on the other hand, has a far more detailed account of the attributes. Hodge (1979:366-367) lays out a description of God to which his understanding of the triune attributes is attributable. According to Hodge, "God is *ens perfectissimum*, the word *ens* designates him as a being, not an idea, but is that which has real, objective existence; and absolute perfection distinguishes him from all other beings." This definition highlights two components of the definition of God that are central in evangelical theology: that God has substance, God is not simply an idea, and that God is distinct and differentiated from God's creation. This definition is the reason that Cone's understanding of God is problematic for evangelical theology. Cone's quasi-existentialism and his defining God in direct relationship to humanity would serve to weaken this more substantive definition of God.

Hodge, therefore, insists that being must be understood as essence or substance in contradistinction of what is "thought, and to a mere power or force." This "real essence" for Hodge is "the common subject of all divine perfections, and the common agent of all divine acts" (Hodge, 1979:367). In all of this Hodge is building the case that the divine attributes are indistinguishable from the divine essence.

Working out of this definition of God, Hodge provides an account of the divine attributes. He argues that any view of the attributes must avoid two extremes. "First, we must represent God as a composite being composed of different elements; And, secondly, we must not confound the attributes; making them all mean the same thing, which is equivalent to denying them altogether" (Hodge, 1979:369). The best analysis avoids both realism that divides the attributes and nominalism that contracts them all into one. He also warns against making the attributes mere causalities whereby the justice of God, for example, is only God's act of retribution for sin, but has no clear necessity as a characteristic of God's self whereby, for example, God is said to be justice only because God has been justice not as a result of his eternal state (Hodge, 1979:373). Hodge ultimately yields to a definition of the attributes as "different modes with which God reveals himself to his creatures" (Hodge, 1979:374). Hodge therefore leaves unresolved the connections between the attributes and the essence, making

the attributes dependent on God's interactions with humanity, not independent distinctions in God's self. Without at least a theory of connection Hodge's appeal to modality has the effect of differentiating the attributes to the degree that they fall back into a realist understanding. It will be clear below that avoiding the two extremes outlined by Hodge requires some prescription, as speculative as it may be, of the means of connection between the essence of God and God's attributes. Hodge's insistence that they simply must be connected without a theory of how is problematic.

Hodge deals with several of the attributes in succession and independently of one another. In his treatment of God's justice, for example, he sees justice as retributive and distributive and God's righteous response to law and legal infraction. Justice has a purely punitive nature. Thus, Hodge argues at length that justice and benevolence are not connected concepts in God; in this way Hodge divides the divine attributes of justice and love to such a degree that he loses the unity and simplicity of God. Such sharp distinctions arise of necessity from Hodge's approach. His treatment of the attributes is purely categorical and descriptive and lacks any theory of connection capable of holding them together within the unity of God (Hodge, 1997:416-426).

The question then arises, are there other ways to view the relationship between the essence and attributes of God? What then of Henry's view of the relation between the attributes of love and justice that are central to understandings of power and privilege?

Henry (1983, Vol. 6:402) begins his discussion of justice as an attribute of God with reference to Hodge's definition quoted above. He literally highlights the words "rectoral" and "distributive" in Hodge's definition. He also brings out the retributive/punitive nature of God's justice (Henry, 1983, volume 6:406). It is significant that he grounds his understanding of distributive justice directly in Aristotelian philosophy and bases it on the fact that God "grants each person his due" (Henry, 1983, Vol. 6:406). He also argues against ideas of social justice that "replace the principle of distribution according to works and merit by that of distribution according to need" (Henry, 1983, Vol. 6:408-409). Any attempt to equate or even correlate God's mercy with God's justice is rebuffed by Henry (1983, Vol. 6:408-409). The latter gets merged into Henry's penal substitutionary view of justification that emphasizes Christ's imputed righteousness as covering just condemnation under the law which is satisfied only in Christ's atoning act (Henry, 1983, Vol. 6:410-411). All of this is leveraged towards a view that God's justice is constitutive of God's law. Justice in God is God's

righteousness defined by law and order. This then is leveraged in an additional argument to reground ethics in the moral, propositionally revealed laws of God in Scripture (Henry, 1983, Vol. 6:418-435).

Henry's discussion of the attributes, like that of Hodge, is merely descriptive and devoid of any discussion of the primary nature of essence. Henry has no theory of how the attributes of God hold together in the Godhead, and in fact errs even more on the side of a realist explanation than Hodge. As will be seen below, Henry's discussion of justice and mercy are disconnected from his broader discussions of the attributes generally. A consideration of Henry's conclusions is an important step towards a constructive approach to the attributes of love, justice, wrath and righteousness within the doctrine of God.

To summarize, Henry believes the attributes of justice and love must be held as distinct. Justice for Henry is defined as distributive justice which he draws directly from Aristotle (Henry, 1983, Vol. 6:405). In Henry's perception of justice everyone does not receive what "he needs" but "what is his due" (Henry, 1983, Vol. 6:408). He (1983, Vol. 6:405) also insists that "justice consists in treating equals equally, and unequals unequally in proportion to relevant differences, that is, impartially." Justice, therefore, becomes God's partial judgment based on merit and works, not need or compassion. Justice for Henry is the righteous judgment of God on humanity for its violation of God's laws. In the exercise of justice, justice is evident when "rightful claims, that is, justifying one's claims by standards or rules that apply to all persons" is the basis for action. "Justice is therefore to be distinguished both from personal experience or group interest on the one hand, and from charity or benevolence on the other." Henry again is trying to distinguish between God's love which is partial and God's justice which is impartial.

Henry's primary point is directed at the application of the justice of God to social settings. He (1983, volume 6:414-415) recognizes a relative justice in God's establishment of civil government and the importance of God's laws, not God's mercy, as underpinning the relationship between God and the temporal social order. Henry (1983, Vol. 6:415) is concerned that secular and liberal Christian perceptions of justice have abandoned a biblical ethic. "Modern philosophy, anthropology and sociology," he says, "have isolated the concept of moral right from its biblical connection with divine law, a connection integral to the Judeo-Christian ethic."

Henry's sharp distinction between the love and justice of God is of course a violation of the unity of the Godhead. It also violates Henry's own understanding of the attributes. Henry (1982, vol. 5:119) says that he rejects "the realistic view that being is a substratum in which attributes inhere, an underlying substance that supports its qualities or predicates." He believes (1982, vol. 5:130) that God is "the living unity of His attributes." Thus, for Henry the attributes and the essence or being of God are the same thing. God is what God does. Further, "if God is noncomposite, and his essence and attributes are mutually inclusive, each attribute in the nature of God interpenetrates every other attribute and no conflict or contrast among them is possible" (Henry, 1982, vol. 5:132). But given his own affirmation that there is no "contrast" among the attributes it is difficult to see how he can maintain such a sharp distinction between love and justice, insisting that justice be differentiated from love and that law, not mercy, must define justice (Henry, 1982, vol. 6:410-412). Henry attempts to resurrect Hodge's "modified realism" but is unable to provide any clear examples from his or Hodge's work that demonstrate how their largely descriptive and categorical approach to the attributes provides any underlying theory of unity. Given the critical issues for a theology of power and privilege created by retributive justice in the various evangelical theologians under review here, it is critical to ask whether there is any approach within the tradition that places the attributes within the essence of God as Henry and Hodge would insist, and also provides a theory of unity within the attributes that might address the importance of the love of God to understandings of the justice of God. (For issues related to racism and theologies of justice see Hodge 3.4.2.6 and Henry 3.5.2.4 above.) Edwards represents just such an approach.

Edwards, in his writings on the *Trinity, Grace and Faith* (1740), has a clear theory of the divine essence grounded in the triunity of God. Edwards affirms that God is real and not simply an abstraction or an inconceivable mystery. He is careful also to distinguish between the persons of the Godhead and the Godhead itself so as not to lose the former in the latter. He writes:

... and this I suppose to be that blessed Trinity that we read in the Holy Scriptures. The Father is the deity subsisting in the prime, unoriginated and most absolute manner, or the deity in its direct existence. The Son is the deity generated by God's understanding, or having an idea of himself, and subsisting in that idea. The Holy Ghost is the deity subsisting in act or the divine essence flowing out and breathed forth, in God's infinite love to and delight in himself. And I believe the whole divine essence does truly and distinctly subsist both in the divine idea and the divine love, and therefore each of them are properly and distinct persons (Edwards, 1740).

Edwards means here that God as absolute being subsists eternally through God's idea of God's self and the love that God has for God's self within the Trinity. God's idea of God's self is the means by which God is eternally self-generated. Edwards ties his perception of God's freedom more closely to a theory of God's being, defining God's idea of God's self as God's means of external self-generation (Edwards, 1740).

Edwards (1740) connects God's love directly to the Trinity and the unity of the Godhead. The essence of love in the Godhead, according to Edwards, is a clear indication and proof of the Trinity. A love of a single person for themselves would equate to egotism, but the transcendent mutual love of three persons each for the other, and all for the whole, is a self-giving love on behalf of the other. A God who is love apart from Trinity is a self-serving, narcissistic God. The triune God who is both three and one, with God's unity held together by God's love, is a God who both honors God's own perfections while also existing for the other.

Additionally, it should be said that Edwards' understanding of love is grounded in a literal reading of Scripture. Edwards draws primarily from I John, but also recognizes the connections between Christ's exposition of the love of God and the love of neighbor as tied to the two tables of the law in the Ten Commandments, making love central to the law, contra Henry's argument. His use of I John also provides a biblical basis for claiming love as the essence of God. John's explanation that God is love and its further elaborations form the core of Edwards' understanding of the Trinity (Edwards, 1740).

The specifics of Edwards' trinitarian theology do suffer from a few problems. First, Edwards subscribes to a type of semi-nominalism that sees the attributes beyond love and God's idea of God's self as lacking reality. Love and self-ideation are the only realities in God, with all other so-called attributes as "mere modes and relations of existence" and beyond love and self-ideation "there are no real distinctions in God that can be thought of." Edwards seems to go beyond even the suggestion that the other attributes are derivatives of love to indicate that they have no real reality in and of themselves (Edwards, 1740).

Second, in Edwards' attempt to describe the relationship of love in the Trinity he makes the Holy Spirit the aspect of pure love in the Trinity. The love of the Godhead is equated to the person of the Spirit. Even Edwards recognizes that this wholly diminishes the place of the Spirit as a person. He attempts unsuccessfully to resolve this by way of the Spirit's participation in the self-understanding and life of the Father and Son. But this

argument simply makes the personhood of the Spirit derivative of the personhood of the Father and the Son (Edwards, 1740).

Finally, and perhaps related to Edwards' weakened view of the Spirit's personhood, he maintains an over-realized relationality to the exclusion of substance in the Godhead. It is possible that Edwards recognizes this and attempts to provide a correction by making love a substantive person of the Trinity in the Holy Spirit. But in doing so he diminishes the Spirit to the category of a substance while also elevating the Spirit to the essence of the Godhead. But as a whole Edwards seems more concerned with elevating love as essence, understood relationally, than using the Spirit to establish any idea of substance. Edwards' views of the Trinity can be said to be decidedly relational and ideational (Edwards, 1740).

As a whole, though, Edwards' views are helpful with certain caveats and constructive revisioning. He bases his work wholly on an understanding of scriptural revelation that would not be subject to attack by Henry. Edwards provides a clear, if not somewhat flawed, theory of Triunity that is absent in both Henry's and Hodge's descriptive approaches. Edwards ultimately recovers for evangelicalism the idea that all that God is, is grounded in God's love.

#### 5.2.3.1.3 Constructive possibilities

What then is to be made of all these views in a constructive way that can speak directly to a theology of power and privilege? It should be noted that what is presented is done so with the same humility and sense of the speculative nature of the work of engaging the Godhead that is pointed out by every other theologian who attempts it. This is an attempt to elucidate what is best in the work presented while also attempting to mitigate against its shortfalls. As such, it is recognized that it may not be the only way to formulate the doctrine of divine attributes.

That said, given the inability of Hodge's and Henry's descriptive approach to create any real connections among attributes in the Godhead, Edwards' view that love is that essence in the Godhead out of which all other attributes stand in relation is to be preferred. What is critical in Edwards' understanding is the view that God's love is for God's self, and that it is evident in the transcendent mutuality of the love that each person of the Godhead has for the other and that each shares for the whole. This love must then be said to form a real substantive unity within the Godhead. This means that God's love is not self-interested or narcissistic but always has its focus on the other. By integrating, rather than bifurcating,

God's attributes and God's person the understanding of the essence of God as love inherits a theory of being that both strengthens it and gives it more provenance in discussions of justice, love, and wrath that are critical to a theology of power and privilege. Edwards' understanding that all other supposed attributes flow from God's love will be followed here. While Edwards connects love and God's idea of God's self, he ascribes the attributes to the former not the latter, although all that God is is derived from God's idea of God's self. But unlike Edwards, who loses the attributes in his embrace of love as essence, it is suggested here that an affirmation of God's subsequent attributes as emanations of God's love, not mere modalities, will strengthen both the individual attributes and the idea of love as the unifying essence of God. It is here suggested that each of God's perfections emanate out of God's essence of love; in so doing they remain wholly connected to God's love and through it to each other while also being identified as distinctive in their own right. It is suggested in this way that love creates simplicity in the Godhead in the same way it creates unity in the Trinity while also suggesting the reality of the attributes in their distinction one from the other.

Edwards' equating of love with the Holy Spirit will not be followed here. Love as the essence of God is to be seen as a constituency of the whole and not a specific economy or substance of any particular person within the Trinity (see Calvin, 1993:125). While this eliminates any direct connection of love as a substance and grounds it directly in relationality, the assumption here is that the relationality of the Godhead in its love has to be seen as in some way substantive. It is admitted here that this is a qualification and not a sustained argument and ultimately the relational element in the essence of God may need to stand on its own because the metaphysics of God's substance is beyond knowing.

With this view of love as the essence of God and the attributes as emanations of love it is now possible to explore more directly the attributes of justice and omnipotence as they relate directly to a theology of power and privilege. A view toward love as the essence that holds everything together and that governs understandings of each of the parts will undergird the constructive work that follows.

When speaking of justice as an attribute of God it must be examined in relation to how it arises out of God in God's self and, because justice is only necessary as an expression of God's relation to creation, it must be viewed secondarily as an attribute originating primarily in God's relationship to humanity. God's love is expressed within the Godhead as

mutuality, equality, and a focus on the other. Thus, justice must be seen, as an emanation from God's love, as having within itself, or being answerable to, these qualities.

When speaking of the other-focused nature of the Godhead what is meant is that condition of God's love, as suggested above, in which each of the persons of the Godhead loves each other and the whole. Even in relation to the whole, the whole is loved not for the sake of the self but for the sake of the other. The implications of expressing God's love in this way are important. God whose love is other-focused exists beyond self-interest and self-love. When God is said to love God's self, there is a need to see, as Edwards does, that God's triune nature challenges the idea that God's love can be a merited narcissism. Again, God's love for God's self is not based on God's narcissistic appreciation for God's own perfections. Trinity means that love in the Godhead exists beyond self-interest and is innately other-focused.

What is created through this eternal focus on love for the other is a mutuality whereby each exists in relation to their love for the other and in relationship to their shared love of the whole. In this way God's love becomes constitutive of God's unity, and God's unity becomes constitutive of God's love. To the degree that it can be said that each participates fully in the whole, then it can also be said that each participates mutually in the whole. This mutuality and union of love in the Godhead also indicates the equality of the persons in the Godhead through their equal participation in the fullness of the Godhead and their equal share in the love of one for the other and the whole. The equality of the Godhead is central to the preservation of the Triunity of God.

The righteousness of God, which is a part of Hodge's, Henry's, and Edwards' view of justice, should also be understood as an emanation from the love of God defined by God's focus on the other, mutuality, and equality. The righteousness of God as it exists within God's self can be said to reflect God's perfect affirmation of God's self as what is completely correct and right. What is righteous in relation to God's self, without reference to humanity, is God's perfect love, again understood as other-focus, mutuality, and equality. God is love, and therefore God's love is righteous and righteousness is God's love. Given what has already been said about justice as distinctive primarily of God's relationship with humanity, but still operating within the parameters of God's own self, it is possible to say what justice can and cannot be and be consistent with the analysis above. Justice cannot be devoid of a focus on the other, mutuality, and equality and be fully constituent of God's own nature. Put another



way, justice cannot manifest as focus on self, self-interest, or inequality. And it is at least logical to extend the concept of righteousness to make what is right that which God affirms in God's self. Thus, justice should be consistent with this understanding of God. That said, what then is justice when understood in view of God's relationship with humanity? Defining justice, particularly viewed as an overflow of God's righteousness, as Edwards would put it, requires a consideration of several factors mentioned above by Henry, Hodge, Edwards, and even Cone. These include consideration of law, wrath, impartiality, and compassion/mercy. All of these need to be considered in light of their connections to divine justice as it exists as an emanation of God's love.

Henry's focus on law has already been considered above. Henry creates a sharp divide between God's love manifested in mercy and God's punishment for non-adherence to law evidenced in God's justice/righteousness. It has already been pointed out that making law the primary determinant of justice is to posit who God is in God's self on the basis of God's condescension to humanity. Law as a condescension in the divine-human relationship says more about humanity than God. It is also true that a sharp distinction between law and mercy divides the unity of God. Law then must be considered in a way that correlates with a clearer understanding of love as the essence of God and the conditions of love in the Godhead. Edwards is a help in providing a way of looking at law in both its positive and negative aspects. Viewed from a negative perspective, law serves to highlight and condemn sin in humanity. Understood fully, it condemns sin. Edwards' definition of sin as self-interested pursuit apart from the guidance and control of God is instructive here. What the law does negatively, seen in this way, is to condemn humanity for pursuing its own destructive self-interest separate from the interests of God and the compelling interests of neighbors. Since selfishness is at the heart of definitions of power and privilege, particularly as they relate to racism and White supremacy, the law identifies racist abuses of power and privilege. If this is accepted, then Cone's (2004:139-152) insistence that racism and White neglect of analyzing it as the original sin shows merit and his conclusions provide real theological significance not just for Black theology but for evangelical theology as well. This is true whether one sees racism as original sin, as does Cone and to a degree Edwards, or simply as a sin. Following Edwards and Cone would create a deeper connection between Adam's sin and the sin of racism. Regardless, the law stands in condemnation of any system or individual that seeks self-interest over the interest of others and apart from the direction

of God. It also sees unredeemed secular governmental structures as subject to self-interest in the abuse of power and privilege as they stand apart from direct dependence on God. This understanding of the law also makes impossible the acceptance of any form of Christianity that insists that self-interest can be pursued at the expense of others. It particularly condemns as non-Christian any group or individual who maintains that racism, White supremacy, and oppressive systems can exist alongside the practice of Christian faith. The law in this way becomes a magnifying glass bringing into view the sin of power and privilege as defined as the pursuit of selfish self-interest. Thus, Cone's (1997a:78) view that White Christianity, when it embraces racism for its own self-interested benefit, is revealed as heretical has merit. As Henry (1983, Vol. 6:402-417) notes, the law remains, even if satisfied fully for the elect in Christ's atoning death, and it continues to function to define morality, ethics, and notions of justice.

Edwards' understanding of original sin as self-interest is highlighted by the fact that self-interest is a complete contradiction to the mutuality, equality, and other-focus of God's essence described above. God, whose love is other-focused, mutual, and equal, stands in complete opposition to the pursuit of self-interested power and privilege. Individuals and organizations, even the church, that pursue or ignore the pursuit of self-interested power and privilege and the propagation of racism and racist systems stand in contradiction to the very essence of God, and as Cone affirms, have nothing to do with God. The law, understood within the context of justice, serves negatively as a condemnation of self-interested power and privilege and as a contradiction to God's own essence. Law is not to be considered as an attribute of God but as an aid to understanding human sin in relation to its contradiction to the nature of God.

Viewed positively, the law affirms the practice of divine love as central to the justice of God. Edwards (1740) again draws attention to Christ's proclamation in the Gospels of the essence of the law found in the proclamation that humanity should love God and love neighbors and that the two cohere. He also mentions that the decalogue itself has two tables, the first focused on the love of God and the second focused on the love of neighbor. It is unlikely that even Henry would deny this connection between the law and love as identified in Scripture. Given Henry's (1983, Vol. 6:406-407) acquiescence to the fact that justice is ultimately concerned with one's relationship to one's neighbor, the law viewed in this way

amplifies the positive pursuit of loving relationships with God and neighbor that should be central to concepts of justice as they relate to law.

Theology when following this perspective on justice and law will reference back to love as the essence of God and, per its logical extension in the current work, God's other-focus, mutuality, and equality. This grounds concepts of justice not in systems of personal morality, although also not to their exclusion, but in a broader more relational understanding of justice derived directly from God's essence as God is in God's self.

Thus, law, contra Henry, is to be seen as directly connected to love as the essence of God. If Henry is followed by including law in the concepts of justice it must be seen as providing a negative focus condemning self-interested power and privilege and affirming a focus on the other, mutuality and equality reflective of the love of God in God's self. Thus, justice must consist both in the condemnation and elimination of oppressive systems of self-interested power and privilege and in acts of love toward God and neighbor reflective of God's other-focus, mutuality, and equality.

But both Henry (1983, Vol. 6:409) and Hodge (1983, Vol. 1:416) focus on the punitive or retributive nature of God's justice. This is offered in contradistinction to God's love and mercy. It cannot be denied that there is an aspect of retributive justice in the justice of God. Henry (1983, Vol. 6:406-407) is correct: without it the cross of Christ has no substance. The question is how God's retribution, or emotively God's wrath, can be said to emanate from God's love? At this point Cone (2018a:70-78) is helpful.

Cone suggests that attempts to deny the righteousness of God in the interests of the singularity of love resurrects Marcionism (Cone, 2018a:71-72). By denying the wrath and retribution of God they disconnect the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Testament and affirm a view of God that does not subscribe to the fullness of the biblical revelation. Cone himself does not wish to deny that love is the essence of God but to suggest that love is not love apart from God's wrath. According to Cone (2018a:74), if God is for everything and against nothing God cannot be said to stand for anything. God's love means that God stands against the oppressor and for the oppressed. Without wrath there is no condemnation and therefore no ability to identify and call evil, evil. Love without wrath is not love at all. He rightly points out that without God's judgment and punishment the problem of theodicy becomes acute. Contrary to what is normal in most liberal theological systems, Cone insists on the literality of God's wrath and God's punishment.

This of course is in line with Henry's and Hodge's view of retributive justice. The difference arises only in the fact that Henry and Hodge focused on God's wrath towards sin understood generally and primarily in relation to individual morality, while Cone applies the wrath of God directly to God's punishment of oppressors as a result of God's love for the oppressed. It is easy for evangelicals to react to Cone's language of oppression and oppressed and miss his affirmation of a foundational view of evil and God's punishment of evil.

Cone can, in fact, be brought close to evangelicalism by way of the analysis above. If sin is understood as the exercise of self-interested power and privilege, then oppression is sin. Further, God is opposed to all that is in contradistinction to God's essence of love realized in equality, mutuality, and a focus on the other. Oppression is, by definition, in opposition to equality, mutuality and focus on the other. Therefore, oppression and the oppressor exist in a sinful state and in opposition to God and under God's condemnation and punishment. God does choose sides and is partial in declaring oppression sin and oppressors sinners. God exercises God's wrath on the oppressor and therefore can be said to favor the oppressed. This of course has to be seen to operate at the level of common or residual grace when the oppressed are made a universal class inclusive of regenerate and unregenerate persons. But God's love existent in God's mutuality, other-focus, and equality cannot but condemn that which is in opposition to God's own nature and to affirm that which, even in its imperfections, draws closest to it. God's love includes God's wrath. This means that justice is exercising wrath on that which is counter to God's essence of love in the interest of assuring its compliance with mutuality, other-focus, and equality in God.

Closely related to law and retribution, particularly in relation to justice, is the idea of God's impartiality. Henry (1983, Vol. 6:405-406) notes that justice is impartial, whereas love is partial, and this makes a clear distinction between God's justice and God's love. But this distinction does not in and of itself sever the connection between the two. There is a way that impartiality can be seen as an emanation of God's love.

Working off Henry's (1983, Vol. 6:405-406) equating of impartiality with the fact "that God is no respecter of persons," Henry uses this to make the point that God sees all in their sin and rightfully judges all for their sin, following the same laws and applying the same judgment to all. But this extracts the New Testament references to divine impartiality from their intended contexts. When Galatians states that there is "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" (Gal. 3:28, NIV) the intention is inclusion in the new covenant

community rather than equal punishment under the law. That is not to deny either the universality of human depravity or God's punishment of the unregenerate. It is simply to make the point that the scriptural understanding of God's impartiality, when tied to the idea that God is no respecter of persons, is that in the new covenant God is making a way for the Gentile, the slave, the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. What people have chosen to differentiate and exclude, God has chosen to include, and God ignores humanity's categories of exclusion and inclusion. Henry's use of impartiality to sever love from justice seems totally out of place in this regard.

Finally, the provision of need in the concept of divine justice has to be considered. Henry (1983, Vol. 6:407) makes a point of distinguishing between the concept of "each according to their need" and "each according to their due." By the latter he means each according to their work or merit. He affirms work and merit over need and even insists that need is not a consideration of justice. He does so with reference to justice as law and its impartial execution, both concepts which have already been challenged above as having more to do with God's love than Henry allows. If law intends to point to God's love, and in it, God's concern both for loving God and loving neighbor, and if law intends to highlight the sin of self-interest as a contradiction of God's own essence, then law is focused primarily on the restoration of mutuality, other-focus, and equality. The fact that this is neighbor-focused and other-focused means that justice gives of itself on behalf of the other. Even work and merit in this understanding becomes subordinated to the requirement of abandoning self-interest in the interest of the other, both God and humanity. It becomes difficult to see how this does not require of justice the meeting of needs.

Justice as the impartiality of God has also been reconsidered above. God meets the needs of the poor, the oppressed, and the excluded by way of inclusion and elevation in failing to recognize human distinctions in God's election. God also meets the needs of the poor and oppressed by way of common grace when God through God's Spirit infuses God's love into the heart of the redeemed oppressor and moves them in love away from their oppression. God is determined through God's election to eliminate self-interest on behalf of love, and that love includes the love of neighbor, which implies a concern for and action on behalf of the neighbor. Justice in its pursuit of the mutuality, other-focus, and equality that is the perfection of the love of the Godhead should evidence active engagement with the needs of the other.

Ultimately, justice then, as an emanation of divine love, is the condemnation and elimination of the sin of self-interest in favor of a restored relationship between God and humanity and humanity towards itself. This must not result in universal salvation; there remains condemnation of sin. But those who are redeemed are redeemed to the image of God— God who is said to be in essence love, a love distinguished by mutuality, equality, and focus on the other. Justice is the pursuit of these qualities as a recognition of the perfection of God and as an expression of love for God. This theological construction of the justice of God has been dependent at many points on the work of Edwards. But it must be pointed out that Edwards never realized the implications of his own doctrine of love in the person of God in relation to the issue of African slavery and Native American colonization. He never extends the doctrine to a full understanding of its implications for justice in his own contemporary context. His understanding of distributive justice limits in humanity what is evident in God. There is no required mutuality and certainly no true equality in Edwards and any engagement with the focus on the other is defined not as love but as obligatory charity. As regards his own definition of original sin, he focuses it towards an advocacy of personal humility and obedience to God. While neither is incorrect, it is incomplete without a universal social application of what is a universal condition of sin. Thus, Edwards is unable to critique slavery or European abuse of power in its treatment of Native Americans as injustice or as an exercise of sin on the part of colonists. Edwards no doubt saw both as allowable because under distributive justice African slaves and Native Americans were given “their due” when treated with charity and because as a Christian nation it was Britain’s right under God to exercise dominion over them for their own good and evangelization (see 3.3.2.5 above).

The exercise of power within accepted cultural norms is for Edwards allowable as a means to necessary social order. The idea that evangelization could occur apart from colonization would never occur to Edwards, who saw Christianization and “civilization” as inseparable tasks (see 3.3.2.5 above). Thus, the exercise of power, in this case colonial power, was necessary for the common good within the providence of God. But there is also no sustained engagement with the power of God and the exercise of power in humanity.

Power is a necessary consideration for this study. Power may be seen through the lens of Barth’s definition of power in *Church Dogmatics* 2.1. Using Barth is justified in two ways. Barth’s high view of the sovereignty of God is consistent with Reformed evangelicalism. There are similar views of the sovereignty and distinction of God from humans. Secondly,

Barth's descriptions of the power of God are focused in a way that highlights the power of God and suggest implications for the exercise of power not available through direct consideration of the evangelical tradition, although not contradictory to it. It would be impossible to provide a full exposition of Barth's theology of the sovereignty of God in the context of this work. Response will be limited to treatment of his arguments specifically in *Church Dogmatics* 2.1:490-607. These understandings could be expanded and debated with reference to Barth's other work and broader debates related to Barthian theology, but those broader debates are not in view here. Instead, it is the specificity of Barth's definition of power that is helpful to the constructive work of this project. That is true whether later work moves beyond, challenges, or refutes the consistency of Barth's definitions.

Barth categorizes God's omnipotence under the category of God's freedom. It should be recalled that in Barth's thought God's love and God's freedom are both paradoxically distinct and the same. The essence of God for Barth is love in freedom, and this is captured in the way he pairs the constancy of God and the omnipotence of God together (2004, 2.1: 490-607). God remains free to be who God wills God's self to be. But God is also always who God is in God's constancy, both determined by God's own morality, but free in the power and ability to do anything in the exercise of the divine will. This power of God, according to Barth, requires definition in order to be rightly understood. Barth defines the omnipotence of God with five statements.

First, he insists that God cannot be defined as power in itself (2004, 2.1:524). "Power in itself is not merely neutral," Barth says; "power in itself is evil." God is all-powerful, but power is not God. Barth contrasts this with the devil, who manifests power for power's sake. This comment appears as an aside and serves as an illustration in Barth's argument. He does not work out the implication at this point of a full theology of evil or of evil power as evidenced in the satanic. His focus remains distinguishing between power as a manifestation of God and the deification of power itself.

Second, and in relation to the first, "God's might never at any place precedes right, but is always and everywhere associated with it" (Barth, 2004, 2.1:526). In this way Barth distinguishes between power as a "physical possibility" and power as a "moral and legal possibility." Thus, might is always guided by a moral rightness. "God's moral and legal potentiality is also his physical." Barth makes this point to distinguish God's power from the pure unrestrained exercise of power which manifests in tyranny.

Third, Barth (2004, 2.1:526-527) distinguishes between the power that God has revealed through God's self-revelation and the power God will reveal in the future and the sum of God's power. The power exercised by God is not the full power of God in the divine essence. God's power does not "exhaust itself in his omnicausality" (Barth, 2004, 2.1:532).

Fourth, God's power is the power to "be himself and to live of and by himself" (Barth, 2004, 2.1:532). God self-sustaining power within God's triunity is the source from which all of God's exercise of power derives. God's power is contained within God's self and is not derivative.

Finally, "God's power is power over everything" (Barth, 2004, 2.1:538). God exercises power over all power and therefore God's power is sovereign and supreme. Again, Barth emphasizes that God is not understood as the sum of all power making any exercise of power God, but God assumes power over any other power.

What then is to be made of Barth's defining statements? It will immediately be a point of objection that any conclusions drawn in accepting Barth's definition would be equally applicable to the oppressed. Barth (2004:524) does after all consider "revolt" to also be an unrestrained exercise of power that he defines as evil. Barth would likely characterize Cone's Black liberation theology, in its call for the exercise of Black power in revolutionary ways, as a violation of his understanding of power. Cone would likely point out that any discussion that minimizes the use of power by the Black community diverts attention from the misuse of power by the White community. He would also likely deny the applicability of Barth's work to oppressed Blacks even though Cone was a self-professed Barthian. For its part, this study is focused primarily on power and privilege as it speaks directly to the powerful and the privileged and therefore will leave considerations of the applicability of the conclusions below related to Barth's definition of power as it might relate to the oppressed and to Black liberation theology.

There are direct applications of Barth's definition to a theology of power. There is a need to distinguish from the outset the difference between God's power and that of humanity. Omnipotence as an incommunicable attribute is central to any understanding of this distinction.

That said, there is a direct relationship to power in God in both the limitation and exercise of human power. This includes excluding human exercise of power for power's sake, as power derived of God. If God is not power in and of itself and the power of God is



distinguished from the exercise of neutral power, then neutral power in humanity would of necessity not be of God. Barth's insistence that neutral power is evil and results in tyranny is instructive. God cannot be said to be a tyrant, and by extension God cannot be said to be the God of tyrants. The unrestrained exercise of power cannot be said to derive from God or be condoned by God.

Related to this, God's power is exercised in coherence with God's "rightness" and morality. God cannot be said to be connected to human exercises of power that violate God's righteousness, morality, justice, and love. Power that lacks coherence to these attributes as revealed by God cannot be said to exist as God working through those who exercise unrestrained power. Hitler was not fueled through the power of God. God was not present in the exercise of power evident in apartheid in South Africa. The power of the masters over the slaves in antebellum America or White supremacists over Black Americans during US segregation was not the power of God. God's power is not exercised apart from God's morality and God's love. Power, if it is allowed at all, requires a moral determinant that guides its acquisition and its exercise. It exists under the critical gaze of covenant and biblical revelation and relation to God's moral constraints on God's free power.

Further, if God's revealed power is not the sum or fullness of all God's power, and if his power is "not exhausted in his omnicausality," then tyrants and oppressors and those who hold positions of power and privilege should believe that they are subject to divine retribution even in temporal circumstances as God exercises God's power on behalf of the poor and the marginalized. If humanity does not know the fullness of God's power, then it can never rest in the belief that just because God has not acted God will not act. In fact, the idea that God has not exhausted God's power is both a token of hope for the oppressed and a cautionary tale for the powerful and privileged.

The fact that God's power is contained in God's self and that God's power is never derivative is equally applicable to a theology of power and privilege. The incommunicability of God's power to humanity brings into question whether the human exercise of power ever has anything connected to divinity. If God's power is in no way derivative, can it ever be said that humans exercise power in relation to God? God's ultimate sovereignty brings into question any notion of political or social power that derives its authority from the divine right of kings or a divine manifest destiny. This is not to suggest that God does not use human

agency in God's providence. But God's use of the redeemed for God's purposes manifests in service to neighbor, not in the unrestrained exercise of power and privilege.

This then brings into view Barth's insistence that God exercises power over everything but not every exercise of power is of God. Not everything done in pursuit of power can be said without qualification and critique to be God at work through humanity.

God's exercise of power informs humanity's exercise of power. Human power may in fact be an abuse, not a divine right. Certainly, any exercise of power and privilege is subject to evaluation under God's standards of rightness, justice, and love. Humanity has a high measure to meet if it wishes to equate the divine to any human act of power.

It should also be noted before moving on that the definition of original sin offered above as self-interested action seemed to typify the human exercise of power and privilege. The question could be asked to what degree the human will to power is in fact inherent in humanity's fallen state. There would be more to say in relation to power in the discussion of reversal when the biblical material is examined again below.

#### 5.2.3.1.4 Conclusions related to God's nature and essence

The argument above has suggested a direct connection between a doctrine of God's attributes and a theology of power and privilege that intersects with the work of Edwards, Barth, and in places Cone. This analysis has suggested that Edwards' consideration of the connections between love as God's essence and understandings of justice and power that move away from distributive notions of justice toward love as mutuality, equality, and a focus on the other is central to any theological understanding of power and privilege. There is also room for understandings of justice that place an emphasis on God's wrath and the exercise of retribution on tyrants and oppressors. Power, in the analysis above, becomes highly regulated if not totally prohibited. Its practice requires strict moral and ethical standards and total acquiescence to God. The ability of humanity to claim its exercise of power as derived from God is sorely curtailed. The connection of the will to power with the original sin of self-interest further weakens its use in contexts beyond God's own transcendent divine activity.

#### 5.2.3.2 *The Persons of the Godhead in relation to power and privilege*

Thus far, it has been demonstrated that the doctrine of the work of God, as seen in the doctrines of revelation and providence, as well as the attributes of the Godhead, have specific

usefulness for the understanding of power and privilege, particularly with reference to racism. It has been possible to envision these doctrines at times in agreement with Cone and at times by refocusing arguments that were already a part of the evangelical tradition but were either underutilized or ignored.

#### 5.2.3.2.1 The person of Christ

What remains in this constructive section of the study is a consideration of the economy of the persons of the Godhead. Particular emphasis will be placed on Christ and the Holy Spirit. In considering Christ, specific attention will be paid to Cone's notion of the ontological blackness of Christ, Christ's kenosis, and the meaning of the cross. The Holy Spirit will be addressed in terms of its role in imparting God's love to the believer and combating sin. While there are many possibilities of engagement with a fuller Christology and pneumatology, these particular topics are offered as the most critical to a theology of power and privilege.

##### 5.2.3.2.1.1 The ontological blackness of Christ

Cone's clearest Christological innovation is his understanding of the ontological blackness of Christ (Cone, 1997b:122-126). This deserves consideration and constructive application. Cone's Black Christ is primarily directed at a North American context, so much of the engagement that follows will reference that context. There might be different ontological perceptions of Christ offered in other more global contexts and the one suggested here may not be applicable in those contexts. This is justified because of the focus here on critiquing a specific type of North American evangelicalism.

When one considers the idea of an ontological Black Christ, particularly within a North American context, what is clear is the idea of a racialized Christ as part of both the theological and artistic imagination of the United States. Two poems and one quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer illustrate this point:

The South is crucifying Christ again  
By all the laws of ancient rote and rule:  
The ribald cries of 'Save Yourself' and 'Fool'  
Din in his ears, the thorns grope for his brain,  
And where they bite, swift springing rivers stain  
His gaudy, purple robe of ridicule  
With sullen red; and acid wine to cool

His thirst is thrust at him, with lurking pain.  
 Christ's awful wrong is that he's dark of hue,  
 The sin for which no blamelessness atones;  
 But lest the sameness of the cross should tire  
 They kill him now with famished tongues of fire,  
 And while he burns, good men, and women, too,  
 Shout, battling for his black and brittle bones.  
 (Countee Cullen, 1922)

The fact that today the 'black Christ' of a young negro poet is pitted against the 'white Christ' reveals a destructive rift within the church of Jesus Christ. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1939)

And the news reporter says: Jesus is White  
 How can she say Jesus is a white man when  
 He died the blackest of ways possible.  
 With his hands up  
 With his mother watching  
 Crying at his feet  
 Her tears nothing more than gossip for news reporters or prophets  
 His body left to sour in the sun  
 With his humanity stripped from his blackness.  
 (Crystal Valentine, 2016)

The notion of a Black Jesus is an ongoing and prevalent image within the American theological and artistic landscape. As the quotes above illustrate, it has held unique staying power for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. As Edward Blum and Paul Harvey have clearly pointed out in *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America*, the racialized Jesus has a very long and complex history in the US.

While not denying the theological and historical complexity of racialization, it is suggested here that the idea of a Black Jesus has potential for informing a more nuanced White evangelical Christology. To that end it is important to discuss first the available images of Christ in modern American Christianity, followed by a definition of just what is meant by a Black Jesus, and finally making some constructive theological observations for how thinking about Christ as Black from a White evangelical location might shape evangelical Christology.

Within American Christianity there have been at least four primary images of Christ if the Black Christ is excluded from consideration. These include the Iconoclastic/faceless Jesus, the Hellenized Jesus, the Christ of American Democracy, and the White Christ. Each will be examined in turn.

Blum and Harvey (2012) suggest that under the influence of New England Puritanism the early colonial period in the US avoided any image of Jesus. Consistent with Puritan iconoclasm, Jesus was seen primarily as a spiritual not a physical presence. Blum and Harvey explain this:

A variety of factors account for the relative absence, unimportance, and even annihilation of Christ's physical body in the British colonies. Few of the groups involved had any inclination to create an image of the divine, and few had the manufacturing or distributing abilities to create a prevailing representation. The newness of Native American encounters with Jesus, the lack of freedom and diverse associations between color and divinity among West African slaves, and the radical iconoclasm of the English settlers created an eastern North America where no physical representation of Jesus dominated the landscape (Blum and Harvey, 2012: 29).

Blum and Harvey continue to see this iconoclasm running through the landscape of American history up to, and at times after, the Civil Rights Movement. This faceless, raceless Jesus is a spiritual Christ who lacks any bodily presence.

While this image of Jesus per Blum and Harvey held ongoing popular appeal, it also creates some very real theological problems. A faceless Jesus is devoid of a historical and social context. This lack of spatial groundedness means Jesus is easily unmoored from the biblical narratives in ways that make his person and ongoing work malleable. The faceless Christ can easily be made to fit the subjective needs of the moment. At its worst a spiritualized Christ can dissolve into a contemporary form of Gnosticism. The effect is to minimize Christ's earthly, bodily, incarnational ministry and spiritualize his work to a degree that Jesus lacks significance beyond personal spiritual salvation.

A second prevalent image of Jesus is that of the Hellenized Christ. This is Jesus stripped of his Jewish ethnicity and even at times stripped of his Jewish faith. There has been a long list of studies that have looked at the ways the early church fathers Martin Luther and Calvin attempted to distance Jesus from his Jewishness. A robust definition of Jesus as a first-century Jew and a clear statement of what this means in terms of Christology, if not altogether absent, seems lacking. Jesus' Jewishness seems to be incidental to who Christ is. Theologically this has the same effect as the faceless, raceless Christ. Jesus is unmoored from the original social, political and ethnic implications of his historical existence. The Hellenized Christ risks becoming the receptacle for Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies which often take the message of his life beyond the horizon of the biblical texts. Also, the lack of any significant suggestion as to how Christ's spatial, geopolitical position as a Jew in

the first century matters to evangelical Christology makes arguments that Christ was not Black but a Jew hollow and without any real theological consequence.

The third image of Christ is the Jesus of American nationalism. Both Nathan Hatch (1991) and Mark Noll (2005) have noted the ways in which American democracy has shaped the American Church in its own image. The Constantinianism of American Christianity, so evident in America through the 1950s, saw Christianity as the center of American democratic values and the capitalist work ethic. At least some streams of popular evangelicalism continue to keep these Constantinian ideas alive. The earliest editorials in *Christianity Today* written by Henry (1956) defended democracy against communism on the grounds that democracy best represented Christian values and the teachings of Jesus. This kind of Christianized American exceptionalism is still evident within evangelicalism. What seems to drive this impulse is the prevalence of the notion of supercessionism. The predominate New England Puritan ideal of America as the promised land and the Puritan colonies as the new Jerusalem seems to run deep in the American evangelical imagination. But supercessionism in all its manifestations including the divine rights of kings, the doctrine of discovery, or South African Afrikaner religious defenses of apartheid removes Christ and Israel from their historical realities and hermeneutically recreates Christ in the image of contemporary society. Certainly, evangelicalism aspires to the opposite. If one takes into consideration that there are more parallels in the Gospels between America and Rome than there are between America and Christ then the hermeneutical and theological damage of too close an association of Christ and Christian values with American democracy becomes evident.

The final prevalent image of Christ within American society is the White Jesus. Again, Blum and Harvey describe the long career of the White Christ and equate the rise of this particular image as a reaction on the part of White supremacists in America to the freeing of slaves and civil rights legislation. But the image is also evident in both Black and White churches across America where the most prominent image of Jesus is the depiction of a Nordic Christ with long flowing hair and distinctively European features. While most academic White theologians would deny that this image of Christ is realistic, they are also at a loss to present a compelling argument to dissuade its continued use. The White Jesus lies latent in the back of every American's notion of who Jesus is. But, to make Christ part of the dominate culture and the dominate racial majority within that culture is again to bring contemporary meaning to the biblical text that is in no way a hermeneutical equivalency. It

also suggests very real theological problems. As Major Jones (1997) has argued, if everyone's image of Jesus is White and Blacks take seriously the inequalities between Whites and Blacks in America then the question of theodicy looms large and there is a very real ability on the part of Blacks to ask Jones' question, "is God a White racist?" The whiteness of Christ carries real theological weight.

If these are the dominate images of Christ within American popular evangelicalism and at times by default within academic evangelical theology, then there is a real lack of a clearly distinct starting point for talking theologically about Jesus. To ignore or minimize the very real cultural, social, political, and ethnic context in which Jesus carried out the mission of God is to ignore whole portions of the biblical message. But given the difficulty of bridging the gap between contemporary notions of Jesus' Jewishness and the first-century realities of what it meant to be Jewish, then it seems responsible to speak of Christ in terms of hermeneutical equivalencies. Cone's assessment that such an equivalency might just be found in the Black Jesus carries some weight. That said, it is important to understand what Cone means by a "Black" Christ.

Historically there have been two dominate ways of viewing the Black Christ. The first is to see Christ as actually historically Black. This view often postulates a racial dualism where Jesus must be either White or Black. This position was represented most prominently by Albert Cleage, the pastor of the Church of the Black Madonna and a radical Black nationalist preacher. Cleage said of the Black Christ:

When I say Jesus was black, that Jesus was the black Messiah, I'm not saying 'Wouldn't it be nice if Jesus was black?' or 'Let's pretend that Jesus was black,' or 'It's necessary psychologically for us to believe that Jesus was black.' I'm saying that Jesus WAS black. There never was a white Jesus. Now if you're white, you can accept him if you want to, and you can go through psychological gymnastics and pretend that he was white, but he was black. If you're such a white racist that you've got to believe he was white, then you're going to distort history to preserve his whiteness. (Cleage, 2017)

Cone (2018a:26-130) could not follow this type of literalism and posited instead the ontological blackness of Christ, by which he meant that the best contemporary hermeneutical equivalent of a first-century Jew in Palestine is oppressed Black people. He believed that to understand Christ from the standpoint of his political, ethnic, and class distinctions meant looking to Blacks within the American context and other oppressed people around the world. Thus, Jesus' suffering and oppression within his historical context finds its equivalent in

contemporary American culture where Christ is best identified with the suffering Black community. This ontologically Black Christ has very real potential for informing evangelical Christology. The question then is, what would it look like for White evangelical theology to take seriously the notion of a Black Jesus? Five suggestions are offered as an answer to this question. First, if White evangelicals take seriously a Black Jesus, they will need to see Christ's social position as central, not merely incidental to who Christ was. This has already been argued in discussions of revelation and providence above and does not need further elaboration here.

Second, the Black Christ requires White evangelical theology and White evangelicals to see themselves reflected less in Christ. It would require them to position themselves differently in the biblical narrative. A Black Christ on the cross, observed by White evangelicalism, has to be viewed differently. A Black Christ can position White theologians in the biblical narratives more clearly as oppressors and can hermeneutically demonstrate the real distance between Christ and White humanity. A Christ that is different racially, culturally and in terms of political power becomes more difficult to appropriate into contemporary defenses of power and privilege becomes more difficult to see as complicit in racist logics.

Finally, A Black Christ would require White Evangelical theology to reorient its ecclesiology. Cone (1997b:70) describes the White Church as "antichrist" because it has failed to live up to at least three marks of the church. First, in its proclamation it has failed to call out evil in society in the form of racism and social injustice. It has failed to preach prophetically, and it has often failed to preach at all about real evil in the world. Preaching for Cone is never neutral: it must always pick a side. Second, it has failed in its service. Having neglected the oppressed and the marginalized, it has failed to render the very service that Christ required and that Christ modeled in the world. And third, it has failed in its fellowship. Cone says the church must be in its fellowship what it hopes to see realized in the world. But the White church has failed to exercise proper discipline in regard to racism within its own congregations. While the church might occasionally practice church discipline in regard to various individual moral failings, it rarely exercises discipline in regard to racism. In this way Cone says the White Church works against Christ and is therefore antichrist (Cone, 1997b:63-70).

If Christ is seen as Black, then it requires a theological answer to the history of White racism and White defense of racism by evangelical theologians, pastors, and laity. It



personalizes the attack on the Black community in a way a faceless Christ does not. A Black Christ requires a different kind of White Church, if it allows a “White church” at all.

In summary it has been suggested that a Black Christ, far from being antithetical to White evangelical theology, might open up avenues for a more nuanced and creative Christology that can proceed from orthodoxy to orthopraxy. It has also been suggested that among the many popular images of Christ available across the landscape of the American church the Black Christ might be more thoroughly biblically rooted than any of the other options. That is, if the Black Christ is defined contra Cleage and with Cone as ontologically Black, not historically so, ultimately this ontologically Black Jesus represents the best hermeneutical equivalent available in the North American context.

#### 5.2.3.2.1.2 Christ’s Kenosis

Having seen the benefits of embracing an ontologically Black Christ, it is important to extend the understanding of this Christ to include an examination of kenosis. Cone sees White applications of Christ’s kenosis as a tool of oppressors to subjugate the oppressed, and his assessments are supported by the historical research (Harvey 2018:67-92). But kenosis also remains a means of subordination in contemporary theology as well.

The temporal submission of Christ to the Father is too extensive a biblical motif to ignore within an evangelical theological system. It also appears that to completely lose it is to set aside an important point in the biblical understanding of power and privilege. Kenosis will be engaged further in the next section as the biblical material is brought into conversation with the doctrinal, but for now it is important to suggest at least three ways kenosis should be understood. Again, the biblical support will be examined below.

First, Christ’s kenosis is utilized, particularly in the writings of Paul, to suggest an ethical and sanctifying practice to be followed by believers. The emphasis here is on Christ’s free sacrifice and service, not Christ’s subordination. When this emphasis is understood it is possible to see the use of the passage to encourage the oppressed to accept their involuntary suffering as a misapplication of the concept.

Second, the use of kenosis seems to be focused on soliciting sacrificial, servant behavior in those who hold cultural positions of power and privilege, not towards those who do not. It has already been suggested that this is the case of appeals to kenosis in the household codes. The implication is the need to surrender what one has, power, privilege,

position, and status, in the interest of the other and that this is done in submission to the power of God.

Finally, this surrender seems to imply a suffering solidarity with those on behalf of whom the surrender is made. The leader becomes the servant of the servant and in so doing relinquishes power in the interest of community. This of course is to consider kenosis in relation to its implications for discipleship apart from the consideration of kenosis purely in relation to Christ's relationship with the Father in the Godhead. But the preponderance of biblical texts point toward the greater significance of the former, in terms of human understanding, and therefore justifies the approach.

#### 5.2.3.2.1.3 The Cross

Closely related to the doctrine of kenosis is the meaning of the cross. Most evangelical theology looks to the cross as a means of defining atonement. This soteriological approach is central to Reformed evangelicalism and cannot be abandoned without rendering that theology hollow. Evangelicalism is also incomplete apart from understanding the full implications of the cross for the moral and ethical life of the believer. Cone is guilty of the opposite. By so neglecting the doctrine of atonement in his focus on Christ's solidarity with the oppressed on the cross he comes very close to vacating any of the eternal, salvific significance of the cross (Cone, 2011). But again, the intent here is not to parody Cone but to ask whether he brings value to evangelicalism. His work does in fact highlight an aspect of the meaning of the cross, that when placed beside evangelical views of atonement and soteriology, has some potential to give a further ethical meaning to the cross that bears directly on a theology of power and privilege.

The idea is not in fact Cone's but is brought forward by Cone in his discussion of Reinhold Niebuhr's ethics (Cone, 2011:33-34). Cone sees Niebuhr, as a white theologian, as racist and lacking in many ways, but he is unable to ignore Niebuhr's conception of the "transvaluation of values" on the cross. Cone rightly understands the importance of this idea. Niebuhr takes the idea from Nietzsche, who berated Christianity as weak because its God died as a weakling for the weak. Niebuhr of course embraces this idea. For Niebuhr humanity's sinful pursuit of self-interested power could only be defeated on the cross by a free act of sacrificial surrender on behalf of the other. Christ's death denies the pursuit of power and self-interest and holds up the surrender of self for the other. Cone understands the

significance of Niebuhr's argument for his own. The self-interested power of the oppressor stands in direct opposition to the sacrificial act of Christ on the cross and is therefore Antichrist. The cross of Christ is said to transvalue humanity's value of the self-interested pursuit of power and privilege and to create a new value system or ethic that values sacrifice over power and the other over self. This has significant implications if integrated into an evangelical theology of power and privilege.

Power and privilege are identified by the cross as alien to Christian sanctification and to Christian social ethics. The justification of systems that perpetuate power and privilege, particularly along racial lines, would be challenged by this broader view of the cross, and any ideas of supremacy are of necessity defeated by Cone's and Niebuhr's view of the cross. Again, including this ethical perspective on the cross does not eclipse the evangelical understanding of atonement, it merely serves as an addition to it, an addition that also seems justified, per the previous discussion of kenosis, because the biblical witness also uses the cross of Christ as an exemplar for the life of the believer.

#### 5.2.3.2.1.4 Conclusions

Thus, there are direct connections between an ontological view of the blackness of Christ, Christ's kenosis, and the meaning of the cross for a theology of power and privilege. All three point to a rejection of the pursuit of power and privilege and an affirmation of ethics that supports the sacrificial surrender of the powerful on behalf of the other. These understandings of Christ and Christ's work place a specific ethical and moral burden on the powerful and stand in direct opposition to persons and systems who exercise self-interested power and privilege, particularly to the disadvantage of the poor and marginalized. Systems of supremacy are particularly antithetical to the person and work of Christ.

#### 5.2.3.2.2 The Person of the Holy Spirit

Self-interested power and privilege can also be said to be antithetical to the work of the Holy Spirit. It has already been suggested that Cone has a very limited understanding of pneumatology and in this way his work is of little help. Edwards on the other hand is very helpful in this regard, with a slight modification to an aspect of his pneumatology that even Edwards sees as problematic. Edwards provides an assessment of the Spirit's work and

sanctification and the overcoming of sin that ties directly to Niebuhr's view of the cross above.

Edwards sees the Holy Spirit as the love of God. This perception, of course, is difficult on two counts. It both makes the Spirit a substance not a person and it places the unifying essence of God in a single person of the Trinity. But this is easily avoided by saying that the Spirit participates in the essence of love in the Godhead and that as an aspect of the Spirit's work the Spirit conveys the love of God to the believer, as Edwards suggests, following I John.

This work of the Spirit is important on several levels. The connection of the believer with the love of God restores what was lost in the fall. According to Edwards (1722:301) in humanity's prelapsarian state human self-interest was checked by its relationship to God, particularly God's love. Adam's act of rebellion was to follow his own self-interest in ignoring his relationship with God. In the separation from God in the fall humanity maintains self-interest apart from God's check on that interest through the provision of God's love. The restoration of this love through the Spirit restores the ability of the believer to resist the will to self-interested power and to live and love God and the other as was intended in the original creation. Failure to love, and continuing to seek unchecked power and privilege, are signs of the reprobate not the believer. The implications are clear. Those who possess the Spirit of God turn from self-interested power and privilege towards the surrender of self in the love of God and the other.

Thus, both the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit further illuminate the attributes of love, justice, wrath and power towards the denial of the exercise of self-interested power and privilege in the life of the believer. Unrestrained power is found to be counter to God in God's self. But it still remains necessary to determine whether the views put forward above are consistent with the exegesis of Luke 4, Romans 13, and the household codes considered in Chapter Three above.

### **5.3 Dialogue with the biblical text (Movement Four, Step Three)**

Movement Four, Step Three places in dialogue the doctrinal conclusions above with the analysis of Luke 4, the household codes, and Romans 13 in Chapter Four. That said, the limited scope of the current work must be recognized. Placing the doctrines under consideration in dialogue with different texts, engaging a broader group of texts, or dealing

with these texts in combination with other texts, might yield a different result. Thus, the reader is cautioned to remember the intent of the study to move “toward” a theology of power and privilege. This assumes the intent to begin work that will of necessity be expanded in later research. What is aimed at here is a faithful consideration of the doctrinal and biblical material within the limited scope of research envisioned by this study. That said, the primary theological motifs arising out of Chapter Four—covenant, reversal, inclusion, kenosis, and civil responsibility—provide a productive and substantial set of material for consideration.

### **5.3.1 Covenant and covenant restoration**

The conclusions of Chapter Four, that covenant and covenant restoration are central to the theological cohesion of Luke-Acts, are important in expanding the doctrinal considerations above. Covenant in Luke’s work is marked by the restoration of Israel, and what is evident in the text is God making right what Israel has been condemned for. This marks God at work, through God’s justice, both in God’s wrath in expecting condemnation for Israel and God’s love in correcting that injustice through the expansion of the new covenant community.

Covenant, as seen in Luke, is viewed as relational, not merely, or even primarily, as contractual. This relational focus serves as a direct critique of federalist theology’s hyper-focus on contract and subsequently law and order. It is this prioritization of law and order in Henry that prevents his full realization of his social ethic. Henry lacks the understanding of relationality that would allow him to view justice as anything other than the equal application of judgment under the law. This in turn means for Henry that adherence to the law becomes the primary ethical responsibility of humanity, which weakens any argument in favor of justice and civil disobedience toward unjust laws. In Henry the contractual God of the covenant who administers justice through law has ordained law as the foundation of civil relationship. The federalist perspective often moves theology from the divine right of kings to the divine right of law.

The idea of covenant as the establishment of relationship is more directly in line with Edwards’ view of relationality within the Trinity, the creation, and providence and is more connected with the conclusions on Luke 4 in Chapter 4. God, whose essence is love that exists in mutuality and equality within God’s own Triunity, extends God’s love towards the establishment of a relationship with humanity in and through the new covenant community. God’s love becomes expressed in the relationship of covenant, and relationality becomes

paramount; even if it does not eliminate law, it certainly subordinates it. This subordination of law creates the ethical possibility of civil disobedience where civil law violates God's self-revealed concern for the poor and the marginalized. It ensures that civil law is not so deified in ideas of covenant that it is allowed to contradict God's love for God's creation. This is particularly true, as stated above, when civil law exists as an extension of the self-interest of the powerful, either individuals or groups, in opposition to the needs of those without power.

The biblical expression of relationality and covenant, or more accurately covenant as relationality, stands as a corrective to federalist legality and as a direct affirmation of God's concern for both the divine-human relationship and the relationship of humanity with itself. But covenant in Luke is best understood in light of one condition and three interoperable ethical requirements.

### **5.3.2 Inclusion**

The one condition of the new covenant community is inclusion. In Luke-Acts the new covenant community in Christ is revealed to be inclusive in two ways. First, it breaks down barriers of ethne and culture to include the Gentiles. Second, it breaks down social barriers to include those on the margins of society. In doing so it radically alters the power structure by abolishing the social means through which individuals and groups could be excluded from the social and religious life of the covenant community.

But this inclusion has to be understood as existing within a bounded set. Election is not universal and is limited by virtue of faith in God's own grace. This of course speaks directly to Cone's and Henry's contention that God's wrath cannot be separated from God's love. But it might also be understood within the dual relational requirement of the covenant. Both the love of God and the love of neighbor are said to cohere in a member of the new covenant community. This is true in Edwards' theology of the work of the Spirit drawn from I John and the Gospel of Luke. Those without the love of God cannot be said to be a part of the new covenant community or receive the blessings of it. In this way the poor and oppressed, though they may exist as objects of God's special concern, as is acknowledged by Henry (1983, Vol. 6:409), are not universally saved by virtue of their poverty.

But the new covenant community does exist as an exemplar of the eschatological community envisioned in the Scriptures. As such, it mirrors God's ethical social expectations and God's morality and justice as it relates to the larger secular world. Luke reveals three

primary ethical practices that exist as a response to the inclusive new covenant community. These include reversal, kenosis, and civil responsibility.

### **5.3.3 Reversal**

The prevalence of reversal in Luke has already been argued in Chapter Four. Calls for reversal in the Gospel of Luke look forward to the formation of the new covenant community in Acts and specifically culminate in the communal sharing of goods (Acts 4:32). Luke also seems to recognize that an inclusive community living in covenant relationship, itself a reflection of God's Triunity, requires the surrender of status, power, and privilege for the sake of a community of mutuality and equality both before God and in actual human interactions.

Luke is also attempting to disconnect power, privilege, wealth, and social status from the assumption of God's blessing, so that inclusion in the new covenant community is not predicated on status but requires the surrender of status in order to participate in the community. Luke again is not suggesting that the rich are by virtue of wealth excluded from the community. But the definition of sin as self-interest does highlight the connection between power and privilege and reprobation and the difficult path of surrender to God faced by those in positions of power and privilege. The requirement to place no stock in personal position and status and to surrender that for a life lived in service to God and others, particularly others with less status, power, and privilege, place a distinctly heavy transformational burden on those with power, privilege, and status.

What reversal in Luke does for covenant community is to suggest a divine ethic that values a mutuality and equality within human community. If the new covenant community is the ideal, then the social objective cannot support a social condition of "each according to their due" (Henry, 1983, Vol. 6:406), but should embrace instead the principle of "each according to the needs of the other." Thus, surrender to the needs of the other is central to biblical principles of kenosis and also affirms Cone's, by way of Niebuhr's, embrace of the transvaluation of values on the cross.

### **5.3.4 Kenosis**

Kenosis as an exemplar for ethical behavior has already been discussed in relation to the household codes. What has been suggested is that the household codes at a basic level inform

a mutuality of service that asks the “head” to submit to God and serve the other. This both subordinates any power they may have to God and obligates them under God to care for the other in the interest of God not in their own self-interest. This they must do because of what Christ did in voluntarily and temporarily subordinating himself to the Father, accepting his incarnation and his death on the cross. The idea of mutual surrender and mutuality of service, as well as the abandonment of self-interest in subordination to God and the other illustrates the alien imposition of notions of distributive justice onto biblical notions of social justice. Embracing the kenotic example of Christ means the abandonment of power, privilege, and self-interest, and embracing the transvaluation of values in favor of mutuality and service of the other. This is no less true of relationships within the church as it is of the relationship of the church to broader humanity.

### **5.3.5 Civil authority**

There is a problem that must be addressed in relation to those things expected of the new covenant community and those things the community is expected to do in relation to greater society. This of course has been the subject of theological works ranging from Richard Niebuhrs (2001) seminal work *Christ and Culture* to Stanley Hauerwas’ (2014) *Resident Aliens*. It also takes up a substantial portion of the discussion in the final book of Calvin’s *Institutes*. The interest here is primarily to understand the implications of civic responsibility and social action that derive from the analysis and conclusions related to Romans 13 and Luke 4 in Chapter Four. There are four primary considerations in relation to these two passages. First, in Luke 4 the clear identification of both the marginalized and the Gentiles as persons of concern in Christ’s work is critical in understanding the community’s relationship to broader humanity. Christ’s admonition that he has come to “preach good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18) make the marginalized a specific point of missional concern for inclusion in the new covenant community. The church has an obligation to specifically reach the poor. It also has an obligation by virtue of Gentile inclusion to reach beyond particular ethne to ensure the inclusion in Christ’s community of mutuality and equality for those of all ethnic groups. The missional call to inclusion forestalls any attempt to justify isolationism and means that the church must be a vehicle of inclusion within its own community and in its encounter with the larger world.



Second, the church's role in confronting evil gains even more clarity when sin is defined as the pursuit of self-interest apart from God. This definition of evil means that the church is involved in the analysis and critique of power, and real opposition to it. The assessment of power in its consequential impact is central to the prophetic role of the new covenant community. While Henry (1967:53-79) is correct that any cultural engagement must recognize the supernatural and spiritual components of social change, it must be pointed out that if sin/evil is understood as the exercise of unrestrained self-interested power, then confrontation with social injustice deriving from power imbalance and supremacy is in fact a direct attack and revealing of the spiritual condition of sin that is at the core of injustice and suffering in the world. The problem is that Henry sees social action as a mere moral response and emphasizes individual salvation as the real "spiritual" solution to social ills. Henry is not wrong, but merely shortsighted in this. Luke's placing of John's call to repentance (Luke 3:1-14) before Christ's call to salvation (Luke 4:16-30) is instructive. In the act of identifying sin in the abuse of power rooted in self-interest the church through social action calls the world to repentance. Missiologically, Luke has it right. The world has to see first why it stands in need of a savior.

But there is also a need to oppose Cone at this point. Cone's disconnection of liberation from salvation, and the emphasis of the former over the latter, in many ways degenerates into a moral sociology with limited or no reference to spiritual reality. This was seen specifically in Cone's existentializing of even the omnipotence of God (Cone, 1997b: 86). As Rowe (2009) and Green (1997) make clear, the witness of Luke-Acts is to both the social and the spiritual. The confrontation of evil by the new covenant community is a real engagement against the exercise of unrestrained self-interested power on behalf of those it harms. But the church cannot simply, like Cone, do so out of a moral or ethical social obligation. Through social action the church identifies sin, directly confronts it as sin, and proclaims God as the remedy in the midst of its battle. Social action, therefore, becomes a call to repentance as a first step towards a missional encounter with Christ. The clarity with which evangelical theology identifies and engages social imbalances of power as constituent with sin is imperative. Cone's lack of a clear doctrine of original sin weakens his appeal to the church's responsibility for challenging evil, evil having no connection to a root cause. But evangelical theologians like Henry need also to see social action in opposition to abuses of power as the first step in their missional efforts because it points the world towards its

sinful nature and calls the world to repentance in the very real acts of protest, revolution, and the work of social reform.

Finally, Barth's analysis of the church's responsibility in light of Romans 13 and Hodge's affirmation of a just revolution are also instructive. Barth (1968:481-492) believes that Romans 13 does not alleviate the church from responsibility to civil government but in fact obligates it. Barth, as illustrated in Chapter Four, identifies the church as a subset of all citizens with a distinct life regulated by God, but insists that it has an existence as an institution within larger society with an obligation to participate and engage within that society. This larger society, however, has no connection within the church, therefore it has no authority over the church. But since the church exists within society it has an obligation and responsibility to it. This highlights the church's particular obligation within a democratic society where both the church and its members have, at least theoretically, voice, votes, and the right to dissent individually and communally. When the government is the people, then any injustice perpetrated by the government is an injustice perpetrated by the people and as a constituent group within society the church and its members become implicit in the injustice. Law and order cannot be seen in a democracy as a justification for inaction. The right to dissent within democracies therefore becomes part of the church's exercise of continued participation in the secular world, as required by Romans 13.

Likewise, Hodge believes that government can be overthrown and replaced through revolutionary action if it fails to fulfill its obligations to the people or proceeds in a manner that violates God's law. Hodge does limit who can rebel and in fact denies the right of rebellion to American slaves. But understood broadly, Hodge's allowance for revolution creates at least the possibility of dissent that seems envisioned in Barth's commentary on Romans 13. Likewise, combined with Barth's view of the power of God, particularly his insistence that God's exercise of power is not devoid of morality or rightness, he creates a condition within understandings of power that provides acceptable reasons for revolution. Hodge's allowance of revolution seen in this way requires not mere objection to government but a moral reason for opposing it. In this way the government's failure to meet its moral obligations to all persons, or its injustice toward particular groups, can justify dissent or revolution.

Far from suggesting a kind of Anabaptist isolationism, both Luke-Acts and Romans 13 require continued participation and direct involvement as a missional, spiritual, prophetic,

and pragmatic act by the new covenant community in the world. Further, in the relational covenantal act of God in Christ the church is called to engage and bear witness to a bounded inclusivism, the abolition of status and position in the interest of others, and a mutuality of service on behalf of the other, as well as a total submission of self-interest to God as an imitation of Christ's kenosis.

### **5.3.6 Conclusions on the connections of doctrinal and biblical analysis**

In conclusion, there seems to be little logical contradiction between the biblical, exegetically conclusions of Chapter Four and the doctrinal conclusions of the current chapter. Both point to a view of power and privilege that calls for the surrender of both power and privilege in service to God and the other. Both see power as sin when recognized as the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest over the interest of others and God. Both point to God's justice as flowing from God's love that includes God's wrath toward those who engage in self-interested pursuit of power and God's love for the marginalized and excluded in God's provision in the new covenant community. Both affirm the church's continued participation, and in light of contemporary democratic governments, its exercise of the right to dissent and in some cases to rebel. Finally, both affirm participation in social action as a direct attack on and illumination of sin, making social action a distinct call to repentance and to God. Both affirm a missional priority in the inclusion and equal treatment of the poor and marginalized. The doctrinal conclusions of this chapter, given the limitations noted at the start of this section, can therefore be said to be at the very least not in any way contradictory to the biblical theology of Luke 4, the household codes, and Romans 13 as understood here.

Having suggested ways in which the doctrine of God, seen in light of a conversation between Cone, Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry, can be understood constructively in the exposition of a theology of power and privilege that is consistent with the biblical analysis of Luke 4, Romans 13, and the household codes, what remains is an evaluation of theological schemas and a consideration of ethical appropriation. This will form the work of the remainder of the study.

## **5.4 Schemas (Movement Four, Part Two)**

Part Two of Movement Four moves beyond individual doctrines to examine the way those doctrines are placed in a system of interactions. While there are some similarities in the

systems of Calvin, Hodge, and Henry there are some important differences as well. Edwards lacks a completed systematic theology and must be dealt with primarily in outline. Cone opposes the use of schemas at all. This suggests the need to engage with both the traditional perspective in its unity in diversity and with Cone's opposition. All of this will be considered towards a constructive proposal that will suggest a schema that is offered not as an outline of a comprehensive systematics but as a systematic presentation that best addresses a theology of power and privilege that is envisioned in the doctrinal and biblical constructive suggestions in Movement Four Part One above.

#### **5.4.1 Traditional schemas (Movement Four, Part Two, Step One)**

To begin with Calvin, it must be remembered that Calvin opens his *Institutes* by debating whether theology should begin with the doctrine of God or the doctrine of mankind. Calvin questions whether he should begin with God because God creates mankind and is the subject of theology, or with humanity because God is only understood by humanity in relation to the human condition. He settles, although without a great deal of insistence, on a starting point in the doctrine of God. Calvin's overarching order includes the revelation of God, the doctrine of God proper, the doctrine of mankind, and mankind's relations in the world, including the church and civil government. Other than Calvin's choice to place the doctrine of God before the doctrine of mankind, his schema balances the broader categories of doctrine, and his admission that he could have begun with the doctrine of mankind indicates that he did not see either doctrine as independent even if he does conclude that the doctrine of God is dominant in the system. Within Calvin's doctrine of God, however, there is a decidedly higher priority placed on the works of God than the person of God, but the latter is not neglected in Calvin's work either. Calvin's work, developed over many years and many revisions, has an internal logic and coherence, but his schema does not seem to determine its individual parts.

Hodge follows Calvin in beginning the body of his systematics, following an extensive prolegomenon, with the doctrine of God. Hodge's work divides into three main sections the doctrine of God, anthropology, and soteriology. Hodge's conclusions are dependent on his schema in that each doctrine builds upon the other. His prolegomenon is distinctive in its broader attention to methodological considerations in theology and to an expanded discussion of apologetics in relation to proofs of the existence of God.

Carl Henry's six-volume *God, Revelation and Authority* is divided into two parts: God who speaks and shows, and God who stands and stays. As the title suggests, Henry wraps his entire theological reflection in a prolonged engagement with God's revelation of God's self, spending a disproportionate amount of space on the God who speaks. This is the result of the apologetic nature of Henry's work. He writes a systematic treatment of theology against the assault on biblical literalism by progressive Christian scholars and the assault on the propositional nature of truth by secular philosophy. This ensures that the doctrine of revelation and the doctrine of God predominate in Henry's work. To be fair, while it is a comprehensive engagement of Christian doctrine, it is probably wrong to consider *God, Revelation and Authority* a systematic theology aimed at a pure systemization. Henry rather leverages the fullness of doctrine towards a defense of his two apologetic goals. The degree to which he succeeds at this is questionable, but in doing so he does illustrate a unique approach to schema that is instructive for this project. In arranging doctrines and demonstrating their connections and relations to a particular question or objective he illustrates how a multiplicity of schemas can be leveraged towards the illumination of distinct theological questions. Henry, perhaps unintentionally, illustrates the use of schema that moves beyond a neutral, logical correlation of doctrines towards an intentional correlation of doctrine that emphasizes particular points in doctrine or addresses a limited interest.

Edwards has no systematic theology and any attempt to create one would be a purely speculative endeavor. Edwards does have comprehensive notes on doctrine evident in the *Miscellanies* and a very brief outline for a systematic theology. The latter only suggests that he intended to organize everything under a doctrine of providence and that it would relate providence through the lens of creation and recreation. But little can be said further given the scarcity of the materials.

#### **5.4.2 Cone's alternative view (Movement Four, Part Two, Step Two)**

Cone (2018a) even though he attempts a limited systematic theology of doctrine in a *Black Theology of Liberation*, he later laments the attempt in a new preface to the rerelease of the same work. Cone's objection is that Black theology is not subject to White logical categories, but finds its expression of theology in the form of story and the experience of oppression. Thus, he desires his theology to focus solely on liberation as a determining factor in any theological discussion. Cone is not able, however, to wholly escape White theological

categories and despite his objection to systematic schemas, liberation does serve as an organizing category, even if fragmentary, across his theological work. Thus, even Cone is unable to avoid a logical organizing principle in his work.

#### **5.4.3 Constructive conclusions (Movement Four, Part Two, Step Three)**

In suggesting a specific theology of power and privilege it has to be admitted that the aim in developing a logical coherence within doctrinal categories is to address a specific contemporary question: what does theology have to say about power and privilege with particular reference to racism? Unlike Calvin or Hodge, who sought to place in a logically, coherent and neutral way the various doctrines of the faith, this study does not aim at a neutral assessment of the logical connections among all categories but a coherent integration of doctrinal categories that speak to the specific question being asked. This work is best seen as constructive, not systematic, although the construction must certainly include an organizing principle. This makes the work of writing a theology of power and privilege as it relates to the organization of doctrine more akin to Henry's work in that the doctrines are brought together toward a demonstration of a particular interest that goes beyond their natural logical priority and affinity one with the other.

This project has attempted to build its doctrinal conclusions on a very precise methodology. It has challenged bias by engaging empathetically and analytically with the work of Cone, it has affirmed Cone's theological instinct that there is a racist logic evident in the evangelical theological tradition personified by Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry, it has also affirmed that there is a social consciousness in Luke-Acts and the other texts analyzed, and that there are doctrinal traditions that both confirm and contradict Cone but that suggest a way forward that de-emphasizes power and privilege and creates space for social action in the service of the other. If the previous work is embraced as accurate, then a schema or construction only serves as a vehicle for emphasizing the conclusions of the work. It must not either reconstruct the work in a way that alters its conclusions in its specifics or that over-emphasize one aspect to the detriment of an equally important component of the work. With that in mind, the following represents the doctrinal connections drawn in this work.

#### **Outline of a Theology of Power and Privilege**

*Prolegomena* On revelation and the primacy and authority of Scripture  
 Scriptural literalism and the interpretation of “liberationist” texts  
 Scriptural literalism and the theological meaning of historical particularities  
 Scriptural literalism and the equal importance of Action, Event, and Speech

*God in relation to God’s self*  
 Revelation as work  
 Providence  
     God’s supremacy  
     Primary vs. secondary causes  
     Creation  
     Covenant  
     Implications for power and privilege

*The Person of God*  
 God’s Attributes  
     Love as the essence of God  
         Mutuality  
         Equality  
         Other-directedness  
     The emanating attributes  
         Justice  
         Power  
 The work and person of Christ  
     The ontologically Black Christ  
     Christ’s kenosis  
     The meaning of the cross  
 The work of the Holy Spirit  
     The Spirit as conveyor of the love of God  
     The Spirit as transforming through/in love  
         Implications for Power and Privilege

*Humanity in relation to God*  
 The distinction between God and humanity  
 Humanity’s separation from God  
     Self-interested power as sin  
 God in covenant relationship to humanity  
     The bounded inclusivity of the new covenant community  
         Social inclusion  
         Ethnic inclusion  
     The relational expectations of the new covenant  
 Community  
     The imitation of Christ’s kenosis  
     Reversal  
     Civil responsibility  
         Implications for a theology of power and privilege

The choices above are driven directly by the preceding constructive biblical and doctrinal work with the exception of the choice to divide the discussion of revelation into sections under both prolegomena and the person of God. These are intentional and meaningful choices. Revelation is treated first as prolegomena to separate the methodological insistence on the primacy of Scripture from the actual implications of God's self-revelation under the doctrine of God. This keeps larger methodological considerations from dominating the doctrine of God. Also, the choice was made to place the doctrine of the person of God prior to the work of God. This becomes possible by separating the two parts of revelation to discuss separately scriptural authority and the work of revelation. Logically this allows the work God to be considered as it flows out of the person of God. The normal treatment of the full question of revelation before person and therefore work before essence in some ways seems to logically limit the totality of God to God's revelation.

What must be noted is that this is simply a plan to organize the material in a way that would speak directly to the question of power and privilege. It is offered in response to Cone's (2004:139-152) accusation that White theology does not take racism seriously in its theological reflection. This critique is deemed accurate because of two tendencies within White theology and particularly evangelical theology. The first has already been identified. Because systematic/dogmatic theology is pursued in the interest of a logical coherence within and among doctrines, it aims at a neutrality that intentionally excludes contemporary concerns. Second, the separation of ethics from systematic theology ensures that ethical issues like race, power, and privilege are treated independently of doctrinal considerations. The consequences of this are apparent in considering Edwards' inability to apply his own understanding of love in the essence of God to British colonization and mistreatment of Native Americans and to slave ownership. The reintegration of ethics with doctrine will be explored in Movement Five, but for now this observation is offered in support of the constructive doctrinal exploration of contemporary issues and the development of schemas that present biblical and doctrinal issues in ways that illuminate and answer contemporary questions.

Before moving to a summary of Movement Four and on to Movement Five it should also be made clear that as a coherent schema the outline above is not offered exclusively. That is, it is not the only possible way of organizing material while expressing the previous



work with integrity. It is recognized that other choices would be equally effective. Also, what is offered above was limited to the scope of the materials covered, which was limited due to the scope of this work. A broader treatment of additional doctrinal categories could be envisioned that altered the schema. Again, it is an effort to capture the current project within its parameters and self-limitations.

### **5.5 Conclusion (Movement Four)**

Movement Four has explored the doctrine of God by placing Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, Henry, and Cone in conversation with a specific focus on a theology of power and privilege with reference to racism. In doing so the project examined the doctrine of God and its constituent parts in terms of the various positions of the theologians under consideration and in conversation with the biblical work of Chapter Four. The project also suggested a schema by which the doctrine could be organized in a way that highlighted the doctrinal work and allowed opportunity to address the contemporary issues of race, power, and privilege. This movement advanced beyond description to constructive choices between available alternatives and toward a theology of power and privilege. The result was the preservation of those doctrinal positions necessary to evangelical identity, while also utilizing Cone's critique to expose latent possibilities in the tradition or to highlight and correct deficiencies.

This process yielded a specific way of addressing the doctrine of God in relation to power and privilege. The evangelical focus on the authority and primacy of Scripture was maintained, contra Cone, as a way of insisting on the literal, historical reality of the text and its theological significance. In doing so it insists that evangelical theology has a higher burden of proof when moving away from the literal interpretation of texts, particularly texts of liberation, because of its focus on the literal historical meaning of Scripture. There is also a preference in the current work toward highlighting the mutual, equally important, theological meaning of both act and speech in God's revelation. Cone's focus on the acts of God and the significance of the historical, political and social details of Christ's life and ministry was taken as instructive for the evangelical tradition. But Cone's liberal theological understanding of Scripture was abandoned in favor of Henry's insistence on the literal, historical truth claims. It is believed that holding evangelicalism to a higher standard of proof in relation to liberationist texts is a better way of meeting Cone's critique than an acquiescence to Cone's own views.

As regards providence, this study could not affirm Cone's existentialist views but addressed Cone's concern related to the racist use of providence by way of Hodge's understanding of secondary causes in non-salvific events and the adoption of, again, a higher standard of evidence in citing contemporary events as within the providence of God. Providence was also equated to God's redemptive-historical work advanced through God's covenants with God's people. This was offered as a matter of preserving evangelical identity and as consistent with scriptural understandings. But this work moved covenant away from contractual and transactional federalist understandings to insist on a relational understanding that emphasizes the inclusivity over the exclusivity of election while also maintaining a bounded understanding of inclusion and suggesting the incompatibility of universal salvation with evangelical theology.

The discussion then moved to a consideration of the person of God inclusive of both God's essence and the economy of the persons of the Trinity. Edwards' views on love as the essence of God from which all other attributes are derivative was accepted over Hodge's and Henry's purely retributive understandings of justice and their lack of any theory of how the attributes cohered in the person of God. Edward's demonstration of love as essence in the Godhead defined by mutuality, equality, and other-focus informed understandings of justice as derivative of love and answerable in its practice to the other-focus, mutuality and equality as central determinants of rightness and morality at the core of God's essence, but, in conversation with Cone's, Henry's and Hodge's understanding of retributive justice, was reimagined. God's wrath is a necessary component of God's love. God cannot be said to love the oppressed if God does not act in either retributive or transformative ways on the oppressor. This allows for an answer to theodicy, even if it does not totally eliminate the problem.

As regards the attribute of omnipotence in the Godhead, the study adopted Barth's definition of the power of God and suggested direct implications for the human use of power. This was done in conversation with Edwards' definition of original sin as unrestrained self-interest. The conclusions greatly limit the ability of humanity to ascribe human power to God and create a higher degree of consideration of power dynamics within theological attribution than is normally considered in evangelical theology.

As regards the work of the persons of the Trinity, the person of Christ and the Holy Spirit were highlighted. Cone was followed, with assistance from Niebuhr, almost

exclusively in this section. Cone's views of the ontological blackness of Christ were shown to be a necessary corrective to the lack of a hermeneutical equivalent within North American evangelicalism. Christ's kenosis was offered as an exemplar focused directly on persons holding positions of power and privilege, and while maintaining the salvific meaning of the cross, it was also suggested that the cross evidenced, in direct relation to Christ's kenosis, an ethical call to the "transvaluation of values" so that the strong must deny power and privilege in the interest of serving God and the other. The Holy Spirit was discussed in its role as a conveyor of the love of God to redeemed humanity, and this then serves as a mark of redemption in the life of the elect, as well as a transformer of the oppressor into a person of love who in turn is redirected in service to the oppressed.

These doctrinal positions and their ability to address power and privilege were guided by Cone's correct analysis that racism as a topic of theological discussion has been absent in the White theological tradition. They affirmed, along with the biblical analysis of Chapter Four, a theological focus on inclusion, reversal, covenant relationship, justice as love inclusive of wrath, and the rightness of mutuality, equality and a focus on the other. These in turn suggest four areas of appropriation toward ethical and pragmatic consideration. This will be the work of Movement Five, which will conclude this project.

## **5.6 Ethical appropriation (Movement Five)**

The separation of ethics from theology has, as suggested above, weakened both ethics and doctrinal engagement and has led to a disconnection of sound doctrine from its implications for the behavior of both the church and the world. The stated methodology of this project requires that doctrinal construction be readily appropriable into ethical reflection.

Bernard Ramm (1983:144-150) discusses this specific problem. Ramm follows Barth in his assessment that Kant, reacting to Nietzsche's nihilism, proposes that ethics could be justified on purely rational grounds apart from any reference to divine command. This effectively severed ethics from theology. The problem became even more acute with the rise of postmodernism and the subjectification of intellectual rationalism. Ethics, per Kant, required the application of logical reasoning, but postmodernism challenged the possibility of a universal ethical truth and neither had an authority or exemplar for human moral or ethical behavior. Christian ethics, separated from any necessary dependence on systematic theology, adopted either a rationalist or postmodern perspective on ethical issues.

Evangelical ethics in some cases did work within a biblical propositional framework, but propositionalism limited the extent to which any issue could be pursued. This weakened ethics, which remain disconnected from broader theological discussions and dogmatic theology, which in turn remain disconnected from contemporary concern. This of course is what, again, Cone (2004:139-152) means when he insists that White theologians fail to consider racism in their theological work. Racism as an ethical and moral issue is absent in systematic theologies that have segregated it out of dogmatics and made it a purely ethical concern.

Ramm favors Barth's solution. Ethics must be reconnected to theological work at the point of the doctrine of God. Ramm insists that God and God's self—not simply specific propositional commands, but God in God's very essence—is the starting point of Christian ethical consideration. Ramm affirms that the doctrine of God speaks directly to contemporary issues. Cone only briefly and reluctantly considers the doctrine of God and in doing so downplays portions of the doctrine, particularly God's person, and makes portions of the doctrine significant only as existential encounters in the human spirit. Cone in that way leaves unexplained a critical doctrine that might have addressed racism within the White theological tradition. The doctrinal work on God that precedes this section fills this gap in Cone's work. Per Ramm, it also affords an opportunity to suggest the praxial/ethical significance of the doctrines that have been affirmed. On the basis of the preceding doctrinal and biblical study of the doctrine of God, four specific areas of ethical concern arise. They include power, justice, community, and responsibility.

The exercise of power in contemporary society must be seen in relation to God's omnipotence and human sin. This was explored above. In short, the conclusions were that power rests with God, that the human exercise of power can only with great critical analysis and hesitation be ascribed to God, and that human sin viewed as unrestrained self-interested pursuit of power makes most human exercises of power and privilege suspect.

What this means from an evangelical ethical perspective is that power analysis is central to the task of evangelical theological ethics. Evangelical engagement begins with the assumption, unless demonstrated otherwise, that all human exercise of power and privileges at its base is corrupted by sin. Power dynamics must be viewed first and foremost as an exercise in self-interest and as such must be viewed as suspect and in need of confrontation and correction.

This also implies that Christians who hold power and privilege over others are morally and spiritually obligated to analyze their own motives and actions within these relationships, the objective being to ensure that their individual and group actions are governed by the transvaluation of values evident in Christ's cross. The abandonment of power, or perhaps the use of power in sacrificial service to the other, should govern the moral and ethical consideration of Christians. Those in positions of power and privilege are under a unique obligation before God to submit to God and service to the other. This service extends beyond the practice of charity that is transactional and towards genuine relationship that establishes real connection. Submission to God requires surrender of self, which includes power, privilege, status, and position. It also means commitment to that which God is committed to. God's commitment to the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed means that Christians in their submission to God must also be committed to the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed, again, not in charitable obedience but in filial love and relationship. Evangelical ethics, pursued under the understanding of power flowing out of the doctrine of God offered here, must be focused on analysis and correction of power dynamics. This understanding of power always operates in the background of any discussion of justice, community, and responsibility.

Justice, as determined above, derives from the essence of love in the triunity of God. As such it is both retributive and liberative. Love as retribution or wrath ensures that the tyrant and the oppressor are not without judgment and punishment. Justice as liberation means that in the justice of God the poor, the oppressed, the excluded, and the marginalized are elevated to equality with the powerful, the privileged, and the rich and offered the full blessings of eternity.

If God's justice is seen as an exemplar for determining human justice and as a basis for the ethical analysis of justice and injustice, human justice must rise to the level of the justice of God. It must be prepared to stand in opposition to the tyrant and oppressor seeking self-interested power as an expression of sin. It must actively pronounce the judgment of God and seek the end of tyranny and oppression as direct results of humanity's fall.

Further, justice must be seen as the elevation of the poor, the marginalized, and the outcast to a level of mutuality and equality. The standard of justice cannot be distributive which merely "values" all equally or that provides for each only according to their due. If it is to rise to God's standard, justice must be restorative, where the focus is the elevation of

those who suffer under the consequences of self-interested power, or put another way, under the consequences of fallen humanity. It is true equality that gives to each according to their need. This is not to prescribe or deify a particular civil political philosophy but to provide a standard by which Christianity critiques every political system and works within it to secure justice for the other and to oppose injustice in any form. Retributive justice aimed at oppressors and oppressive systems and restorative justice aimed at the oppressed and the marginalized, all predicated on an understanding of God's justice as derivative of God's love, should form the basis of Christian assessments of justice and injustice and Christian responses to the same.

The idea of community rooted in Christ's new covenant community further engages Christian practice in regard to power and privilege. The idea of reversal and submission inherent in Luke and understandings of the new covenant require the elect to surrender power, privilege, and status in the interest of mutuality, equality, and a commitment to serving the other. Christian community, in light of the findings of this study, cannot be characterized by self-interest. It is instead that bounded community of inclusion where God has, through the power of the Spirit, brought self-interest back under God's control and infused God's love, again through the Spirit, into believers who by God's love are bound one to another. This act of the Spirit requires those who form the community and the community collectively to evidence a love for God that extends as a divinely guided love of neighbor. This love for the other is expressed in service and engagement.

God has revealed an intent that the poor, the marginalized, and the excluded by virtue of their race/ethnicity are welcomed into the new covenant community and are a special object of Christ's missional concern and his compassion. This inclusivity is the mission that the church has inherited and therefore the church has a special concern for the poor, the marginalized, and the diverse people of the world. Inclusion unites all believers in community, which is a community of mutuality, equality, and service.

Inclusivity leads to diversity, which requires reversal and surrender. A community reflective of God is a community that exhibits the love, mutuality, and equality evident in the Godhead. Christian community is judged by whether or not its members through the love and grace of God have surrendered sinful self-interest in the interest of serving the other. If they are engaged in the missional inclusion of the poor, the marginalized, and the outcast, as well as all peoples regardless of race and ethnicity, and if in so doing these individuals assume

places of equality and mutuality and restorative care within the new covenant community, these praxial concerns, derived from biblical and doctrinal study, can be said to form the marks of the church.

The missional formation of the new covenant community involves inclusion, service, and love extended to the poor and marginalized and the racially excluded, but the doctrinal considerations above also concluded that both individual Christians and the church have responsibility for continued participation in civil society. That participation is guided by standards of love, justice, and restoration defined by the rightness and morality of God. Christians must base all political, social, and cultural actions, not on political and social philosophy, but on an understanding of God's perfections. Christians, therefore, respond in support of or opposition to political and social actions not out of an appeal to appropriateness and legality within particular political forms or social norms but in relationship to their conformity to the standard predicated on God's triune being. Any political or social pragmatism that is in opposition to who God is in God's self stands opposed to God and must be opposed by God's elect. The idea of "a necessary evil" is contradictory to a Christian ethic based on a biblical understanding of God.

This means that Christians cannot be passive or dismissive of injustice, abuses of power, systemic inequality, or human need, all of which arise out of the unrestricted self-interest of the powerful and privileged. These sins, whether committed by a collective or an individual, are sins nonetheless. In this way social action and social justice become an obligation of evangelicalism. Through social activism the sinner(s) are called to repent; this is not merely a confession but primarily a call to cease and reverse the action. For that reason, Christian social action must also explicitly reference the fall of mankind as the root of all injustice and Jesus Christ as the only true answer, while also calling on the sinner to cease and correct evil acts of injustice. This distinguishes Christian social activism from secular social activism and Christian social ethics from philosophical social ethics even when the final objectives are the same.

Christian individuals and Christian churches within democracies have a special obligation. If democracy is seen as the rule of the people, then the people are the government and its acts are their acts. Those who have a voice, a vote, and the right to dissent also have responsibility and culpability. As individuals and institutions within democratic societies the sin of the government is the sin of the people.

Thus, the doctrine of God envisioned here extends the specific ethical and praxial social obligations in relation to power, justice, community, and responsibility. Does it then also extend to a personal ethic? Yes, there are personal moral obligations derived from the doctrine of God that mimic the social obligations above.

Individuals are called to an abandonment of power and privilege in humility before God. Personal humility is a focus in the theology of Calvin, Edwards and Hodge. So, its practice as an ethical extension of a theology of power and privilege draws on a long Reformed evangelical tradition. Surrender to God and service to neighbor is not a controversial idea in evangelical theology. But what is envisioned here is a humility that draws both on humanity's lowness in relation to God's glory and a vision of humility as an action not an attitude. Humility, when it is contemplated within the affirmation of hierarchy and distributive justice, often references an attitude and determines action based on position, station, and status. Each should be humble in relation to their social position. But humility here insists on the Lukan principle of reversal where the powerful and the privileged are called to abandon their power and privilege in the interest of mutuality and service. Humility is actual surrender of the privileges of status. Power is abandoned by the powerful in an imitation of Christ's kenotic sacrifice on the cross.

Further, individual Christians are called to the practice of justice in opposition to evil abuses of power. They are called to community in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and every race of humanity, and finally they are called to individual engagement in civil society through the lenses of God's standards evidenced in God's own self.

Given both of these social and personal ethical frameworks that were derived directly from a particular view of the doctrine of God, what can be said about how these standards speak to and advance racial justice and prevent the re-encroachment of racism into evangelical theology? First, the definition of sin as self-interested power places the exercise of power and privilege inherent in racism and White supremacy outside the acceptable realm of practice of Christians and Christian communities. Second, the degree to which this study has insisted on the abandonment of power, reversal and inclusion makes the perpetuation of exclusive, self-interested racial acts antithetical to Christianity itself. Likewise, the affirmation of Christian responsibility for civil society with a redefinition of Christian activism as an evangelistic identification of sin and call to repentance that is also a call to action stands in opposition to evangelical passivity and dismissiveness around racial justice



issues. Doctrines shown to have been previously abused in the interest of racist logics have been examined and re-engaged within the tradition in ways that leave them unavailable for racist appropriation. What is suggested then is that the historical, biblical, and doctrinal work, within the limitations outlined in the final conclusion below, points to an evangelical vision of power and privilege that, when appropriated toward ethical and practical ends, does logically forestall the perpetuation of racist logics and the use of those logics toward racist ends. What then should be said by way of a final conclusion to the entirety of this project?

## 6.0 Conclusions

What then can be said by way of conclusion and summary about the project as a whole? The project began with Movement One, Step One by engaging in an emphatic analytical reading of James Cone, who was posited as the theologian representing the tradition most distinct from that of the author. In this way there is an attempt made to challenge the tendency toward author bias by requiring the author to engage with alternate viewpoints from his own. This formed the work of Chapter Two.

Cone was examined in terms of his theological agenda, his rhetorical persona and his conversation partners. Understanding Cone in this way allowed the author to avoid critical stereotypes of Cone's work that often exclude Cone from consideration by evangelical theologians.

Among those attributes shaping Cone's agenda what was emphasized was first, his fight against White supremacy (2.1.2.1) in which Cone engages and challenges the White theological community directly. Cone's critique of White theology has gone largely unanswered and has gotten lost in debates over the efficacy of a Black particularist theology that can be separated from any supposed universal theology. The lack of an answer to Cone's critique of White theological racism suggests a deficiency in White theology generally and Reformed evangelical theology specifically.

Second, Cone's agenda includes an apologetic for a truly Black Christianity (2.1.2.2). This section demonstrated that Cone was working to retain a generation of young Black women and men within the Black Power Movement who were rejecting Christianity as a religion of the oppressor. Cone was working to hold on to a Christianity that was uniquely Black. This suggests that much of Cone's work was apologetic and evangelistic. It can be seen, at least in its motivation, to be in line with White efforts to contextualize Christianity for successive younger generations. Seen in this way, Cone's efforts hold some affinity to White apologetics in ways that open up the possibility of theological conversation.

Cone also draws on a rhetorical persona both to advance his apologetic agenda and to heighten his critique of White theological racism (2.1.3). Contra Andre Johnson it is argued here that Cone took on the persona of a rebel not a prophet. This rebel persona is often the point at which Cone's theology is viewed as wholly incompatible as a conversation partner for White theology. But viewed as a rhetorical device it is possible, whether Cone would

approve or not, to separate Cone's theological content from his rhetoric in a way that opens doors to theological dialogue.

It is also true that Cone, despite his insistence otherwise, is connected to and influenced by the White theological tradition in ways that also open up avenues for theological dialogue. Cone's thought does not exist in a vacuum. He is, according to his own admission, influenced by his "intellectual trinity," the Black Arts Movement, other Black theologians, global theological movements, and Marxism (2.1.4). Cone also evidences influence drawn directly from White European and North American theology (2.2.1). This means that Cone does not lack points of contact with a broader theological discourse.

Similarly, Cone's theological corpus (2.1.3) has a subset of works that specifically challenge and critique White supremacy and the White theological tradition in ways that require, as suggested above, a theological response from the White theological establishment. This includes some of Cone's earliest works. This aspect of Cone's work has often been lost on White readers who tend to focus on the separatist and particularist nature of Cone's Black liberation theology.

This chapter also dispelled three myths (2.1.6) that hinder evangelical theological interaction with Cone. Cone is shown to operate within a liberal modern foundationalist perspective, not within postmodern cultural relativism (2.1.6.1). Second, Cone does not deny a universal Christian truth, he merely attempts to separate the universal from truth advanced primarily by White theologians (2.1.6.2). Finally, while Cone does come close to arguing for the exclusive salvation of the oppressed, he does stop short of saying that the poor are saved by virtue of their poverty (2.1.6.3). These common misconceptions of Cone, once dispelled, also suggest opportunities for dialogue.

The remainder of Chapter Two is spent demonstrating that Cone has both a methodology and a theology that is accessible to evangelicals (2.2). While Cone makes largely rhetorical comments to the contrary, he both engages with standard doctrinal categories (2.3) and uses standard, mostly modernist liberal, methods which also create openings for dialogue.

Having established Cone as a possible dialogue partner and identified White theology's lack of an answer to Cone's critique, Chapter Two also suggests that Cone's primary critique of White theology is that racism is embedded in White theological discursive systems (2.4). It was also evident that this assessment functions as a theological intuition in

Cone, not as a proven proposition (3.1.1). There is nothing in Cone's work that can simply be accepted as proving his point in a way that does not require further consideration. Therefore, his critique had to be either proven or disproven with reference to the evangelical tradition. Before directly critiquing evangelical theology, it was therefore necessary to determine whether Cone's theological intuition was correct in regard to evangelicalism. This formed the work of Chapter Three and Step Two of Movement One.

Chapter Three advanced the thesis by examining a Reformed evangelical tradition primarily centered in North American Reformed evangelicalism to determine whether Cone's claims of embedded racism could be said to be true of this tradition. The chapter proposes a methodological approach to the historical analysis of racism that depends heavily on discursive as opposed to nondiscursive analysis. Following Goldberg's philosophical definition of racist logics, it sought to identify racist vocabulary, grammar, narrative, and performance of narrative (3.1.5).

Once a methodology was articulated, the chapter moved on to providing a rationale for the particular tradition and historical figures to be analyzed. The study focused on the form of Reformed evangelicalism that emerged in the United States in the 1940s out of and as an alternative to separatist fundamentalism. Because the study is focused on doctrinal construction, the tradition was further narrowed to the doctrinal stream of the tradition which was prioritized over an equally influential pietist stream. The central historical figures within this doctrinal stream were further narrowed to a subset of theologians including Carl F. H. Henry, Charles Hodge, Jonathan Edwards and John Calvin (3.1.6).

Once a logical methodology was proposed and the tradition narrowed, the chapter applied Goldberg's theory of racist logics to Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry to determine whether Cone's accusation of embedded racism could be said to be true of each individually. The analysis concludes that Calvin (3.2) evidences racist logics at the level of vocabulary and grammar but does not develop these into a racist narrative, nor does he use them to defend racist acts. Calvin does, however, provide discursive doctrinal logics that could be applied by later theologians for racist ends. At best Calvin can be said to exhibit proto-racist logic (3.2.4).

Edwards (3.3) evidences racist logic more clearly than does Calvin. Continuing and expanding on Calvin's racist vocabulary and grammar, Edwards uses them specifically

toward racial narratives. Edwards also evidences racist narrative performance in his nondiscursive practice of holding slaves (3.3.4).

Hodge (3.4) has a theology that clearly embeds racist logics and uses those logics to defend both slavery and White supremacy. He has narrative discourse that specifically addresses the superiority of Whites over Blacks, and he was a slave holder. It would be difficult to deny that Hodge embedded racist logics in his own theological system (3.4.4).

Henry (3.5), who at times seems to suggest an anti-racist theology, does in fact carry over much of the potential racist vocabulary and grammar evident in Calvin, Edwards and Hodge. He does evidence an almost latent racism in some of his own discourse and his views so minimize the questions of racism, power and privilege as to provide openings for ongoing racists logics. But he cannot be categorized as racist in the way Edwards and Hodge can, and the fact that he is a theologian of the modern era precludes the use of the term proto-racist. The term “pragmatically” racist is employed instead. Henry’s system, if it were applied towards less socially conscious ends, could be used to further racist logics (3.5.4).

By way of conclusion Chapter Three ends (3.6) with the assertion that to some degree all four individuals under consideration perpetuated elements of vocabulary and grammar within their theological discourse that was either employed by them for racist ends (Edwards and Hodge) or that preserved vocabulary and grammar that could be used for racist ends by other theologians (Calvin and Henry). In this way it was suggested that Cone’s assessment that racism was embedded in White theology could be demonstrated to be true of the evangelical tradition under consideration. This then creates space for a consideration of evangelical biblical exegesis and biblical theology, as well as a constructive examination of evangelical doctrines as they apply specifically to questions of power and privilege with reference to race.

Chapter Four then takes up a consideration of Movements Two and Three which are an examination of pertinent biblical texts. Movement Two, Step One (4.1.2) identifies and defends the use of Luke 4:16-30 as a central text for either affirming Cone’s liberationist reading or evangelicalism’s more redemption-historical reading of the text. It is also suggested that the household codes and Romans 13 that play a part in the racist vocabulary and grammar of Calvin, Edwards, Hodge, and Henry serve as texts that may suggest an alternative interpretation when taken alongside Luke 4:16-30.

Movement Two, Step Two (4.2) begins the critical textual analysis of Luke 4:16-30. This section includes a textual analysis (4.2.1) that: 1) examines specific points of interest in the text (4.2.1.1), 2) analyzes contested points of interpretation (4.2.1.2), 3) places Luke 4:16-30 within the unity of Luke-Acts (4.2.1.3), 4) places Luke-Acts in relationship to the other Gospels (4.2.1.4) and 5) examines questions of intertextuality in Luke 4:16-30 (4.2.1.5). This analysis suggested a preliminary interpretation of Luke 4:16-30 (4.2.1.6).

This included, first, the literality of the text. Second, the messianic nature of the text suggests that whatever the messiah is he is one who sets at liberty the oppressed. Third, Jesus who has come in response to Israel's sins is also involved in undoing the previous injustice of Israel through a new ethic of inclusion. Fourth, Lukan salvation, in relation to the other Gospels, is more focused on the social and temporal blessings of salvation. Luke does not deny individual salvation, but this operates more in the background of Luke's Gospel and his focus is instead on the providential scope of salvation. Finally, Luke positions salvation/liberation and Jubilee in the person of Jesus, blurring the boundaries between the spiritual and temporal and privileging the power of Christ over the power of political and social entities. This section concludes that there is a place for Cone's more literal interpretation of the passage as long as the salvific nature of the text is also preserved.

In Movement Two, Step Three alternative interpretations of Luke are considered (4.2.2) including the views of Conzelmann, Green, Marshall, Rowe and Blount. The chapter concludes that all of the views but Marshall's recognize Luke's call for the inclusion and just, ethical treatment of the poor and marginalized within covenant community and as a requirement for missional engagement (4.2.2.2) and as such are consistent with the preliminary interpretation above.

Movement Three (4.2.3) examines the theological significance of the text. In Step One of Movement Three, six primary theological foci are identified (4.2.3.1). First, Luke's view of salvation includes individual salvation, but he also expands the idea of salvation to include its ethical and social dimensions. Second, Luke's theology insists on inclusion, both of the poor and socially marginalized and of the ethnically marginalized as well. Third, the symbolism of Jubilee, if not its actual implementation, is important in Lukan theology. Fourth, all three of these foci are tied together by reference to covenant community. Fifth, Luke emphasizes the inbreaking of God and the resulting collision of cultures. And finally, Luke emphasizes the importance of reversal in the new covenant community.

Movement Three, Step Two (4.2.3.2) examines texts that seem to oppose the theological interpretation of Luke 4:16-30 above. Specifically, these texts include the household codes and Romans 13. The analysis of Romans 13 draws heavily on Barth's normative view and concludes that Romans 13, understood in this way, is consistent with the interpretation of Luke 4:16-30 presented in the textual analysis. Likewise, the household codes are examined, following a "third way" between egalitarianism (which denies the literality of the texts) and complementarianism (which overlooks the rhetorical nature of the texts). This "third way" embraces the literality of the mutuality of servanthood implied in the text but places an emphasis on the kenosis of the "head" which is consistent with the motif of reversal in Luke.

Movement Three, Step Three (4.2.3.3) assesses the use of Luke 4:16-30 by Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry (4.2.3.3.1) and Cone (4.2.3.3.2). The primary assessment offered in relation to the use of the text in Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry is that they work to mitigate the political interpretation of the text toward a redemption-historical understanding. As regards Cone, he elevates the political almost to the exclusion of the redemption-historical connotations of the text.

Additionally, 4.2.3.3.3 relates the work of other Black theologians and biblical scholars. Crowder sees Luke as forefronting the oppressed, while Isaak focuses on communalism and Blount emphasizes the ethical components of the text.

Movement Three, Step Four (4.2.3.4) reaches final conclusions on the theological meaning of the text. Among its conclusions are that the ethical/political components of the text strengthen its implications. Further, reversal is central to any understanding of Luke and the new covenant community he envisions. This is true even when Romans 13 and the household codes are taken into consideration. Likewise, inclusion and unity are central to God's providential plan for the new covenant community. The inclusion of the actual poor and marginalized within this community and their acceptance by way of reversal is paradigmatic of Luke's theology. All of this exists within the sovereignty of God over the social and political powers of this world. The primary themes of sovereignty, covenant and covenant renewal, inclusion, kenosis and reversal are central to Lukan theology as was evident in the study.

Movement Four (doctrine and schemas) and Movement Five (appropriation) are the work of Chapter Five. In order to maintain the scope of this chapter and to ensure adequate

treatment of the doctrines considered, the doctrinal study was limited to the doctrine of God. This focus was deemed appropriate due to the intersection of racist vocabulary and grammar identified in Chapter Three with the issues inherent in the formulation of the doctrine of God. Specifically, revelation (5.2.1), providence (5.2.2), the essence and nature of God (5.2.3.2.1), and the persons of Christ (5.2.3.2.1) and the Holy Spirit (5.2.3.2.2) are considered.

The constructive work on revelation affirms the evangelical view of the authority of Scripture and sees Scripture as God's primary means of revelation, but also suggests that Cone be heard and integrated at three points (5.2.1.5.1). First, while Cone does not affirm the literality of the text of Scripture in his theory of revelation, in his use of Scripture he does insist on the literal, historical use of Scriptures related to liberation. Evangelicalism, however, which favors literal, historical readings of the text, tends toward typological or redemption-historical readings of liberationist texts without clear reasons for moving beyond the literal, historical details of the event. Cone forces a consideration of the degree to which the exodus of slaves from Egypt and Christ's care for the poor and marginalized are to be read first as acts of social and political liberation. While this does not forestall broader redemption-historical readings, it does place a higher burden on evangelicals to defend typological readings and suggests that the political and social realities of the texts cannot be entirely absent from even historical-redemptive interpretations.

Related to this discussion Cone also emphasizes the revelation of God in the acts of God recorded in Scripture. It is pointed out that evangelicalism does not deny the revelation of God in the acts of God but its treatment and use of the latter is often anemic. This is the case with Henry, who emphasizes that God both speaks and shows, but weights his discussion so heavily towards God's speech that God's actions get lost in Henry's discussion. Evangelicalism needs to find a balance between the words and propositions of Scripture and the acts of God recorded in Scripture. This means taking seriously the political and social implications of God's involvement in human history.

Finally, it is suggested that evangelicalism might benefit from Cone's understanding of axiological distance, since Cone adds to Gadamer's understanding of the chronological distance between the contemporary reader and the ancient text by suggesting that by virtue of similarities in culture or status some contemporary readers may be closer to the horizon of the ancient text than other contemporary readers. Cone's suggestion means that oppressed



communities may read the text of Scripture with more clarity than communities of contemporary readers who hold positions of power and privilege.

In terms of the doctrine of providence (5.2.2) a few constructive conclusions were reached (5.2.2.2.3). Cone's view of providence was found to be too focused on existentialist explanations to be helpful. But Cone's broader focus on the political and social implications inherent in Christ's incarnation could serve as a corrective to theologies that focus providence primarily on atonement to the minimization of incarnation. Also, Cone's understanding of eschatology as hope and ethical exemplar with its application for temporal praxis is an important addition to standard evangelical eschatology.

But as a whole this study suggested that evangelicalism has resources within its own doctrinal traditions to formulate an understanding of providence that is more clearly anti-racist. This includes Hodge's views on secondary causes in non-salvific events, which eliminates the requirement to assume that the poor and marginalized are poor and marginalized because "God willed" or "allowed" it. The evangelical view of the fall and original sin provides an origin story for evil that, when combined with Edwards' understanding of human depravity as the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest devoid of the image and guidance of God, gives evangelicalism a basis for the doctrinal critique of power and privilege that is absent in Cone and other liberation theologies.

Further, the recovery of covenant from a federalist focus on judicial/contractual obligations and a refocus on covenant as relationship could have positive implications for a theology of power and privilege. This moves election as an element of covenant away from an overemphasis on exclusion and toward an emphasis on the bounded inclusion inherent in the new covenant community. Within an evangelical system, however, this cannot be a universal election but must maintain a criterion for inclusion separate from social and political distinctives. This again opens up the doctrine of providence to a focus on the ways covenant inclusion shapes understandings of marginalization and of power and privilege.

From there the study moved on to discussions of the person of God (5.2.3). As regards the nature and essence of God (5.2.3.1) the study focuses on love as the essence of God defined as God's love for God's self in God's mutuality, equality, and focus on the other (Edwards), justice as an emanation of divine love that reflects the love within God's triunity (a modification of Edwards), justice as inclusive of God's wrath toward evil and evil actors as an emanation of God's love (Cone and to a degree Edwards), and a definition of God's

power that suggests a limited, if any, role for power as realized in humanity (Barth, 5.2.3.1.4). These understandings of the love, justice and power of God were shown to have direct connections to a theology of power and privilege and to the formulation of an anti-racist evangelical theology.

Moving from the essence and nature of God to the person of God the study dealt first with the person of Christ (5.2.3.2.1). It asserted that Cone's understanding of the ontological blackness of Christ is preferable to prevailing popular images of Christ evident in North American Christianity (5.2.3.2.1.1). In addressing Christ's kenosis the study suggested an understanding that eliminates the use of kenosis as a means to encourage the oppressed to endure in silence. It suggested instead that kenotic definitions should focus on the voluntary nature of Christ's surrender, the biblical use of Christ's kenosis to call the powerful and privileged to surrender status in the interest of the marginalized, and the call to solidarity inherent in Christ's kenosis (5.2.3.2.1.2).

In its treatment of the cross the study suggests that while the soteriological role of the cross must be preserved, evangelicalism must also consider the implications of the cross for the moral and ethical life of the believer. In this regard Cone's use of Reinhold Niebuhr's notion of the transvaluation of values on the cross is followed. This is meant to supplement, not supplant, evangelical understandings of the cross in doctrines of atonement (5.2.3.2.1.3). Taken together, this understanding of the person of Christ envisions an ontologically Black Christ who as an exemplar encourages the powerful and privileged to surrender their status in order to live with the oppressed and marginalized within the new covenant community. Again, this provides a specific Christological approach to an anti-racist, evangelical theology of power and privilege.

The work above modifies, but primarily follows, Edwards' understanding of the Holy Spirit (5.2.3.2.2), continuing to follow Edwards' notion of depravity as unrestrained self-interest. The work of the Holy Spirit is viewed as reconnecting humanity to the restraining love of God, which then moves believers away from self-interest and toward the love of God and others. In this way a believer, empowered by the Holy Spirit, who continues to work toward their own self-interest in opposition to the interest of others, particularly the poor and marginalized, is suspect. Thus, power and privilege as attributes of a believer are challenged and brought under the authority of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Having presented a constructive theology of power and privilege as it relates to the doctrine of God by placing Cone in conversation with Calvin, Edwards, Hodge and Henry, the study then asks whether the resulting theology is consistent or in any way modified by the biblical study found in Chapter Four. This is the work of Movement Four, Step Three (5.3). This section addresses the biblical motifs of covenant and covenant restoration (5.3.1), inclusion (5.3.2), reversal (5.3.3), kenosis (5.3.4), and civil authority (5.3.5). This section concludes that at each point the biblical theological motifs are consistent with the constructive doctrinal conclusions of the previous section (5.3.6), thus advancing the idea that the doctrinal views conform with a biblical understanding of power and privilege, at least as it is evident in Lukan theology.

Having suggested a biblically compliant, constructive evangelical theology of power and privilege, the study continues in Movement Four, Part Two, Steps One and Two to suggest a schema that would highlight or organize a theology of power and privilege. The use of schemas is defined, using traditional understandings of schemas (5.4.1) and in opposition to Cone's insistence that systematic categorization and synthesis should be avoided (5.4.2). It is suggested that while attempts to engage in a "neutral" synthesis of doctrine as is evident in the work of Calvin and Hodge have value, it is also important for a theological schema to organize a full range of doctrine to focus on specific theological concerns, as is evident in Henry's work, where a full range of doctrines are organized around the authority and revelation of God. With this in mind, the study presents an organizing scheme for a doctrine of power and privilege with specific reference to the doctrine of God. This is the work of Movement Four, Part Two, Step Three (5.4.3).

Having presented a biblical, constructive, evangelical theology of power and privilege and an organizing schema, the study turns to the final movement, Movement Five, which focuses on the ethical appropriation of the doctrine presented. This section draws on Bernard Ramm's reintegration of ethics and doctrine to suggest that ethics must be embedded in the doctrine of God (5.6). Applying the notions of justice as emanating from the love of God, ideas of kenosis and reversal in the surrender of power and privilege, and ideas of surrender evident on the cross, the doctrinal work is shown to have direct pragmatic implications in the life of the believer and the church.

With this summary in mind, the project was intended to test whether, in listening empathetically to Cone's critique of White theology, it would be possible to move toward a

theology of power and privilege that could be said to be both thoroughly evangelical and to meet Cone's critique. It did not intend to be a comprehensive theology of power and privilege, particularly in reference to consideration of every possible biblical text, doctrine, and historical theological debate. It did intend to have a breadth in its methodology in order to engage power and privilege across the spectrum of steps involved in the writing of an evangelical theology. But at each movement of the methodology what was considered was narrowed to a select set of persons (Chapter 3), biblical texts (Chapter 4), and doctrines (Chapter 5). Each section gave reasoning for the choices made, which provided the reader with the ability to evaluate the reason for inclusion and exclusion of material. Each section suggested the content considered in the next section and those connections were also intentionally made explicit. But this project recognizes from the beginning that finality in regard to a theology of power and privilege would not be reached. Therefore, the only limited claim that is made is that the conclusions reached are logically consistent given the limiting of materials explored. The study could be said to have an intellectual integrity within the confines of its editorial choices. It is readily admitted that the additions of other persons within the genetic history of evangelicalism, other biblical texts and other doctrines could yield support, refute, or expand the work started here. The importance of the claim that the project intended to move "toward" a theology of power and privilege cannot be overemphasized. It can be said to be successful in that it opens up and demonstrates both the potentiality and the necessity for a doctrinal study of power and privilege particularly in relation to race. In that way, though limited, it is neither inconsequential nor unsubstantial.

What then can be said about whether or not the work accomplishes its primary thesis? The intention from the beginning was to test whether taking seriously Cone's critique of White theology and reengaging the evangelical tradition on questions of power and privilege with reference to race might move toward a constructive theological proposal whose ethical appropriation meets Cone's critique while remaining moored to the evangelical theological tradition. For the following reason it is believed that the answer to the question raised by the thesis is, yes.

First, the interaction with Cone was decisive at several points. Cone's theological intuition related to the embeddedness of racism within the White theological tradition was tested using a subset of theologians deemed to be representative of a Reformed evangelical tradition. This study affirmed Cone's critique but did so by way of historical analysis, not by

accepting Cone's critique as an a priori assumption. Cone's focus on the liberation motif in Scripture and its opposition to the exegesis of the evangelical theologians under consideration helped point the way to a consideration of Luke 4 in relation to the household codes and Romans 13. The latter two texts were chosen because they seemed to underpin racial logics in the evangelical theological tradition. Additionally, Cone's understanding of the theological importance of the historical Christ, God's wrath as a component of God's love, and the ontological blackness of God opened up faults in White evangelical theology and allowed for constructive reconsideration at these points.

But in the interest of the second point of the thesis, staying moored to evangelical theology, there were instances where Cone's positions were so contradictory to the evangelical tradition that embracing them would have completely altered evangelical identity. These points of contradiction included Cone's denial of biblical authority, his subsuming both the providence of God and the omnipotence of God into an existentialist explanation, the lack of a theory of the fall and the origin of evil in his discussion of Christian opposition to evil, and finally, his overly weak soteriology. But in all these cases Cone's critique caused a reexamination of the evangelical tradition and in many cases the recovery of aspects of the tradition that spoke directly to the problem of power and privilege in ways that support Cone's intended results if not his theological logic. These particular theological arguments, while part of the tradition, remained unutilized or underutilized in relation to discussions of power, privilege and race within the evangelical tradition. A prime example of this was Edwards' understanding of love as the essence of God and unrestricted self-interest as the definition of original sin. Edwards himself never realized or applied his own doctrine to issues of colonialism and slavery, but when examined in the light of Cone's insistence that White theology must treat racism as a theological issue, Edwards' theology could be seen with expanded implications. These and other constructive moves in Chapter Five were confirmed as consistent with and further expanded by the biblical exegesis in Chapter Four. This exegesis was in turn considered in conversation with Cone, although the exegesis led to conclusions beyond, but inclusive of, many of Cone's views. All of this work resulted in an evangelical doctrinal understanding of power and privilege that was able to be appropriated into an ethical/theological framework that demonstrated the way these doctrinal conclusions not only cease to perpetuate racism but preclude its use and affirm the necessity of evangelical engagement on the issue of racial justice. In this way this study can be said to

have reached doctrinal conclusions that do take seriously Cone's critique but that remain identifiable as evangelical while also forestalling the perpetuation of racism in White evangelical theology. Again, that is only within the logical integrity of the data points considered.

A word might also be said about how this theology is to be categorized. While it is a self-definition, this theology should be considered as anti-racist and liberative but not liberationist. It both forestalls racism and generates action toward racial justice both in the church and society, but it denies the kind of overarching place of liberation that Cone insists on. The work did not set out to be a liberation theology, and there was no intention of suggesting an abandonment of evangelical theology in the interest of liberation theology. A defense of Black liberation theology was not an objective here. Nor was a critique that sought to supplant it. The intention was focused on doing evangelical theology pointed primarily at White evangelicalism in relation to power, privilege, and race. This work should be seen as an attempt to accept Cone's "word to Whitey" and use it as an opportunity to see through a different lens the implications of evangelical doctrine for questions of race, power, and privilege. Ultimately, it is an effort to move "toward" an extended and renewed evangelical theology that connects doctrine to the contemporary moment without abandoning orthodoxy or ignoring orthopraxy.

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