The Theo-Ethics of Howard Thurman: Reconciliation and Beyond

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To all of those at Rock Church and Circle Urban Ministries,

Who taught me that reconciliation is possible.

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INTRODUCTION

Why is it that Christianity seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively, with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race, religion and national origin? Is this impotency due to a betrayal of the genius of the religion, or is it due to a basic weakness in the religion itself? The question is searching, for the dramatic demonstration of the impotency of Christianity in dealing with the issue is underscored by its apparent inability to cope with it within its fellowship.[1]

– Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*

In 1949, Howard Thurman proposed a provocative question in the Preface of his seminal text, *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Thurman's questioning of Christianity's impotency regarding discrimination and injustice is as searching today as when he wrote it almost seventy years ago. One of the reasons Thurman's question provoked inspection was because it explicitly challenged an assumption held by many Christians of that era: That Christianity had an adequate response – if not solution – to the problems of discrimination and injustice in the U.S. and the world. Or, stated more generally, the assumption held by many Christians that their religion not only makes them better people and neighbors[2] but also that Christianity makes the world a better place.[3]

Written in the aftermath of the Second World War and still under the governance of Jim and Jane Crow Segregation, Howard Thurman's world was still ripe with tension, strife, and fear of the unknown. Discrimination, violence, and injustice were on the hearts and minds of many people in the United States, especially those "with their backs against the wall."[4] In spite of the

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[1] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 7-8.

[2] In the final chapter of *Jesus and the Disinherited* on the love-ethic of Jesus, Thurman examines the meaning of "neighbor." He writes on page 89, "Once the neighbor is defined, then one's moral obligation is clear. . . . Every [person] is potentially every other [person's] neighbor. Neighborlieness is nonspatial; it is qualitative."

[3] Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 467.

[4] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 13.

reality that a great multitude of Christian churches and the white members of those congregations supported and demonstrated a wide variety of racial prejudice, discrimination, and oppression, many people who suffered under these oppressive social conditions were, in fact, also professing Christians, and as such, they looked to their faith to understand, cope, and respond to their difficult life conditions. In Thurman's own words, "The significance of the religion of Jesus to people who stand with their backs against the wall has always seemed to me to be crucial. It is one emphasis which has been lacking."[5]

As both a pastor and professor of theology and religious studies, Thurman's primary audience in *Jesus and the Disinherited* (as well as most of his other books) were those claiming to belong to the Christian tradition, or the term he preferred, followers of the "religion of Jesus." Following the influence of William James, Thurman made a careful distinction between Christianity and the religion of Jesus in that the former is more of an institutionalized ecclesial religion whereas the latter is more of a "personal religion" including communal engagement with the teachings of Jesus.[6] As James explains the difference, in personal religion, there is no "ecclesiastical organization, with its priest and sacraments and other go-betweens, . . . The relation goes direct from heart to heart, from soul to soul, between [one] and [one's]maker. . . . The personal religion will prove itself more fundamental than either theology or ecclesiasticism."[7] For Thurman, a close correlation exists between personal religion and religious experience (to be examined more thoroughly in following chapters).

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[5] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 7.
[6] Howard Thurman, "Colombo Journal" (October 1935-December 1935?, Colombo Ceylon) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman: Volume 1: My People Need Me, June 1918-March 1936*, edited by Walter Earl Fluker, et al. (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 303.
[7] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 29-30.

As a black man who spent the first several decades of his life in the South in the early 20th Century under the governance of Jim and Jane Crow Segregation, Howard Thurman's life experience was informed not only by the debilitating and unjust structures of racial separation but also by the life-giving wisdom and attributes of his mother, grandmother, and the Black Church tradition in which he was raised. From this context, Thurman developed an awareness not only of an *ethos* of racial uplift, but also a hermeneutic of suspicion regarding religion and the Church dogmatism which used Scripture to justify slavery and also promoted exclusivism by declaring who was "in" and who was "out" of the Church – including his own father.[8] These experiences of exclusion and isolation both in society and the Church created a sensitivity in Thurman towards such ideologies and practices.

Stemming from his own context, many of Thurman's early writings including *Jesus and the Disinherited* are primarily aimed at the marginalized and underprivileged in society. Yet, many of his later works were written during his time within interracial and multicultural religious spaces, thus expanding his audience to the greater Christian tradition including peoples of various races, ethnicities, and traditions. Throughout his professional career, he was able to balance the insights of his own experience as one of the marginalized in society with holistic and universalistic visions regarding humanity as a whole. Howard Thurman was not just unique but extraordinary in his ability – and willingness – to cross racial lines both during and after the de-legislation of Segregation.

Even though Thurman's perspective stems from the experiences of the marginalized and disinherited, his inclusive vision allowed him to reach a wide variety of persons of various socio-

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[8] Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart: The Autobiography of Howard Thurman* (New York: Harcourt Brace Javanovich Publishers, 1979), 5-6. Saul Solomon, Howard Thurman's father, died when Howard was young, and when a traveling minister "preached his father into hell," the event made a lasting imprint on Thurman.

political and religious spaces including the privileged in society. In this, Howard Thurman's perspectives, insights, and approach are valuable for privileged Christians because he provides an entry point and space for them to encounter and engage the lived-experiences and perspectives of the marginalized as it relates not only to their shared religion but also to their interdependent – but conflicting – socio-political experiences. As such, Thurman's ideas have broad socio-political implications, but it is important to remember that his primary frame of reference is religious in nature. Thus, Thurman's question from the epigraph above was not simply rhetorical, but probed to the core religious sensitivities of many Christian practitioners as well as to the socio-political validity of the religion itself.

Thurman's question was also searching because it directly linked Christianity's ineffectiveness in challenging discrimination and injustice in society with its apparent inability to challenge these same issues within its own fellowship (not only within individual congregations, but also within various theological traditions, denominations, and the Christian tradition as a whole). Thurman believed these were not two distinct issues but were actually correlative and interdependent. He writes, "If being Christian does not demand that all Christians love each other and thereby become deeply engaged in experiencing themselves as human beings, it would seem futile to expect that Christians as Christians would be concerned about the secular community in its gross practices of prejudice and discrimination."[9] Thurman understood that the fragmentation and discrimination in the Church was inherently linked to the division and injustice prevalent in society, and, therefore, the impotency demonstrated by the Church within the former context was related to its ineffectiveness in the latter. Even though some Christians did not – and arguably, still do not – necessarily see a direct connection between the two,

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[9] Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness: A Personal Interpretation of the Anatomy of Segregation and the Ground of Hope* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 105.

attempts to address the problems in society without concurrently addressing the same issues within the Church is usually limited and even hypocritical. Considering today's continued struggle towards peace, equality, and justice in both society and the Church, Thurman's insight may still ring true. Prior to, during, and following Howard Thurman's time, the proliferation of division and inequality within Christianity[10] – a religious tradition of a plurality of individuals and as a socio-political institution of parish and congregational churches and denominations – continues to be one of the limiting factors in the Church's effectiveness to deal radically and effectively with the issues of discrimination and injustice in society.

Finally, Thurman's question was searching because seventy years later Christianity **still** struggles to find effective and affective responses to these problems – both in theory and in practice. Thurman's question remains pertinent today due to the continued presence of discrimination and injustice not only due to race, religion, and nationality, but also numerous other factors including ethnicity, gender, sexuality, language, class, ability, etc. Even though there is much work to be done, progress has arguably been made in many of these areas both in the Church and is society as a whole. As a result of the various social justice movements over the past half century as well as shifts in academic discourse including the development and expansion of various forms of liberation theology and ethics, both *de facto* and *de jure* segregations have lessened in some capacities compared to Thurman's time. Yet, in spite of

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[10] I often use the terms "Christianity," "Church," "Christian Church" interchangeably although I recognize there are various theological and ecclesial positions regarding the distinctions between these three terms. When I use a capital "C" for "Church," this is in reference to the theoretical "universal Christian Church" and not in reference to the Roman Catholic Church (unless noted otherwise). Also, when I use a lowercase "c," this will refer to individual congregations or churches, but not the theoretical universal Church. And finally, when I use the term "Christian Church," this is referencing the universal Christian Church and not the denomination known as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). For Thurman, the Church was both a space conducive to promote the religious experience as well as fellowship and community with others, and as such, represents both the "personal religion" and "ecclesial religion" as defined by William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

these progressive efforts by a wide variety of Christian clergy, scholars, critics, activists, and religious practitioners, discrimination and injustice continue on both in the Church and society.

Though some of the particularities have changed in the last seven decades, the overarching problem Thurman identified remains the same: the Church continues to be, in many respects, ineffective in dealing with issues of discrimination and injustice both in society and within its fellowship. As such, Thurman's question remains: Is this ineffectiveness and/or impotency due to a betrayal of the religion or is it evidence of the weakness of the religion itself? The simple fact that this still seems to be a valid question seventy years later may indicate that the answer could potentially be the latter. In spite of the acknowledgment of this possibility, similar to Thurman, I proceed with the assumption (or, to use religious jargon, maybe more of a "faith"[11]) that the answer lies more in the former option than the latter. Maybe, seventy years later, we are **still** betraying the genius of the religion through misapplication. Maybe we are **still** making the same mistakes, using the same faulty paradigms, and producing similar results because we have not heeded the guidance – dare I say, prophetic word – of sages such as Howard Thurman.

Though the empirical evidence is not overwhelmingly supportive, I believe the religion of Jesus **does** have something to say, some guidance to provide, in the transition from injustice to equality, from hate to love, from discrimination to harmony, from division to reconciliation. I proceed understanding that Howard Thurman's genius lies not only in his ability to ask the probing question, but also as a guide in the quest to finding both an effective and affective

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[11] Thurman distinguishes between "belief" and "faith" in the following manner: "Belief is an object of proof and validation. Faith is what belief becomes when it develops into a part of the conscious thinking and feeling of the individual and is not an object of proof." Howard Thurman, "Letter to Dorothy Henderson" (24 March 1955, Boston, MA) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4: The Soundless Passion of a Single Mind, June 1949 – December 1962*, edited by Walter Earl Fluker, et al. (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 120.

response to the problems of discrimination and division. In addition to his writings, sermons, and lectures, Howard Thurman's life serves as a guide – a moral biography – into potential responses to this and other problems that continue to plague the Church and society. Even though Thurman lived in an era defined by war, strife, segregation, discrimination, and injustice, he was able to not only find ways to overcome these divisions in his own life, but he was also able to help guide others along the path towards inclusiveness, community, and harmony. As evidenced not only in his scholarship but also by the professional, familial, and personal decisions in his life, Howard Thurman becomes a witness to the possibilities of moving out of separatist spaces – in theology, ethics, politics, denomination – toward more inclusive, integrated, and cooperative forms of human relatedness. In distilling the theo-ethics of Howard Thurman, I hope to demonstrate the possibility and importance of bridging separatist spaces and ideologies – both in the academy and the Church – toward more cooperative approaches which not only expand limited perspectives but create more diverse, holistic, constructive responses to the multitude of relational and social problems in the world. In this, Howard Thurman can be a "bridge" between the marginalized and the privileged.

Religion, Politics, Ethics, and Personality

As a pastor, professor, public speaker, and university chapel dean, it is important to note that Howard Thurman's context was primarily religious in nature and the theoretical framework of his writings was as well. I would contend that Thurman is best understood from this perspective, but his ideas have broad theoretical and practical application and need not be limited only to religious and theological discourses. As mentioned above, in addition to the obvious

religious aspects, his question in *Jesus and the Disinherited* also has significant social, political, and cultural underpinnings, and the overlapping nature of these various aspects expose the complexity of the issues at hand. As such, I would argue that many of Thurman's books and writings are not simply religious or theological but also ethical for they not only analyze socio-political issues from a religious perspective but also provide ethical responses to the various issues in society.

A cursory reading of *Jesus and the Disinherited* reveals that Thurman's response to his own searching question is neither simply socio-political deconstructive analysis nor theological explication. Instead, Thurman delves into the realm of the personal and the psychological, the private spaces of personhood. In many of his books, writings, speeches, and sermons, Thurman addresses socio-political and cultural issues from the perspective of relationship – relationship with God, self, others, and our world.[12] Even though the problems of racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and a wide variety of other injustices are undoubtedly made manifest in social and political contexts and should be addressed as such, as humans, we also experience these discriminations and injustices on the personal level as individuals. For this reason, Thurman consistently addresses cultural, social, political, and religious topics and issues via a deep-rooted personalism, or with a slight nuance influenced by Thurman's mysticism, a "spiritual personalism."[13] Similar to other Boston Personalists including Edgar Brightman (1884–1953)

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[12] *The Creative Encounter* (1954) was Thurman's primary text regarding his ideas on religious experience but this theme is present is many of this other writings, lectures, and sermons. *The Luminous Darkness* (1965) is Thurman's book on his interpretation of segregation in the United States and includes analysis of personal, social, political, economic, and racial forms of human relation. *The Search for Common Ground* (1971) addresses various forms of human relatedness including humanity's connection to nature itself.

[13] What I call Thurman's "spiritual personalism" was greatly influenced by the Boston Personalism school of thought associated with Boston University in the 20th Century (which also influenced Martin Luther King, Jr.). This spiritual personalism also has similarities with the Transcendentalist school of thought including concepts of idealism, individualism (though a different form), and spirituality. Thurman synthesizes his own understanding of Christianity into his personalist thought and his theological positions (including slightly "heterodox" Trinitarian theology) often create slightly nuanced constructions compared to other forms of Boston Personalism.

and Albert Knudson (1873–1953), Thurman believed in the dignity of the person as an individual

and not merely as a means to an end or as a member of a larger group. Within Personalism,

personhood (i.e., "personality") is the fundamental source of value and all philosophical and

ethical reflection departs from this unconditional state. For Thurman, this dignity is grounded in

one being a child of God, thus making such metaphysical reflections not only philosophical but

also theological and spiritual endeavors.

One of the stories Thurman told often was an encounter he had in his youth when he was

working for one of the white families in his hometown. While raking leaves, the four year old

daughter of the household poked him and told him, "That didn't hurt you. You can't feel."[14]

Thurman told this story not to shame the little girl or her parents but in order to illustrate what

happens when we fail to acknowledge the humanity of others, or to use his language, when we

lack "reverence for personality." This failure to acknowledge another's humanity **and**

personality is not without consequence: "Deny personality to human beings and the ethical

demand no longer obtains. Much of the evil in human life and society is rationalized in this

way."[15] Having lived through Jim and Jane Crow Segregation and two World Wars, Howard

Thurman experienced firsthand the consequences of denying personality to other human beings

whether in war or segregation.

Another reason Thurman told the story of the little girl who poked him was to

acknowledge something similar in his own heart and mind. As Thurman reflected upon his own

upbringing in Daytona, Florida, he wrote, "To all white persons, the category of exception

applied. I did not regard them as involved in my religious reference. They were not read out of

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[14] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 11.
[15] Howard Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1977), 67.

the human race – they simply did not belong to it in the first place. Behavior toward them was amoral. They were not hated particularly; they were not essentially despised; they were simply out of bounds."[16] History often demonstrates that when persons – individuals and/or groups – are "out of bounds," it opens the door wide for a multitude of injustices. This is just one of the reasons Thurman believed that segregation "is at once one of the most blatant forms of moral irresponsibility. The segregated persons are out of bounds, are outside the magnetic field of ethical concern."[17]

This idea that groups of people fall into "the category of exception" is not unique to Thurman's upbringing nor is it relegated only to his time period or culture. Whereas explicit hate and discrimination are often more noteworthy and receive more media attention in our current time, the complacency directed toward individuals and groups of people considered to be ethically "out of bounds" is probably much more common but not necessarily any less destructive. For Thurman, the idea that other humans were "outside the magnetic field of ethical concern" was not only problematic, but theologically irresponsible. As Thurman explains, "If a [person][18] is of infinite worth in the sight of God, whether [s]he is saint or sinner, whether he is a good man or a bad man, evil or not, if that is true, then I am never relieved of my responsibility for trying to make contact with the worthy thing in [them]. I must love him [and her] because God causes the sun to shine upon [them] as well as upon me."[19] This "love-ethic" is central

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[16] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 3.

[17] Ibid., 6.

[18] Howard Thurman wrote in an era in which gender-*ex*clusive language was normative and we should not necessarily fault him for this. Considering Howard Thurman was one of the most inclusive religious thinkers of his day, I hope we can be patient and gracious with his gender-exclusive language. Due to his particular writing style which includes an extensive use of pronouns, modifying his gender-exclusive language into gender-inclusive forms can be difficult and can often hinder the flow of reading. For this reason, I will attempt to modify his quotations to hold to gender-inclusive standards when possible, but occasionally I will forgo modification in order to maintain flow of reading.

[19] Howard Thurman, "Confronting the Enemy," in *The Growing Edge* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1956), 18.

within the religion of Jesus, for Jesus teaches that we must not only love God, but ourselves, our neighbors, and our enemies, all of whom are children of God.[20] This concept is the foundation for Thurman's religious personalism: All persons – individuals and members of groups – are equally children of God and should be engaged in a manner which takes this into account. Of course, this idea requires more nuance and expansion in order to address the great complexity of human relationships, but for Thurman, this reverence for personality was the starting point of human engagement.

Beyond being a foundational concept or starting point of relationship, the reverence for personality should also serve as the attitude – or mood – with which one engages another (though Thurman primarily refers to other humans, he includes other forms of life as well as worthy or reverence). As Thurman writes, "It follows that the mood for each of us must be one of reverence – reverence toward one's self, towards one's fellowmen and towards life itself. This mood expresses itself in respect for personality – and what is that – it is meeting people where they are, and treating them there."[21] In many ways, Thurman's understanding of the reverence for personality is the antithesis of "the category of exception" or being "outside the magnetic field of ethical concern" which is often pre-determined by social categories and structures. Raised in a segregated world where his personhood was only occasionally acknowledged and rarely valued across racial lines, Thurman's ideas about personality were not just atypical but non-normative. As Quinton Dixie and Peter Eisenstadt note in their book on Thurman, "His student essays on race are deceptively original and deceptively radical. He argued that respect for personality meant realizing an individual's potential, and only when individuals are treated as

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[20] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 89. I will examine the "love-ethic of Jesus" more extensively in Chapter 4.

[21] Howard Thurman, "The White Problem" (1944), *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman: Volume 3: The Bold Adventure, September 1943 – May 1949*, edited by Walter Earl Fluker, et al. (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2015), 28.

persons, and not as faceless and soulless extensions of their group or race, that society as a whole begin to realize its potential."[22] Even though I would use an adverb other than "deceptively" to describe Thurman's ideas (possibly "subversively" or even "revolutionary"), Thurman's ideas on the reverence of personality were truly extraordinary – beyond the ordinary – in the manner in which he challenged the racial norms of his day in both theory and practice.

Again, for Thurman, the reverence for personality was not simply a social or psychological strategy but stemmed from his understanding of the religion of Jesus. Religion – and religious experience in particular – **should** provide the space which affirms one's humanity regardless of social classifications and structures. Within religious experience, the affirmation of one's own humanity allows her or him to acknowledge the humanity of another, and hopefully, vice versa. The affirmation of one's humanity does not include ignoring, negating, or removing one's unique characteristics – Thurman was not promoting a "melting pot" ideology – but the acceptance of the worth of person regardless of social structures or cultural classifications. Difference was not something to be feared or hated or ignored, but something that was created by God and should be embraced by humanity, an as such, celebrating diversity is both theological and spiritual. Though far from a reality in Thurman's time or our own, this vision guided Thurman throughout his life as pastor, professor, mentor, and leader. As he explains,

> The ideal . . . is a vision of all [people] as children of God and the church as a social institution formally entrusted with this idea in our society cannot withhold it from any [person] because of status, of class, of any social definition whatsoever. A part of its instrumentality in society is to a commitment of attack on any binding social classification that takes precedence over the intrinsic worthfulness of the individual as embodied in the centrality of the religious experience.[23]

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[22] Quinton Dixie and Peter Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World: Howard Thurman's Pilgrimage to India and the Origins of African American Nonviolence* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 33.

[23] Howard Thurman, *Creative Encounter: An Interpretation of Religion and the Social Witness* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1972), 146.

Thurman was not the first, and nor will he be the last, to stress the importance of the intrinsic worth of the individual person. What made Thurman unique in his time and why he is still relevant today is how he began with the reverence for personality and expanded it and applied it all forms of human relatedness. Instead of accepting socio-political norms which often function by assuming that people are just "faceless and soulless extensions of their group or race," Thurman taught that all persons have intrinsic individual worth, and once we acknowledge and accept our own worth, we can begin to see and accept that worth in another – in **all** others. This is the foundation and starting point of Thurman's framework for human relatedness.

Howard Thurman and the Problem of Human Relatedness

As social beings, humans have a wide variety of social contacts, connections, and commitments as we interact with our environments as individual persons. As such, the problems of the world are essentially a problem of human relatedness: problems of humans interacting with each other, other groups, our societies, our environments, and other forms of life in the world. In 1929, H. Richard Niebuhr examined various problems of human relatedness within the church. He wrote, "The color line has been drawn so incisively by the church itself that its proclamation of the gospel of the brotherhood of Jew and Greek, of bond and free, of white and black has sometimes the sad sound of irony, and sometimes falls upon the ear as unconscious hypocrisy – but sometimes there is in it the bitter cry of repentance."[24] Thurman's perspective on human relatedness stems from these issues prevalent in society and the church, and it is important to note that Thurman did not see these issues as simply one individual interacting with

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[24] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1965), 263.

her or his environment whether it be a small community or society as a whole. As mentioned

above, an essential component of this relatedness framework is the internal aspect of being

human, the validity of the individual as an entity in and of oneself and not simply as just one part

to the whole.

In several of his books including *Jesus and the Disinherited* and *The Creative Encounter*,

Howard Thurman addressed this conundrum of the human experience: the tension between the

individual and the social, the private and the public, the particular and the universal. In his final

monograph, *The Search for Common Ground*, Thurman called this tension "the paradox of

conscious life." He writes,

> The paradox of conscious life is the ultimate issue here. On the one hand is the absolute
> necessity for the declaration that states unequivocally the uniqueness of the private life,
> the awful sense of being an isolate, independent and alone, the great urgency to savor
> one's personal flavor – to stand over against all the rest of life in contained affirmation.
> While on the other hand is the necessity to feel oneself as a primary part of all life,
> sharing at every level of awareness a dependence upon the same elements in nature,
> caught up in the ceaseless rhythm of living and dying, with no final immunity against a
> common fate that finds and holds all living things.[25]

Though coined in one of his final writings, the concept of the paradox of conscious life was

Thurman's driving force for addressing the various forms and problems of human relatedness

including discrimination and injustice throughout his life. Thurman writes, "From my childhood

I have been on the scent of the tie that binds life at a level so deep that the final privacy of the

individual would be reinforced rather than threatened. I have always wanted to be **me** without

making it difficult for you to be **you**."[26] I would also claim that the inverse is true as well, that "I

want you to be you without making difficult for me to be me."

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[25] Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground: An Inquiry into the Basis of Man's Experience of Community* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1986), xiv.
[26] Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*., xiii.

Thurman's approach is not an "either/or" proposition which privileges the individual over

and against the social and political, but is a "both—and" perspective which addresses **both** the

private individual **and** the public habitats of which that individual is a part. Thurman's

reverence for personality expands to something greater because "personality is something more

than mere individuality – it is a fulfillment of the logic of individuality in community."[27]

Though stemming from Thurman's personalism, this concept is not exclusive to his system of

thought. A similar concept can be found in South Africa in their cultural understanding of

Ubuntu. South African archbishop Desmond Tutu attempts to describe it in the following

passage:

> Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language. It speaks of the very essence
> of being human. . . . It is to say, 'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in
> yours.'. . . A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does
> not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance
> that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished
> when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or
> treated as if they were less that who they are.[28]

South Africa is worth noting here not only because it is also a country (like the United

States) which has struggled with racial segregation for centuries, but also because, similar to

Thurman, some of the leaders of South Africa understood religion to be an essential voice and

reconciliation to be a necessary component in their transition from Apartheid to more democratic

and equitable forms of governance and existence. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission

(which was instituted by the secular government and headed by religious leader Tutu) is the most

notable contemporary example in which religion was an intentional and vital component in

addressing nationwide issues of institutionalized racism. In part, this was due to the reality that

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[27] Howard Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change" (1939), *Strange Freedom: The Best of Howard Thurman on Religious Experience and Public Life*, edited by Walter Fluker and Catherine Tumber (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 116.

[28] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999),31.

the racial injustice experienced by the indigenous peoples of South Africa occurred on personal, group, and institutional levels and religion was able to address these issues on the various levels. In many ways, Thurman understood religion to function in a similar fashion.

According to Thurman, religion functions in both private and public spaces and, in fact, one of the key functions of religion is to make sense of them together. As he writes in *The Creative Encounter*, "It is the purpose of this volume to give an interpretation of the meaning of religious experience as it involves the individual, totally, which means inclusive of feelings and emotions. Further, its purpose is to examine, somewhat, the effect that such experience has upon the complete life of the individual, both as a private person and as a member of society."[29] Though we engage the world through our own unique individuality, our personhood has worth not only in and of itself or as part of group of persons who look like us, but also as part of humanity as a whole. As religious scholar Miroslav Volf concisely summarizes, "'universality' is available only from within a given 'particularity.'"[30] From this space of ultimate personhood, Thurman branches out in a variety of trajectories in order to affirm life in its multitude of forms – personal, interpersonal, communal, collective, social, political, and global.

Within this framework, discrimination and injustice are not the core problems at hand, but are symptoms of a deeper-rooted problem, the problem of troubled human relatedness. Perhaps Thurman's genius is recognizing the necessity of engaging the problems of discrimination and injustice from a variety of perspectives: both personal and social, both religious and political, both spiritual and religious. Even his approach to mysticism represented this "both—and" perspective in that it was both introverted and extroverted. As defined by Walter Stace, "The extrovertive way looks outward and through the physical senses into the

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[29] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 9-10.
[30] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 18.

external world and finds the One there. The introvertive way turns inward introspectively, and finds the One at the bottom of the self, at the bottom of the human personality."[31] This overlapping nature of Thurman's approach often makes "labeling" his ideas difficult. Within theological discourse, Howard Thurman does not fit easily in traditional theological paradigms due to his lack of "systematic" theology and denominational affiliation, and his unique engagement of spirituality and mysticism also restricts specific theological labeling. As the editors of *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman* write, "Thurman's theological vision is forged on the borderlands between American liberal theology, mystical experience, and the black Christian tradition of protest, racial uplift, and social advancement of the race."[32] In addition to these theological labeling challenges, Thurman's ideas often expand beyond traditional theological categories to the realms more often associated with the social, political, and ethical. Thus, as Luther E. Smith eloquently describes Thurman, "Classifying always oversimplifies – partly due to the inadequacy of labels, and partly the dynamic quality of mind which refuses to follow the script of any one system."[33]

I would argue that Howard Thurman's system of thought fits just as well within the field of Ethics as it does Theology or Spirituality due to the pragmatic aspects of his ideas. Yet, even if Thurman fits relatively well within the field of Ethics, further delineation becomes more difficult. Within ethical discourse, I think a strong argument could be made that Thurman falls into the category of religious ethics. As mentioned above, Thurman's context was almost exclusively religious in nature whether in churches, seminaries, universities, or even as a public

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[31] Walter T. Stace, *The Teachings of Mystics* (New York: New American Library, 1960), 15.

[32] Walter E. Fluker, et al., eds, "Biographical Essay" in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman: Volume 2: Christian, Who Calls Me Christian? April 1936 – August 1943* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2012), xxi.

[33] Luther E. Smith, Jr. *Howard Thurman: The Mystic as Prophet* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2007), 89.

speaker. In addition to his religious contexts, Thurman's ideas were consistently religious in origin and framework and many of his concepts and ideas would be indecipherable without these religious frames of reference.

Within the broader discourse of religious ethics, Thurman undoubtedly engages both theological and social aspects, but I do not believe Thurman fits easily within either of the traditional ethical categories of "theological ethics" or "social ethics," but is more a synthesis of the two. I would contend many of Thurman's ideas are better described as "theo-ethical" or as a "theo-ethic" because even though they are undoubtedly theological in many aspects (especially within a Christian context), the scope and application extends beyond the parameters of a theological ethic to include the social, political, economic, spiritual, and personal realms. Because many of Thurman's ideas and beliefs originate with his understanding of God and then extend to the various forms of human relatedness, I believe "theo-ethical" is better suited to describe the ethics of Howard Thurman.[34]

As a "theo-ethic," Thurman's "both—and" approach differed from several of the other religious, social, and political approaches of his day. Whereas some of the social justice ideologies of his time period (including the Civil Rights Movements, Social Gospel, Socialism, and Black Power Movement)[35] focused primarily on addressing systems and structures, Thurman

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[34] I understand "theo-ethic" is a vague term, but for the purposes of this paper, I believe it accurately represents Howard Thurman's ideology and framework which are most often religious is nature, centered on his understanding on God, and engage social, political, ecclesiological, theological, economic, spiritual, and personal aspects.

[35] There are numerous references and perspectives available on these various social movements of the 20th Century, so I have included one for each. I want to acknowledge that there is scholarly debate on whether there was a singular Civil Rights Movement or multiple civil rights movements. At this point, I merely want to acknowledge that the fight for civil rights in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s was not a monolithic nor unified endeavor. Civil Rights Movements: Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63*, written in 1988. Social Gospel: Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology of the Social Gospel*, written in 1917; Socialism: Michael Harrington, *Socialism: Past and Future*, written in 1989; Black Power Movement: Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation*, written in 1967.

engaged the social and political via the individual though religious experience and personalism. As Thurman writes, "[One's religious] experience is personal, private, but in no sense exclusive. All of the vision of God and holiness which he experiences, he must achieve in the context of the social situation by which his day-by-day life is defined."[36] Yet, as religious ethicist Victor Anderson reminds, ". . . while the percept is immediate, [religious experience] nevertheless is substantiated by mediating structures of the life-world of the individual. That is, the social life-world substantiates the individual as personal and private. If we grant the *a priority* of acquaintance-knowledge, then the individual stands in the subject-position of an 'experiencer.'"[37] In other words, one's life-world both informs **prior to** the religious experience and **follows** the experience in application, and in so doing, one enters into an "exchange" with the divine instead of just an "encounter" with God as subject and oneself as object.

Unlike many white Christian evangelicals and spiritualists who often view faith and religion through essentially personal frameworks and fail to challenge systematic issues (or even "evaluate whether the social system is consistent with their Christianity"[38]), Thurman believed one's personal faith should inherently lead one to engage society and its systems and structures. As he writes, "But there can never be a substitute for taking **personal responsibility** for social change. The word 'personal' applies both to the individual and the organization." (emphasis his)[39]

One could assume that in attending to the personal Thurman avoids or possibly minimizes the social, but Thurman does not see them as distinct or separate. In fact, Thurman

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[36] Thurman, *Creative Encounter*, 124.
[37] Victor Anderson, *Creative Exchange: A Constructive Theology of African American Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 117.
[38] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22.
[39] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 161.

believes this dichotomous way of thinking is part of the problem: "The dichotomy that exists between [one's] professional life and [one's] private life, between [one's] formal life and [one's] informal life, between [one's] inner life and [one's] outer life, must be reduced steadily to the vanishing point."[40] For Thurman, the personal and the social are interconnected, and it is only by going "inward" are we able to go "outward" in a holistic and healthy manner.[41] It is only as we learn to address the prejudice, discrimination, and injustice within the deep spaces of our hearts and heads that we will effectively learn to address these same issues in the world of which we are a part. Again, this approach is not an either/or proposition but a both—and.

Thurman argued that in order to attempt to change the way society functions, it will be necessary to address the various troubled forms of our human relatedness – personal, interpersonal, and collective (on a variety of levels).[42] As stated above, I contend the problems of injustice and discrimination and the problem of human relatedness are highly correlative, and as such, analyzing the latter will potentially provide insight into how to address the former. Until we find new ways of engaging each other in spaces of mutuality, respect, and commonality, many of the dominant characteristics of our human relatedness will continue to be based on contentious forms of interacting and negative ways of being (me/not me; us/not us). This is due, in part, because within many dominant relational paradigms, we have learned "who we are by knowing who we are not."[43] In his book on identity and otherness, Miroslav Volf notes, "Identity is a result of the distinction from the other and the internalization of the relationship to the other; it arises out of the complex history of 'differentiation' in which both the self and the

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[40] Thurman, *Creative Encounter*, 131.
[41] Ibid., 131.
[42] In the final chapter of *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman explicates many of his core ideas regarding human relatedness under the concept he refers to as "the love-ethic of Jesus." He also addresses this topic in many of his other writings including *Footprints of a Dream* (1959) in which he recounts his experience with The Church of the Fellowship of All Peoples.
[43] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 143.

other take part by negotiating their identities in interaction with one another."[44] Yet, this

differentiation model is insufficient for identity formation in the United States because it does

not address the conundrum when one's identity is not in conflict with another but oneself –

something W.E.B. Du Bois called "double-consciousness."[45]

In his seminal work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois coined the term "double-

consciousness" to describe this tension between being both black and American. His dissonance

rests in the understanding that he is both at the same time while they are concurrently in conflict

with each other due to the ideology of **white** Americanism. He writes (using gender-exclusive

language),

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife – this longing to attain self-
> conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging
> he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for
> America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro
> soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for
> the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an
> American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of
> Opportunity closed roughly in his face.[46]

Du Bois's double-consciousness is made possible by the ideology of white Americanism

grounded in white supremacy in which whiteness is not only normative, but blackness and other

forms of non-whiteness are deemed deviant and inferior. Limited by the normative lens of

whiteness, the cycle of dissonance is difficult to escape: "One ever feels [one's] two-ness, – an

American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in

one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."[47] Utilizing

womanist pedagogy, Stacey Floyd-Thomas presents a means for escape from this consciousness

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[44] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 66.
[45] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 9.
[46] Ibid., 9.
[47] Ibid.

trap. She writes, "In shifting the ontology of blackness from one that is exclusively delimited by the dialectical (back-and-forth) entrapment of double-consciousness to one that embraces a divergent range of responses there is clearly an expansion of one's worldview."[48] By incorporating various perspectives beyond the limitations of white Americanism, identity can be developed beyond the narrow parameters allowed by whiteness. Even though one cannot determine the socio-political, cultural, ethnic, racial, or religious context in which one was born, by expanding one's worldview through the engagement of a variety of perspectives and experiences, the great diversity and creativity of the world becomes a rich source of human meaning and purpose not limited by the confining frameworks of whiteness.

In *The Christian Imagination*, Willie James Jennings argues that a significant factor in this development of identity is a "diseased social imagination" which has often prevented Christians from learning how to "think **theologically** about their identities." Instead, Christian theology has often chosen to maintain stagnant doctrine which in turn fails to be "reflective of the central trajectory of the incarnate life of the Son of God, who took on the life of the creature, a life of joining, belonging, connection, and intimacy."[49] As Jennings states, "That intimacy should by now have given Christians a faith that understands its own deep wisdom and power of joining, mixing, merging, and being changed by multiple ways of life to witness a God who surprises us by love of differences and draws us to new capacities to imagine their reconciliation."[50] Yet, instead of learning the art of joining and being surprised by the love of differences, Christianity has continued to support a system of negative identities and separatism.

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[48] Stacey Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 56.
[49] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 6-7.
[50] Ibid., 9.

According to religious scholar Charles Long, both race and religion were foundational in the development of this system. The socio-political structures of race and religion have implemented (and arguably created) these frameworks of differentiation by placing Western and Christian ideology at the epistemological center while rendering the cultures, perspectives, and lives of people of color on the periphery. Identity – and human existence – was thus determined by proximity to the epistemological center with accompanying values.[51] Whether it is based on race, religion, nationality, ethnicity, language, culture, gender, sexual orientation, etc., we, as Americans, have consistently come to understand identity not only by who we believe we are, but also who we are not, which often places individuals and groups in contention and competition with each other in a multitude of ways. Within these exclusionary competitive frameworks, demographic labels are not simply used for description but signify placement and identity within the socio-political order.

My Identity, Location, and Reconciliation

As a white, educated, athletic, lower-middle class, heterosexual male raised in an evangelical Christian home on the plains of the United States, I had very few challenges or questions regarding my identity or how I was supposed to navigate the socio-political order. I was white and Christian in a predominately white and Christian town, and my identity and actions were largely determined through the synthesis of my Christian faith and maintaining the status quo of white normativity. Yet, this basic information regarding my upbringing and my social location only provides minimal insight into how I came to write a dissertation on Howard

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[51] Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 186.

Thurman and a theo-ethic of reconciliation. As informed by narrative approaches to ethics, "morality is, at root, constituted by stories – that our judgments about right and wrong and good and evil, and our resulting actions, are dependent on the stories we tell and are shaped by."[52] The following narrative provides a glimpse into the stories that have shaped not only my understanding of race, religion, and reconciliation, but my own identity as it relates to these topics. In the end, this dissertation is not just about Howard Thurman and/or reconciliation, but it is also about me in that my moral agency is not pre-determined by my social location but is embodied in my responses to this location and the world of which I am a part. In the end, "we shape our stories even as through them we are shaped."[53]

Growing up in the middle-of-nowhere Nebraska, the only real diversity I was exposed to was the Mexican American neighborhood adjacent to my own. I remember occasionally hearing racist comments from some white people regarding the Mexican and indigenous American people in our town, but for the most part, tension between the various groups was muted and rarely demonstrated itself in noticeable action. During my childhood, I did not have any real negative experiences with people of different races or ethnicities – but I did not have any particularly meaningful positive ones either. Everything just hovered around a neutral state of indifference. That said, as far as my identity was concerned, I knew I was not only white, but that I was **not** Mexican American.[54]

When I attended a small Christian liberal arts college in eastern Tennessee, much of this racial and religious context remained the same. I was still white and Christian in a

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[52] William A. Barbieri, Jr., "Ethics and the Narrated Life," *The Journal of Religion* 78:3 (July 1998): 362.
[53] Ibid., 366.
[54] Even though I knew I did not have any Mexican heritage in my family, my father is 1/16 Native American but I knew at a young age that this was essentially a non-factor in my social, cultural, and religious upbringing.

predominately white and Christian community, and even though there were several black students at the college, my interactions with them were minimal. As could be expected, my racial and religious identity remained stable and unchallenged. Yet, at this small southern school, I quickly realized that I did not fit in. Even though most everyone looked like me, I knew they were not like me – or maybe more accurately, I was not like them. This was my first real exposure to cultural difference within **white** America and the first real challenge to my identity. I remember feeling like "I could not be myself" in college because the people in my community did not understand my humor, they did not understand my language (nor I theirs),[55] and in many ways, they did not understand my worldview. In spite of never really fitting in, I left college with an added element to my identity: I was still white and Christian, but I knew I was **not** Southern. Instead of seeing my whiteness as an ontological monolith, I started to understand my identity as more than just my race and my religion – I began to see how my culture (to be more premise, my micro-culture) also affected my identity.

After graduating from college, I would continue to expand my understanding of my identity in ways I never could have predicted. Instead of simply assuming the legitimacy – and supremacy – of white normativity through my privilege and naïvete, with the wisdom and patience of people from other races and ethnicities, I slowly began to see beyond my assumed ontological whiteness[56] (of course, I could not have articulated it as such at the time). I would

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[55] Learning to understand the Southern dialect of English (Appalachia dialect more specifically) was a bit of a challenge with its unique jargon and idioms as well as the tone and pace of the speakers.

[56] "Ontological whiteness" is the expansion of a term from Victor Anderson's groundbreaking work, *Beyond Ontological Blackness: An Essay on African American Religious and Cultural Criticism* (Continuum: New York), 11. I contend that "whiteness" is not monolithic in a similar manner than "blackness" is not monolithic. Whiteness inhabits a wide variety of differentiated spaces and functions in a variety of ways and should not be essentialized as a singular culture, religion, or worldview. I also believe that the tendency toward "ontological whiteness" not only reifies existing racial categories, but it also reifies the debilitating and destructive power of white supremacy by essentializing all whiteness as an expression of white supremacy which deems all whiteness non-redemptive.

learn that my identity was not strictly bound to the dualisms of white/not-white and

Christian/not-Christian, but "who I was" was malleable and could be formed in ways beyond

these simplistic ontological frameworks. Even though I could never shed or escape certain

aspects my "whiteness," I could actively participate in the development of who I was and who I

would become by addressing how I thought, what I did, and who would speak meaning and

purpose into this process.[57]

After graduating from college, I spent the summer on the Mexico/U.S. border building

homes for Mexican families with a Christian construction missions group. Part of the reason I

decided to work with this particular missions group was that they were not overtly or excessively

"evangelistic" (even though I grew up in an evangelical Christian family, I was never very

"evangelistic" myself), but their goal was to share the love of Jesus with these Mexican families

by building them a home on a plot of land they would own. The agenda was not to "save"

(neither soteriologically nor physically) these families, but to provide them with resources they

did have access to, empowering these families by working alongside Mexican churches and

ministries for the betterment of their community.[58] My life was enriched by this experience –

not only in the labor I shared toward the well-being of these families and communities, but also

by worshipping alongside them in church on Sunday mornings. Even though I understood very

little Spanish, the experience of worship we shared seemed to transcend the barriers of language

and culture, creating bonds of friendship and fellowship that were stronger than our differences.

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[57] Instead of utilizing a Cartesian model of identity based upon the dualism of mind/matter, Stacey Floyd-Thomas' womanist ethical methodology as presented in *Mining the Motherlode: Methods is Womanist Ethics*(page 39) provides a more holistic and helpful ethical model of identity based upon a "being-thinking-doing continuum."

[58] "About Us: CrossRoads Missions," CrossRoads Missions, accessed August 24, 2018, https://crossroadsmissions.com/about-us/

After my summer in Mexico, I would continue along my journey in cross-cultural education and ontological formation by moving to an impoverished neighborhood on the westside of Chicago. The four years I lived in this community and worked as the director of an Adult Literacy Program would be some of the most formative and trajectory-altering years of my life. During my time in this almost exclusively black neighborhood I was not only exposed to the debilitating forms of systemic racism in education, employment, housing, transportation, politics, law enforcement, penal system, and medical care, just to name a few, but I would also see how this systematic racism directly impacted the lives of my students and their families, my neighbors, and my friends in oppressive ways. Most discouragingly, I learned how this system of oppression was created by and maintained by people who looked like me.

My time in the Austin neighborhood not only opened my eyes to the evils of systematic racism and white supremacy, but it also opened my heart and mind to how religion could function as an essential aspect of how people not only survive but also challenge these oppressive systems and conditions. As a white, Christian, heterosexual male, I slowly began to see some of my dysfunctional ideas and beliefs and the privilege associated with them that I had never been aware of up to that point in my life. I also began to see how my whiteness and my religion were supported by a mood of superiority, something I would later learn as "white supremacy" and "the myth of American exceptionalism."[59] It was also here on the westside of Chicago that I was first introduced to a profound book titled *Jesus and the Disinherited* and exposed to the potentials of reconciliation via Rock Church, a bi-racial congregation founded on the idea and ideal of racial reconciliation.

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[59] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (New York: Maryknoll, 2015), 4.

The years I spent in Chicago would not only alter how I would see the world and the

great diversity of people that call it home, but it would also expose me to some of the difficult

and troubling aspects of what it means to be human including abject poverty, racism, substandard

housing, education, medical care, etc. (many of which I had been sheltered from up to that point

in my life). I would learn that religion and faith could be used to bring people together across

social, political, economic, and racial lines to challenge these systematic issues, but I also learned

that religion could build walls between people and teach a wide variety of unkindness and

prejudice. I learned that many well-intentioned white folks like myself (Christian and non-

Christian alike) often do more harm than good by failing to listen to and learn from those of

different races, ethnicities, religions, and cultures, but I also learned that some of best solutions

to difficult problems comes from the synthesis of multiple perspectives including those often

relegated to the margins.[60] I learned that who I was and who I wanted to become was not simply

determined by my demographic and my past, but that my identity also included the perspectives I

would incorporate into my worldview, the passions and purposes to which I would invest my

energies, and the goals and visions I would let guide me in the journey of life. And maybe more

than anything, I learned that I no longer wanted to be part of the problem of human relatedness

that I saw all around me (consciously or unconsciously), but in order to contribute to the

betterment of humanity, I would also have to attend to the inner workings of my heart and mind.

After these experiences in Mexico and Chicago, I often found myself in mediatory roles

which included helping individuals and groups learn and understand the perspectives of persons

who looked different from themselves. In particular, part of this mediation included assistance in

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[60] Formative in the development of my understanding of the necessity of marginalized perspectives in ethical analysis and construction was Miguel De La Torre's book, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004).

"translating" various social, political, cultural, and religious perspectives for white evangelical Christians because many of them struggled to understand the concerns, wisdom, fears, goals, and perspectives of the communities of color of which I had been a part. In many ways, I was able to use my own experiences from the expansion of my worldview to help these white evangelical Christians begin the process of learning how communities of color interpret and understand social, political, cultural, and religious experiences differently compared to white normativity. Intentional in trying not to "speak for" these communities of color, I tried to assist in the reconciliatory process by addressing some of the incommensurability and misunderstandings common between various multi-cultural and racial perspectives. Yet, I also learned that in many circumstances, significant barriers exist which prevent such interracial, interreligious, multicultural experiences from occurring. Due to systems, traditions, and ideologies based upon various forms of separatism, the possibilities of integrative and collaborative work becomes limited. Within my own experience, the concept of "reconciliation" became the mediating ethic which bridged these various divides. Formed within my Christian religious tradition but manifested in a context of social justice, reconciliation – robustly conceived as a theory and a practice – became an ethical strategy which addressed and possibly corrected the limitations of separatist modes of theology and ethics.

In a variety of ways, this dissertation is an extension of these experiences – both reflection and extrapolation – acknowledging that "narration is, metaphorically speaking, both external and internal to agents; for we are formed by or appropriate the narratives of others even as we rely on our own narratives, implicit or acknowledged, in 'living out our own stories.'"[61] In addition to the experiences mentioned above, Howard Thurman's narrative has served as an

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[61] Barbieri, "Ethics and the Narrated Life," 367.

essential voice in the construction of my ideas and perspectives regarding race, religion, and reconciliation as I have attempted to live out my own story as best as I can. Howard Thurman and the perspectives of persons of differing races, ethnicities, cultures, denominations, religions, and nationalities not only exposed my own myopia and blind spots regarding my identity and social location determined by my isolation and systems of separatism, but they also opened my eyes to the potentials of incorporating a variety of perspectives into my worldview – including my religion and ethics.

In addition to Howard Thurman, womanist ethicist Stacey Floyd-Thomas has also been an essential influence not only in the development of my understanding of the intersection of race, class, gender, and religion, but through her mentorship in ethics, has also informed the theo-ethical construction of this dissertation. As informed by womanist methodology, Floyd-Thomas's critical pedagogy incorporates the embodied "being-thinking-doing continuum" as a method of theo-ethical analysis which, in turn, provides the framework of this dissertation around the concepts of *Ethos*, *Logos*, *Pathos*, and *Theos*.[62] My hope is that this dissertation will contribute to the field of Christian Social Ethics by utilizing Howard Thurman as a model and exemplar of the potentials of moving beyond separatist approaches to ethics and move towards more integrative and collaborative strategies and methodologies in order that our moral and ethical imperatives and actions will become more affective and effective in addressing the troubled forms of human relatedness.

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[62] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 39, and Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, "From Embodied Theodicy to Embodied Theos: Black Women's Body and Pedagogy," in *Being Black/Teaching Black Politics and Pedagogy in Religious Studies*, edited by Nancy Lynne Westfield (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 125-135.

Howard Thurman and Reconciliation: *Ethos*, *Logos*, *Pathos*, and *Theos*

The problems of human identity and relatedness are undeniably complex in both their construction and expression considering the roots are a convoluted entanglement of ideological, theological, social, political, psychological, economic, and relational causes. The manifestations of this problem are even more numerous in that these various causes synthesize in a multitude of both predictable and unforeseen ways. As such, the significance of this problem is both far-reaching in scope and urgent in nature because the casualties of injustice and discrimination are numerous and most current solutions utilized within the Christianity tradition seem to be insufficient – or possibly incomplete – to address the problem in any truly effective manner.

An exhaustive analysis of the problems of discrimination and injustice within Christianity is beyond the scope of this dissertation and a comprehensive solution is far beyond my level of expertise. Instead, my aim for this dissertation is to narrow the scope to the problem of human relatedness within the Christian tradition in the United States.[63] Similar to Thurman, I contend that Christianity in the U.S. will continue to struggle to engage the problems of discrimination and injustice outside its walls as long as it fails to address the same issues within its boundaries. To expand this claim, I also contend that the Church will also struggle to engage its contentious relationships with greater society until it learns to address the various troubled forms of relatedness within its own tradition.

Due to the expansive nature of the topic at hand, I will structure my critical analysis and theo-ethical construction around four theoretical concepts: *Ethos*, *Logos*, *Pathos*, and *Theos*. In "Chapter 1: *Ethos*," I will examine the *ethos* of the Christian Church within the United States in

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[63] For the purposes of this dissertation I am limiting the scope of my analysis primarily to Christianity in the United States. Even though discrimination and injustice occurs across the earth in countless nations, the diversity of these contexts would make critical analysis of them all nearly impossible.

order to gain a more thorough understanding of how and why the Church continues to be ineffective in addressing the multitude problems of human relatedness both within its own tradition and in society as whole. In particular, I will critically analyze the problems of discrimination and division as they undergird the culture of separatism dominant in the United States. Beyond the critical analysis, I will also glean from the theo-ethical insights of Howard Thurman for potential responses to these problems of human relatedness.

"Chapter 2: *Logos*" will provide an expansive analysis of "reconciliation," including an examination of the theological integrity and moral meaning of the term. Beyond basic definitions, this chapter will investigate the contextual differences in meaning and understanding of the term within various theological and socio-political contexts. I will also compare and contrast meanings of the terms within theological and ethical discourses, noting how these varied meaning directly impact religious and socio-political beliefs. The chapter will include a functional analysis of reconciliation noting its theo-ethical task as well as its problematic history, limits, and potential hindrances.

The third chapter, "*Pathos*," will address the role of emotions and emotional wounds in the troubled state of human relatedness regarding race in the United States. Race is not only the primary context of discrimination and injustice in U.S. society, but it is also the primary context of reconciliation within religious contexts. "Racial reconciliation" is an essential topic within reconciliatory discourse due to its troubled history of failures and successes as well as its charged emotional perspectives. This chapter will include analysis of the pathology of whiteness (in the forms of white supremacy, white normativity, and white privilege) and how it relates to the emotions and emotional wounds of both the disinherited and the privileged. Howard Thurman

will provide important insights into the internal aspects including emotions and spirituality of human relatedness as it relates to racism and race relations.

"Chapter 4: *Theos*" will specifically address the problems of human relatedness in the Church as well as the potential for reconciliation. For Howard Thurman, separatism within the Church was the greatest betrayal of the religion of Jesus and Thurman spent a significant amount of time, energy, and thought attempting to find creative solutions to the problems of discrimination and division within religious contexts. Foundational in Thurman's approach was the love-ethic of Jesus including four components: the love God, love of self, love of one's neighbor, and love of one's enemy. Thurman promoted this revolutionary love-ethic as a challenge to the various forms of separatism within Christianity including race and denomination. In creating interracial and multicultural religious spaces, Thurman became a model in the possibilities of reconciliation as a theo-ethic.

The final chapter, "Reconciliation and Beyond," will examine several strategies of implementation for the theo-ethic of reconciliation including the various forms of integration within the Church as well as collaborate pursuits in social justice. This chapter will also explicate "out of solitude" as a strategy of reconciliation as a process instead of conceptualizing it as a state of being. By framing it as a dynamic process, reconciliation becomes not the final theoretical destination but a step along the trajectory toward the teleological goals of harmony and wholeness which are beyond reconciliation.[64]

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[64] "Harmony" and "wholeness" are the two of the most consistent teleological goals promoted by Thurman in his writings but he never defines them. I believe Thurman understands "harmony" as a metaphor representing different individuals and groups working together in cooperative action producing something greater than the sum of the individual parts (similar to musical theory in which "harmony" is more than just individual notes being played at the same time).

Khyber Pass and Beyond

In 1935, Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman departed on a six-month "Pilgrimage of Friendship" to India, Burma, and Ceylon, not as missionaries of American Christianity but as an endeavor exploring the role of religion for the underprivileged in an oppressive society. They undoubtedly knew they were about to embark on an adventure of a lifetime, but they may not have known this journey would forever alter the trajectory of their lives. As Thurman reflects upon this fantastic voyage in his autobiography, "Among the many gifts of the spirit I was bringing back with me was the 'feel' of a moment of vision standing in Khyber Pass looking down into Afghanistan as the slow camel train ambled by en route to India – it was there that I knew a way must be found to answer the persistent query of the Indian students about Christianity and the color bar."[65] Similar to Du Bois' "double-consciousness,"[66] Thurman felt a compulsion to determine how he was going to reconcile the color of his skin with the religion of his faith which historically had done grave injustices to people with his skin color. Ultimately, Thurman's response was not to abandon his religion, but to determine how his religion informed his predicament in this world. As Thurman writes, "I am Christian because I think that the religion of Jesus in its true genius offers me very many ways out of the world's disorders."[67] Yet, the question about Christianity and the color bar also prompted Thurman on a quest to determine why Christianity had been so distorted from the original teachings of Jesus. As Thurman answers his own question, "But why has the church been such a tragic witness to its own Gospel? It does seem to me at times that it is because the church is not sufficiently religious. By this I mean that it is not wide open to the Spirit of the living God."[68]

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[65] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 136.
[66] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 9.
[67] Thurman, "Colombo Journal," 303.
[68] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 107.

The vision Thurman received at Khyber Pass was not simply cognitive or spiritual in nature, but alongside the questioning of the validity of the religion of Jesus was also an ethical inquiry: What are we to do about it? For Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman, their response would end up determining the course of their personal and professional careers for the rest of their lives: "It became imperative how to find out if experiences of spiritual unity among people could be more compelling than the experiences which divide them."[69] Upon returning to Howard University from the Pilgrimage of Friendship, Thurman broadened his approach to the services at Rankin Chapel and began to implement silence, meditation, art, and dance into the services with the aims of creating new experiences of spiritual unity.[70] For the next eight years, Thurman continued to explore and investigate ways to implement his vision not only into his own life, but also in the life of the religious community. Yet, due the restrictions of racial exclusiveness at Howard University, these religious experiences at Rankin Chapel did not completely satisfy the yearning he had from his Khyber Pass vision. Thurman explains, "But nowhere in my experience had I ever seen a Christian church that was a living confirmation of my conviction. Deep within me I wondered whether or not my conviction was groundless."[71] So, at the age of 44, Thurman decided it was time to expand this vision even further by moving beyond the predominately black space of Howard University to the help create an interracial and interreligious community with The Church of the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco. Needless to say, this was bold move in the search of the fulfillment of his inclusive vision of love and reconciliation in the Church.

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[69] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 24.
[70] Ibid., 24-26.
[71] Ibid., 21.

In San Francisco, Thurman continued to implement his theo-ethical vision by pastoring

(initially co-pastoring) Fellowship Church and trying to embody the inclusive ideal he received

at Khyber Pass "to find out if experiences of spiritual unity among people could be more

compelling than the experiences which divide them."[72] As Thurman reflects, Fellowship Church

"was in its essence an attempt to establish empirical validation for what to me is a profound

religious and ethical insight concerning the genius of the church as a religious fellowship."[73] For

a decade, he developed and implemented various practices of religious experience with the hopes

of creating inclusive religious fellowship which transcended the numerous divisions within

society. In 1953, the Thurmans left San Francisco to attempt to establish a similar fellowship at

Boston University with the hopes of expanding this vision beyond a single congregation to a

more nationwide movement. As Thurman explained to the Board of Fellowship Church,

> We have been distressed, all of us in Fellowship Church, that the young theologians
> coming out of the seminaries today have no special training in developing churches that
> can break through the intercultural-interracial barriers in religion. The opportunity to
> 'pastor' the university, to take leadership in developing a church there and, at the same
> time, to offer courses in the School of Theology, is the most crucial challenge inherent in
> this invitation.[74]

Once again, Thurman let the teleological vision he received from Khyber Pass almost twenty

years prior guide him into the challenge of implementing an inclusive religious community

where none has existed before. His experience at Fellowship Church validated his conviction

that it is possible to create inclusive religious spaces not governed by racial and religious

separatism; however, Thurman also knew it was one thing to create a **new** church based upon

this ideal, but it was an entirely different proposition to **change** an existing institution grounded

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[72] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 24.
[73] Ibid., 21.
[74] Howard Thurman, "To the Board," (letter, March 9, 1953, San Francisco) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 60.

on ideologies of racial and religious separatism into an inclusive and reconciled community. This was to be his new challenge at Boston University.

As Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University, Thurman continued to attempt to implement his Khyber Pass vision. For twelve years he struggled to create such a community and fellowship, but what began as an inchoate vision at Fellowship Church never fully developed at Boston University. In addition to the racial challenges at a predominately white institution, Thurman also encountered theological, ecclesial, and religious hindrances as well. "Thurman continued to press for the creation of a nondenominational and interreligious fellowship attached to Marsh Chapel and to resist narrowing his religious outreach to Protestants," but after years of tension between Thurman and the Boston University administration regarding this issue, Thurman decided it was time to depart without his vision coming to maturation.[75] In spite of the struggles, challenges, and even failures, Thurman never relinquished his inclusive vision of what the Church could and should be: inclusive, integrated, and reconciled.

After leaving Boston with his vision incomplete, Thurman continued to write and speak about the possibilities and necessities of overcoming the separatism that plagues the Church. In 1971, Thurman published *The Search for Common Ground*, his most exquisite explication of this inclusive and reconciliatory ideal. In spite of its fractured history and reality – especially for people of color and other minorities – Thurman believed the Church is **still** called to find and create common ground with which the followers of the religion of Jesus can come together to heal wounds, repair relationships, fight injustice, and transform ourselves and our societies for the betterment of all including future generations. Thurman continued to believe in this hopeful

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[75] Fluker, et al. Introduction to "To Harold C. Case" (letter, April 24, 1959, Boston), in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 246.

vision because "[l]ong ago he learned from his grandmother that no one wins a fight and that the way of reconciliation is the only creative way to peace among [people] and among nations."[76] For Thurman, the pursuit of reconciliation was more than simply a strategy for surviving the present but an essential step in producing a harmonious future in which all of humanity can live together. As Thurman reminds us,

> Such fierceness of manner and deed plants the seeds of ill will and bitterness which will bear the same kind of fruit for one's children and one's children's children. It is the denial of the possibility of good and beautiful future. It says that the contradictions of life are not only final but ultimate. . . . when the battles are over, Negroes and white people must live together in the United States. To forget this is the great betrayal of the future.[77]

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[76] Elizabeth Yates, *Howard Thurman: Portrait of a Practical Dreamer* (New York: The John Day Company, 1964), 237.

[77] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 58-59.

CHAPTER 1: *ETHOS* – THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN RELATEDNESS

> The formula is very neat: love begets love, hate begets hate, indifference begets indifference. Often this is true. Again and again we try to mete out to others what we experience at their hands. There is much to be said for the contagion of attitudes. There are moments in every [person's] life when [one] tries to give as good or as bad as [one] gets. But this presupposes that the relation between human beings is somehow mechanical, as if each person is utterly and completely separated. This is far from the truth, even though it may seem to square with **some** of the facts of our experienced behavior.[78]
>
> — Howard Thurman, "Keep Open the Door of Thy Heart"

The Problem of Human Relatedness: Discrimination and Separatism

In his autobiography, *With Head and Heart*, Howard Thurman recounts a story of his senior year of college where Dr. John Hope, the first black President of Morehouse College, invited Thurman to join him at an interracial YMCA chapter meeting. At this meeting, there was great debate regarding where the black attendees should sit considering they were usually relegated to the balcony. The compromise was to separate the white and black attendees vertical rather than horizontal, and the whole process frustrated Thurman. He walked out of the meeting in disgust only to be consoled by Dr. Hope, "Thurman, I know how you feel about what is going on in there, but you must remember that these are the best and most liberal men in the entire South. We must work with them. There is **no** one else. Remember." And, as Thurman recounts the story, he shared, "I did remember, and his advice helped me grow in understanding."[79] As

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[78] Howard Thurman, "Keep Open the Door of Thy Heart," in *The Inward Journey*, 42.
[79] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 37.

one of his first opportunities of working in an interracial setting, this experience undoubtedly helped Thurman understand what would be required of him in challenging these systems of segregation and discrimination. Thurman would grow in understanding that the process towards more inclusive and diverse fellowship often requires working with and extending patience to those whom may not place the same value on inclusivity and diversity as oneself. His willingness to return to the meeting was not an expression of the acceptance of racism, but an acknowledgment that this "compromise" was at least a step in the right direction. Even if exclusionary and separatist responses to such situations may be more appealing, Thurman learned that the processes towards building inclusive and integrated communities are often tedious and frustrating, and just as he experienced that evening, even though the current state is far from the ideal, it is nonetheless better than previous alternatives.

An examination of the rest of Thurman's life demonstrates that he did, in fact, grow in understanding in regards to such matters. In spite of much social, political, and cultural resistance, Thurman continued to work toward the dismantling of racial and ethnic separation in the churches in which he preached and the colleges and universities in which he taught.[80] Upon returning from the Pilgrimage of Friendship to India, Burma, and Ceylon, as Dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard University, Thurman began experimenting with various forms of worship from different racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds which sometimes detoured from the more traditional forms of worship common in the chapel. These experiments included long silences for prayer and meditation as well as the incorporation of artistic dance.[81] Serving as the co-pastor of The Church of the Fellowship of All Peoples, Thurman led the congregation in an

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[80] Thurman learned after he had been at Boston University for a while that there had been much opposition to his hiring based on both racial and theological grounds. Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 174.
[81] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 92-94.

interracial endeavor in which the church's very existence was a challenge to the racial and political norms of the day.[82]

After leaving Fellowship Church, Thurman became Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University and almost immediately started making changes in the structure and order of the worship service, "sweeping away the old ways of doing things."[83] Though not dismantling the traditional forms of worship entirely, these changes became small steps in promoting more inclusive and multi-cultural forms of worship. As a university founded within white mainline Protestant tradition (Methodist), the chapel services included many traditional Christian practices, but Thurman replaced many of the parochially Christian elements with aspects and activities he deemed more in line with his vision of the chapel including an extended 'Period of Meditation.' In spite of these changes, the chapel service was not "entirely de-Christianized by Thurman."[84] In addition to making Marsh Chapel more interreligious by incorporating elements into the services that were not necessarily Christian in origin, Thurman's presence also impacted the racial make-up of the services. Similar to Fellowship Church, the congregation that consistently attended Marsh Chapel was generally about one-third minority and two-thirds white.[85] Again, Thurman challenged the structures and practices of racial and religious segregation and separation that were normative during his time with a vision of inclusivity and harmony.

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[82] Howard Thurman's book, *Footprints of a Dream: The Story of the Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), is his autobiographical retelling of the story of the beginning of Fellowship Church.

[83] Fluker, et al., "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Thurman, Vol 4*, xxiv.

[84] Ibid.

[85] George K. Makechnie, *Howard Thurman: His Enduring Dream* (Boston: Howard Thurman Center, Boston University, 1988), 41.

Uncharacteristic of his time, Thurman was able to navigate racialized spaces – whether they were predominately black, predominately white, or racially and culturally mixed – and challenge and lead them into more inclusive visions and actions. Just as it did for Thurman, Dr. Hope's pragmatic insight may serve as a helpful reminder for us as well in the difficult work of pursuing justice, equality, and harmony by recognizing that there will be times when our expectations are not met and others fail to meet our standards, but that we must to continue to work with them toward our *telos* because there might not be anyone else available to work with and we cannot do the work alone. At some point, the pursuit of inclusion inherently includes engaging exclusion and exclusivists (while concurrently not trying to condone or destructive exclusivist ideologies). Even though the interpretation and incorporation of Dr. Hope's challenge is different for persons of color compared with the white majority, the teleological vision toward more inclusive and just spaces of worship will require both patience and tenacity in the pursuit of harmony and wholeness.

In some regards, reading Thurman's story about the "compromise" made to separate black and white participants on the left and right sides of the lecture hall instead of relegating the black attendees to the balcony seems outdated (and undoubtedly frustrating), and serves to remind us that we no longer live in a world where these forms of segregation exist this explicitly. Yet, in other ways, one could wonder how much progress has actually been made. A brief observation of the lecture halls and sanctuaries in churches, seminaries, and divinity schools across the nation would most likely show that even though these spaces are no longer divided by legislated segregation, they still demonstrate a form of separatism. Whereas in Thurman's world, "white and black worlds were separated by a wall of quiet hostility and overt suspicion,"[86]

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[86] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 10.

they are now often separated by walls of personal preference and social pressure – and possibly quiet hostility and overt suspicion as well.

I speculate this modern form of voluntary racial separateness would frustrate Howard Thurman just as the interracial YMCA meeting mentioned above.[87] As Thurman states, "The fact that the first twenty-three years of my life were spent in Florida and in Georgia has left its scars deep in my spirit and has rendered me terribly sensitive to the churning abyss separating white from black."[88] For Thurman, being raised in the segregated South during the early 20th Century not only exposed him to some of the most atrocious forms of racial segregation, but it also created within him "a sensitivity" to such things. Instead of simply accepting racial segregation (in all of its variant forms as he experienced it in the South during his youth, the North during his graduate education, and the West Coast at Fellowship Church), Thurman challenged it in word, deed, and thought recognizing that the "churning abyss" of racial separation rarely left people unscathed. Even though Thurman was opposed to segregation in any form or capacity, he was particularly concerned with its presence within Christian contexts, calling it "a complete ethical and moral evil."[89] This sensitivity was not limited to state-sanctioned or other forms of legislated **segregation**, but extended to most any form of **separatism**, racial or otherwise. As Thurman wrote in 1965, "Segregation guarantees such inhumaneness and throws wide the door for a complete range of socially irresponsible behavior. This obtains for the segregated and the separated."[90]

To provide clarification regarding our topic at hand, segregation and separatism are not synonymous though they are undoubtedly related. "Segregation" primarily refers to the forced

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[87] In *The Search for Common Ground*, Howard Thurman addresses the issue of voluntary separation.
[88] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, x.
[89] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 98.
[90] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 8.

racial separation through the legal enforcement of Jim and Jane Crow Segregation whereas "separatism" is predominately a voluntary form of separation, or as Thurman refers to it, "self-determined" boundaries.[91] Thus, in the quote above, black Americans were "the segregated" because they were forced to live in racially separated neighborhoods, forced to ride at the back of the buses, forced to sit in the balconies of auditoriums and sanctuaries, and forced to use particular restrooms or restricted from using "white only" restrooms. On the other hand, white Americans represented "the separated" because they were free to choose wherever they wanted to live, eat, sit, worship, etc., but they still **chose** to separate themselves from blacks and other persons of color by living in all-white communities, attending all-white schools, worshipping at all-white churches, etc. In our modern contexts in the United States, "Segregation" officially no longer exists even though the remnants of it remain in neighborhoods and communities across the nation. As such, "separatism" is a more accurate descriptor of our current forms of separating whether it be in regards to race, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, or any other form to dividing one from another. In addition to this, our modern conception of separatism is also related to the term "sectarianism." As described by religious ethicist Phillip Kenneseon, "In sociological contexts, the language of sectarianism is used to focus attention on the processes and justifications used by minority groups as they seek to retain a distinct identity."[92] As such, sectarianism is closely related to separatism in racial and religious contexts.

Both in Thurman's time and in our current context, racial separation is often one of the most noticeable – due in part to various factors from media coverage to cultural differences to power dynamics to economic disparities. Yet, separatism is evident in the U.S. along a myriad

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[91] Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, 96.
[92] Phillip Kenneson, *Beyond Sectarianism: Re-Imagining Church and World* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 14.

of fronts including politics, religion, ethnicity, class, language, etc. Within Christian religious

contexts in the U.S., possibly the most visible chasm in recent history has been the apparently

widening gap between the conservative and liberal poles on the religio-political spectrum. Even

though the connection between religion and politics was not unfamiliar to Thurman, the depth

and polarizing nature of this relationship was different during Thurman's time compared to now.

According to Robert Putnam and David Campbell in their book, *American Grace: How Religion

Divides and Unites Us*, the connection between religiosity and partisanship has varied over time,

but it grew considerably after Thurman's death in 1981.[93]

In the decades prior to Thurman's death, as the country increased in religious, ethnic, and

racial diversity, the "point was clear: America was a pluralistic but fundamentally religious

country, and the Protestant-led ecumenical movement . . . was positioning itself to be the official

voice of American religiosity."[94] As the predominately white, liberal, and Northern mainline

Protestant denominations pursued their ecumenical project, evangelical Protestant Christians

were also attempting to compete for control of White Christian America by establishing many of

their own religious, academic, and political institutions and programs.[95] Even though mainline

Protestantism seemed to carry more cultural influence in the middle of the 20th Century, the

"white Christian conservative movement dominated the American political and cultural

consciousness in the 1980s, 1990s, and even into the mid-2000s."[96]

These shifts in religious cultural influence and political partnership in the last half of the

20th Century were not simply the ebbs and flows of political sway, but were related to changes in

immigration, and in turn, contributed to the many divisions within Christianity in the United

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[93] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 379.
[94] Ibid., 19.
[95] Ibid., 22.
[96] Ibid., 37.

States.[97] The partnership between conservative Christianity and Republican politics in the 1980s created a negative association for much of the rest of U.S. society. By the 1990s, the "terms 'Religious Right' and 'Christian Right' were becoming pejoratives in most Americans' view, representing a noxious mixture of religion and political ideology."[98] By the end of the 20th Century, the white Christian religious milieu was as polarized as ever with two primary branches: "a mainline Protestant family residing primarily in the Northeast and upper Midwest and an evangelical Protestant family living mostly in the South."[99] In addition to this political division within white Christian America, the country also continued to be divided along the racial, ethnic, language, regional, and religious lines that had existed for decades.[100]

The recent transition from the Obama to the Trump administration has exposed some deep-rooted antagonisms between these various branches of white Protestant Christianity. Over the last several years, the tension between "conservatives" and "liberals" / Republicans and Democrats has often appeared more hostile and venomous compared to earlier times, though it is difficult to decipher the magnitude of influence of the various factors involved. Even though many of these tensions undoubtedly have some ideological and political underpinnings, they are not exclusively so. Some might assume that the 2016 Presidential election had less to do with race (Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton) than the previous elections (Barack Obama vs. John McCain; Barack Obama vs. Mitt Romney) and that it was more about gender and political ideology. Yet, as Ta-Nehisi Coates examined the process, he came to the conclusion that this assumption may not be entirely accurate. Coates writes, "The Republican Party is not simply the party of whites, but the preferred party of whites who identify their interest as defending the

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[97] Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 20-22.
[98] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 120.
[99] Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 3.
[100] Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 259-263.

historical privileges of whiteness."[101] Obama's presidency was a direct challenge to whiteness

and many of those who believe in its inevitability. For a decade (two years of campaigning and

two terms as President of the United States), Republicans and Tea Party members and

constituents consistency challenged and attacked President Obama on racial, religious, and

political grounds. These attacks were not independent acts but created a precedent which further

polarized Republican from Democrat, conservative from liberal, whiteness from non-whiteness.

The consistent and open racism directed at the President of the United States helped clear the

way for future attacks on the Democrat nominee (whoever it might be). The "not-Hillary" vote

was made possible largely because of a "not-Obama" sentiment.[102] This prolonged attack on

President Obama also prepared the country for the acceptance of the white supremacist ideology

spouted by Trump.[103] As Coates explains,

> The symbolic power of Barack Obama's presidency – that whiteness was no longer
> strong enough to prevent peons from taking up residence in the castle – assaulted the
> most deeply rooted notions of white supremacy and instilled fear in its adherents and
> beneficiaries. And it was that fear that gave the symbols Donald Trump deployed – the
> symbols of racism – enough potency to make him president, and thus put him in position
> to injure the world.[104]

The promotion of white supremacist ideas specifically by the Trump administration – and the

acceptance of them by many claiming to be both Christian and Republican – has undoubtedly

contributed to the increased polarization within religious America. Yet, it is important to

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[101] Ta-Nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World Publishing, 2017), 325.

[102] Gregory A. Smith, "Many Evangelicals Favor Trump because He is not Clinton," (September 23, 2016) Pew Research Center, accessed August 22, 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/23/many-evangelicals-favor-trump-because-he-is-not-clinton/. This research supports my own experience attending evangelical church in which many of the evangelical Christians I talked to during the 2016 election said they were not voting "for Trump," but they were voting "not Hillary."

[103] Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, 332. Pew Research regarding the 2016 Presidential Election revealed the roughly eighty percent of evangelical Christians voted for Donald Trump. See Gregory A Smith and Jessica Martinez, "How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis" (9 November 2016), accessed August 22, 2018, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/.

[104] Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power*, xvi.

remember that racial and political polarization existed long before Trump became President and

"the ideology of white supremacy and the more subtle assumptions of white privilege and

normality are at the heart of the 'racial problem' in America today."[105]

Another reason behind these religio-political and racial divisions within the Church is

related to the bizarre relationship between religion and politics **in** the Church. Many Christian

churches attempt not to "mix" religion and politics due to the U.S. ideology of "separation of

church and state." Yet, as Putnam and Campbell explain, this position may be more easily

claimed than achieved. They write, "There may not be much politics **in** church, but much that

has political relevance happens **through** church."[106] Also, when religion and politics intersect,

the bond formed tends to have a compounding effect. Putnam and Campbell explain: "We

suspect that when religion is the common thread that has woven a network together, the political

information that circulates carries more moral weight – and is thus more persuasive – than

networks formed through other means."[107] In other words, when one's religion is conflated with

one's politics, the compounding effect means that these positions are often held more strongly

which also often includes that differing positions are opposed more vehemently as well. This

dynamic contributes toward much of the division that exists along religious, political, as well as

racial lines. Even though many Christians might not admit it, the Church has also contributed to

this troubling dynamic in regards to race as well as politics. As Jim Wallis writes in his recent

book, *America's Original Sin*, "The churches have too often 'baptized' us into our racial

divisions, instead of understanding how our authentic baptism unites us above and beyond our

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[105] Jim Wallis, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 80.
[106] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 419.
[107] Ibid., 441.

racial identities."[108] Again, when racial ideologies and racial divisions are promoted by

churches, they tend to carry more "moral weight" with stronger bonds and greater antagonisms.

According to Putnam and Campbell's research, this "division" that exists in the United

States along religious, racial, and political lines is both material and perceived. This division is

"perceived" because there are a wide variety of other factors involved that demonstrate more

unity, flexibility, and toleration than would be expected, but by focusing on differences – and **not**

similarities – these perceived differences materialize into real-lived divisions which separate one

from another. As such, "To be divided is largely a matter of perception, and by that standard

America is a religiously divided nation."[109] According to recent research, "93 percent of

Americans believe America is divided along racial lines. 96 percent see divisions along

economic lines. 97 percent say the country is divided along political lines."[110] Again, although

the forms may have morphed and look a bit different compared to the racial segregation of

Thurman's college years in the South, the divisions – both perceived and real-lived – within the

U.S. seem to be as strong as ever. Our problem of human relatedness remains.

The United States in a Crisis of Human Relatedness

In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. proclaimed the now (in)famous indictment that the 11

o'clock hour on Sunday morning was the most segregated hour of the week. When King made

this claim, he was not simply observing a sociological phenomenon, but he was making a value

judgement by labeling it a "shameful tragedy."[111] Even though this statement has become a bit

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[108] Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 8.
[109] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 495.
[110] Ibid., 516.
[111] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Meet the Press," (Interview, August 13, 1963), accessed 03/03/2018, http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/primarydocuments/Vol5/17Apr1960_InterviewonMeetthePress.pdf

of a cliché over the years, statistically, it remains more true than not.[112] In fact, recent research

indicates that a basic "measure of congregational diversity confirms that most Americans attend

churches right out of Martin Luther King's America, in which ethno-racial separation is the

norm."[113] For the moment, we will postpone the critical evaluation of King's value judgement,

but we need mention that for many Christians both then and now, King's statement reminds them

that the current status of the church falls terribly short of its inclusive ideal. Many Christians

from different churches, denominations, and traditions still believe, theoretically and ideally

speaking, the church **should not** be racially segregated or separated – at least to the magnitude

which it demonstrates today. In theory, black Christians and white Christians and Latinx

Christians and Asian American Christians **should** be able to worship together and maintain some

form of relational fellowship, yet, in practice and in preference, racial separation within the

Church remains the standard of choice.

Interestingly, Martin Luther King, Jr. was not the first to make this claim, and in some

regards, his version was not as thoroughgoing as earlier claims. Almost a decade prior to King's

pronouncement, Howard Thurman wrote a challenging critique of this religious phenomenon in

his book, *The Creative Encounter*,

> But when the church, even within the framework of the principle of discrimination
> inherent in denominationalism, further delimits itself in terms of class and race, it tends to
> become an instrument of violence to the religious experience. Here we come upon the
> shame of what is meant by the phrase of a certain minister in referring to eleven o'clock
> hour on Sunday morning as 'the great and sacred hour of segregation.'[114]

It is worthy to note the differences between Thurman's and King's claims. First of all, in one

particular aspect, Thurman's claim is a harsher indictment of Christianity in the U.S. than

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[112] For a thorough investigation of the racial divisions within Christian Churches in the United States, see
Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*.

[113] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 291.

[114] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 141-142.

King's. Shared in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, King's claim focuses one aspect of separation in the church: race. Thurman, on the other hand, also addresses two other forms of separation that plague the church: denominationalism and class. Even though race is often the most visible and discussed form of separatism in the church, it is not necessarily the most prevalent. One of Thurman's contemporaries, H. Richard Niebuhr, wrote a book in 1929 on this topic, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. In that work, Niebuhr examines the numerous denominational fractures in Christianity as well as divisions relating to race, class, and region, and it is probably not surprising that recent research reveal similar trends. Research done by Michael Emerson revealed that differences within Christianity due to class and economic well-being demonstrated a similar level of division compared to race. "The lone exception to this pattern was multiracial congregations. Here, informants reported that their congregations were **more economically diverse than economically similar**."[115] Not wanting to deduce too much from this correlation, it tends to indicate that individuals who are open to diversity in racial and ethnic matters are also open to diversity regarding class and vice versa; or it may possibly indicate an overall openness to diversity in general as opposed to an *ethos* of exclusivity.

Whereas King's claim calls out the "shameful tragedy" of racial separatism in the church, Thurman addresses another aspect much more embedded in the history and tradition of Christianity in the United States and the world. It is worth noting that according to Thurman, the frame of reference for discrimination within the church is not race but denominationalism. Despite being a black man living under the legal enforcement of Jim and Jane Crow Segregation, Thurman still believed denominationalism was the principle – or possibly, initial – framework by which discrimination occurred in the church in the United States. Statistically speaking, there

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[115] Michael Emerson, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 50-51.

are countless more fracture lines within Christianity due to denominationalism than race or class, and this verity should not be ignored or underestimated.

Before I proceed, I must address a semantical question regarding Thurman's use of the word "discrimination." From the context of the quote from *The Creative Encounter*, Thurman is most likely using "discrimination" in the neutral sense of the word, "to distinguish; differentiate," as opposed to the more charged understanding "to make a difference in treatment or favor on a basis other than individual merit."[116] As the quote states, race and class are secondary terms for discrimination and it is in their combination with denominationalism that segregation takes its current form in the church.[117] Yet, the ambiguity of Thurman's use of "discrimination" combined with the fact that Thurman uses the term in the latter sense in his other texts, creates the potential for a dual-interpretation. I do not think it would be too far-reaching to claim that Thurman would agree that discrimination in the former sense can and often does lead to discrimination in the latter sense. This quote also serves to remind us that, for Thurman, religion and religious experience were often his primary contexts and frames for understanding things often deemed social and political. Again, as a pastor and professor of theology and religious studies, Thurman often engaged the socio-political issues of his day **through** his understanding of religion.

With religion as his context, Thurman's designation of denominationalism as foundational in regards to discrimination in the church makes more sense. In essence, denominationalism promotes the premise and correlative practice that division and separation based upon difference is not only tolerated and accepted, but even celebrated. This is the

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[116] "Discriminate," Merriam-Webster, accessed August 28, 2018, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/discriminate

[117] If written today, I can only assume Thurman would include various other demographic characteristics including gender, sexual orientation, language, nationality, etc.

inheritance of Protestantism. Particularly within Protestantism, denominationalism sets the precedent for the acceptance of discrimination and sectarianism whether it based upon theology, ecclesiology, liturgy, worship style, region, or race. As Thurman writes, "The concept of denominationalism seems to me to be in itself a violation of what I am delineating as the Jesus idea. The separate vision of a denomination **tends** to give to the individual who embraces it an ultimate, particularized status, even before God."[118] Instead of simply claiming God as ultimate, denominations behave as an ultimate vessel through which one must go to encounter God. Instead of Christianity serving as a space for people to come together in their common worship of God, denominationalism creates the framework which allows for dissociation and separation, which then often contributes to the likelihood for discrimination, which then often swings open the door for injustice. Denominations become just one more category by which humans can – and do – separate from each other.

Within the United States, division due to denominationalism almost seems inevitable to the point of being considered a **given** in religious reality. This may be the most dangerous aspect of denominationalism – the acceptance of division as **normative** and **unchallenged** within Christianity – because many consider denominationalism to be a natural and neutral form of differentiation. Yet, from Thurman's perspective, separation based upon creed or denominationalism is not simply discrimination as differentiation but discrimination through both favorable and unfavorable treatment of difference. For Thurman, denominational division had a tragic aspect he considered even greater than division due to racial difference:

> As difficult as it is for experiences of unity to transcend differences of race, it is infinitely more difficult to create experiences of unity that can unite beyond the fundamental creeds that divide. There is an amazing incongruity in the fact that in peripheral matters there is

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[118] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 140.

fellowship, there is community, but in the central act of celebration of the human spirit in the worship of God, the lines are tightly drawn and a [person] goes before God with those only who believe as he [or she] does. The experience that should unite all [persons] as children of one Father becomes the great divider that separates [one] from his brothers [and sisters].[119]

For Thurman, the act of worshipping God should be an activity that can unite people in spite of their differences, but instead, denominationalism turns the worship of God in an act of division. Many Christians in both Howard Thurman's time and our own often just assume and accept the value and validity of denominationalism and its correlative discrimination and separatism, but Thurman had a much different response. As he writes, "religion had become so identified with sectarianism, and its essence so distorted by it, that I felt the need to bring to bear all the resources of mind and spirit on the oneness of the human quest."[120] Beyond race, class, or denomination, Howard Thurman addressed a deeper-rooted problem within Christian belief and practice: division, segregation, separatism, sectarianism, fragmentation, or whatever name one wants to give it.

Separatism became one of the fundamental issues to which Thurman applied his many talents and energies. The ideology and correlating action of separating one from another – whether based on race, class, denomination, or any other factor deemed worthy to separate – became that which Thurman would spend the majority of his life fighting against in thought, word, and deed. The U.S. was and still is in a state of relational crisis. Justified by ideologies of discrimination and division, injustices perpetuate on, and despite the tireless efforts of many envisioning something different, more, and better, the church and society continue on in fragmented realities unable to affect radical and effective change.

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[119] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 137.
[120] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 199.

Howard Thurman was raised in Daytona, Florida primarily by his maternal grandmother, Nancy Ambrose (his father died when he was young and his mother had to work long hours), and he grew up going to church for most of his youth. After a traumatic experience with the church council and intervention by his grandmother, he joined the church at the age of twelve.[121] Probably more than the church itself, Thurman's grandmother influenced his understanding of the Christian faith which included the belief that he was of worth because he was a child of God. In addition to a tradition of racial uplift, Thurman also had a proclivity toward the more "spiritual" aspects of life. As he recounts his youth: "When I was young, I found more companionship in nature than I did among people. The woods befriended me. . . . The quiet, even the danger, of the woods provided my rather lonely spirit with a sense of belonging that did not depend on human relationships."[122] This affinity with nature included a unique sense of belonging with the ocean, the night, and a large oak tree near his home.[123] From a young age, Thurman had a sense of balance and harmony with nature, and he maintained this sense of wholeness and balance with nature throughout his life, a form of nature mysticism.

In part due to this openness to nature and the more "spiritual" side of religion, Howard Thurman has often been referred to as being a religious "mystic" both during and after his lifetime. Christian ethicist Gary Dorrien describes Thurman as "a Quaker-inspired mystic and pacifist," and Thurman received this label for various reasons including his studying with Rufus Jones (the famous Quaker mystic), his inclination toward silence and meditation, as well as his

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[121] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 18.
[122] Ibid., 7.
[123] Ibid., 7-9.

privileging of personal religious experience and spirituality in both his thought and practice.[124]

Even though Thurman himself claimed the term, due to potential misconceptions and

misunderstandings associated with "mysticism" and "mystic" in our current time period, this

label may not be the most useful to bestow upon Thurman when trying to understand the breadth

and depth of his life and work. As this tendency is explained by William James, "The words

'mysticism' and 'mystical' are often used as terms of mere reproach, to throw at any opinion

which we regard as vague and vast and sentimental, and without a base in either facts or

logic."[125] In fact, the label of "mystic" has often led to the isolation of Thurman outside of

mainstream theological and ethical discourses, which in turn has deprived these fields of his deep

theological examinations and revolutionary ethical insights.[126] Instead of limiting Thurman by

simply labeling him a "mystic," it may be more helpful to further articulate his mysticism and

balance this singular aspect with the variety of other attributes, skills, perspectives, and passions

which governed his thought and life.

In *Visions of a Better World*, a book about Thurman's pilgrimage to India, the authors

describe his mysticism as such, "If Thurman was a mystic, he was essentially a nature mystic

who felt that God could be most directly perceived and experienced through nature rather than in

any human-made representation. . . . that [God] could never be claimed by any one person, one

theology, or one denomination."[127] In the book, *Howard Thurman: Portrait of a Practical*

Dreamer, Elizabeth Yates describes Thurman in a similar manner as feeling "in complete

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[124] Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Idealism, Realism, and Modernity 1900-1950* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 559.

[125] James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 379-380.

[126] For example, in *The Westminster Dictionary of Theologians* edited by Justo Gonzalez and published in 2006, Howard Thurman is never listed nor mentioned in the book despite Thurman publishing 22 books and over 45 articles on religion, as well as speaking hundreds of times across the United States and world. Even though the dictionary lists over 1,300 theologians, Thurman is not one.

[127] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 10.

harmony with the mystics through the ages who made no distinction between the God of life and the God of religion. . . . There was no rift between the secular and the sacred."[128] These descriptions are quite different compared to the mystical experiences, bizarre dreams, and unions with God associated with other famous Christian mystics like Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and others.

Even though Thurman himself preferred the label of mystic over that of theologian – due partly to his resistance to ecclesial and theological systems – labels other than mystic may be more helpful in describing the thought, life, and religious outlook of Howard Thurman.[129] In fact, Dorrien's other descriptions may be just as pertinent as "mystic" when he describes Thurman as "a social gospeler, . . .a pathbreaking advocate and practitioner of racial integration, an advisor to civil rights movement leaders," though I would also argue that Dorrien's list seems incomplete without acknowledgment of Thurman's astuteness as a theologian (although non-systematic and even heterodox at times) and visionary. I also believe an essential aspect to Thurman's life and thought was his prophetic voice (as noted by Luther Smith, Jr. in his book, *Howard Thurman: The Mystic as Prophet*) – both in his critique of the time in which he lived and the vision of the future which he shared with all those who would listen.[130]

Reading Thurman's various books, articles, speeches, and sermons, he rarely delves into the realms we would now call "mystical," and in fact, "What Jones and Thurman called mysticism or experiential religion, we today might call spirituality, . . . an alternative to formal, creedal religion."[131] For Thurman, engaging God was never about an other-worldly experience, but this-worldly encounters with God were meant to guide us in our lives here on earth. In this

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[128] Yates, *Portrait of a Practical Dreamer*, 162.
[129] Smith, *The Mystic as Prophet*, 46.
[130] Ibid. Chapters I, II, IV, and VI address the prophetic aspects of Thurman's education, life, and thought.
[131] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 53.

sense, the titles of the books mentioned above not only seem appropriate but consistent with

Thurman's life. Thurman was a practical dreamer who let his prophetic vision of a better world

steer him through life. Instead of accepting the norms of society and the church which often

promoted division and discrimination, Thurman allowed his teleological visions of harmony and

wholeness guide him toward that which he believed the church could become. As he writes in

The Search for Common Ground, "The key word to remember is always **potential**: that which

has not yet come to pass but which is always coming to pass. It is only the potential, the

undisclosed, the unfinished that has a future. I find it difficult to think of life apart from the

notion of potential; indeed, they seem synonymous."[132] Luther Smith summarizes this

relationship between potential, religious experience, personality, and community, "The inner

life's teleology is to bring the Kingdom of God into reality – to form a world community where

personality has a free environment in which to seek its potential, and in which love gives

harmony to relationships."[133] Another term or metaphor Thurman often used to describe this

process of transformation is "the growing edge." Life correctly understood has a "growing

edge," that which "is unfinished, it is unrealized, it is unfashioned. But it is always trying to

realize itself, trying to fashion itself, trying to arrive."[134]

As a practical dreamer, Howard Thurman could easily be considered an optimist or even

an idealist, but he kept these hopeful visions in balance with the difficult realities of the world in

which he lived. Thurman lived through some of the most tumultuous decades in U.S. history

which included two World Wars, The Great Depression, Jim and Jane Crow Segregation, the

assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X (at the time of his death, he went by the

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[132] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 4.
[133] Smith, *The Mystic as Prophet*, 36.
[134] Howard Thurman, "The Growing Edge," (February 1949), in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 304.

name el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz), Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy, the war in

Vietnam, the Cold War, and the Civil Rights movements. If anything, these events mark a

century defined by a glaring lack of peace, community, and harmony.[135] Living through these

historical events, Thurman himself was not sheltered from many of the difficulties including

poverty, violence, racism, discrimination, etc., and their embodiment in various persons, groups,

and the structures of which he was a part. Yet, in spite of these experiences, Thurman not only

had a hopeful vision of what humanity had the potential to become, he also balanced this

teleological vison with practical ideas of what would be required to move along that trajectory.

The following quote is a glimpse into Thurman's teleological vision:

> For better or for worse we must live together on this planet. Any [one] who denies this
> for any reason whatsoever cannot enjoy the fullness of life. Until this central fact
> becomes the common possession of men [and women], guiding their practice, their
> worship, their economic, political, and social arrangements under which they live, there
> can be neither peace, prosperity, nor joy among [humanity].[136]

This quote provides insight into how Thurman kept the future and present in balance. His

reminder that "we must live together on this planet" applies to efforts both in the present as well

as in the future. In a world where a "better" life for some often includes a "worse" life for

others, Thurman reminds us that these groups are not only connected but interdependent. Within

the context of race, Thurman describes (using masculine terms) this interdependence as follows,

"No black man could be what his potential demanded unless the white man could be what **his**

potential demanded. No white man could be what his potential demanded unless the black man

could be what **his** potential demanded."[137] His holistic and theo-ethical vision reminds us that if

something makes life worse for others, it is not better – for us, for them, or for humanity as a

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[135] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 24.
[136] Howard Thurman, "God and the Race Question," (May 1946) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 3*, 189.
[137] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 95-96.

whole – in the course of history. Whatever visions one has for the future, whether individual, collective, national, or universal, Thurman reminds us that these visions need to incorporate the reality that we, as humans representing a variety of races, ethnicities, languages, religions, nationalities, and creeds, will continue to live on this earth **together**. As we envision our worship as well as our economic, political, and social arrangements, remembering our shared common existence will serve as a practical guide in this process. As Thurman reminds us, without common ground and inclusive visions of togetherness, peace, prosperity, and joy will constantly be beyond our grasp.

One of the challenges and/or shortcomings of teleological approaches to ethics and politics is that there is no guarantee that our efforts in the present, no matter how well-thought out or well-intentioned, will actually create the future as we have planned. In spite of this limitation, Howard Thurman continued to envision something better for humanity with the hope that someday we will share this earth in a more harmonious and holistic existence. As a student leader, professor, dean, and pastor, Thurman reminded students on the importance of trying to transform the world into something better instead of being satisfied with the current status of society and life. He states early in his academic career, "The problem which this student generation seems to be conscious of facing is the obvious failure to achieve in its experience the quality of life which is in harmony with the highest and best that it knows."[138] Thurman was truly remarkable in his ability to see beyond the current situation toward "the highest and the best," and he believed it was possible to become more in harmony with this ideal.

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[138] Howard Thurman, "The Perils of Immature Piety," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 48.

Thurman's teleological vision was guided not only by his life experiences but also by his religious understanding of God and God's intention for humanity. In *The Search for Common Ground*, Thurman suggests that the "creative intent" of God was not strife, division, and contentious human relatedness, but that "life seeks always to realize itself in wholeness, harmony, and integration within the potential that characterizes the particular expression of life."[139] Thurman's understandings of God's creative intent informed by his Christian upbringing and own personal study was decidedly different than the world in which he saw all around him. As Thurman reflected upon his studies, he wrote, "the examination of the implication of the Christian ministry upon my life and the life around me caused the question of the segregated church to become an issue – how could I in good conscience accept it?"[140] As mentioned above, Thurman's religious personalism served as the starting point and framework by which he engaged the issues of this day (including segregation), and it also influenced his teleological vision:

> Implicit in the Christian message is a profoundly revolutionary ethic. This ethic appears
> as the binding relationship between [persons], conceived as children of a common Father,
> God. The ethic is revolutionary because the norms it establishes are in direct conflict
> with the relationship that obtains between men [and women] in the modern world. It is a
> patent fact that attitudes of fellowship and sympathetic understanding across lines of
> separateness such as race, class, and creed are not characteristic of our age.[141]

Beyond the reality that we must share this world together, Thurman's teleological vision was based on the belief that our "highest and our best" future is not overdetermined by separatism. Based on his understanding of God's creative intent, Thurman's vision of the future included the

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[139] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 7.
[140] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 18.
[141] Howard Thurman, "Judgement and Hope in the Christian Message," (1948) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 3*, 243.

establishment of "new" societal and religious norms which challenge the modern lines of separateness and move toward spaces of harmony and wholeness.

Howard Thurman's Theo-Ethical Response

> Somehow we must find that which is big enough to absolve us from artificial and ineffective methods for increasing welfare and well-being. This means that the large view, the great faith, which will release the vast courage capable of sustaining us in the long pull toward a valid increase in welfare and well-being. It is for this reason that a religious faith about life and its meaning becomes a necessity for all who would work for a new heaven and a new earth.[142]

One of Howard Thurman's unique gifts was his apparent ability to see the larger picture of life. Beyond the compartmentalized aspects of work, family, community, and faith, Thurman was able to comprehend them all within a holistic vision probably better than most. He understood that a firm grasp of the bigger picture enabled one to not simply survive, but it provided the courage in the difficult work to make the world a better place, or using his words above, "the long pull toward a valid increase in welfare and well-being." He also understood that the meaning of life was not simply about being happy in the present, but that the past, present, and future all intimately connected and he believed we all have an ethical responsibility to work together to make this world a better place. For Thurman, this conviction rested not only in his understanding of religion and faith, but also that this was a timeless project overlapping generations.

Given during a speech while he was a divinity student at Rochester Theological Seminary, Thurman shared, "If we are just as good as the students of past generations, it means

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[142] Howard Thurman, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," in *The Inward Journey*, 34-35.

that we are worse than they were. In order to be as good as they were we must be better; for apart from us they cannot be made perfect."[143] This quote is an example of how, even early in his career, Howard Thurman approached the challenges of his day from a theo-ethical perspective. We are not expected to simply reproduce what the generation before us had done, but we are to build upon it, develop it, and bring it closer to completion. Teleologically speaking, we cannot simply "stand on the shoulders" of those who came before us, but we have a responsibility to build upon their dreams and move further along the trajectory toward justice, equality, and harmony – or to use Thurman's religious jargon, "be made perfect."[144] As Howard Thurman's life demonstrated, this process is rarely straightforward and often requires going against the grains of the status quo and of tradition. In regard to the problems of discrimination, injustice, and division, this meant moving beyond the normative frameworks which preferred and maintained separatism and moving toward the goals of harmony and justice by way inclusion, integration, community, and reconciliation.

What makes Thurman unique – if not exemplary – is not just that he challenged the societal and cultural norms of his day, but **how** he responded to the tumultuous context in which he found himself. In both his life and his writings, Thurman responded to the social, political, and religious challenges of his day with a holistic vision that was at the same time practical and teleological. With **the religion of Jesus** as a foundation, Thurman's response was more than just a socio-political reaction or theological explanation, but a theo-ethical accounting of what was occurring and what could – and inherently, should – be done about it. Balancing his idealist vision of God's creative intent with the harsh realities of life, he analyzed, evaluated, and

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[143] Howard Thurman, "The Perils of Immature Piety," (speech, May 1925, Rochester, NY) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 48.
[144] Matthew 5:48.

responded to the immediate issues of segregation, discrimination, prejudice, and violence while concurrently searching for that space in which humanity could find harmony and wholeness.[145]

In many of his texts including *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949), *The Luminous Darkness* (1965), and *The Search for Common Ground* (1971), Howard Thurman employs this structure of critical evaluation followed by theo-ethical response. Similar to other religious scholars and ministers, he applied various tools of critical evaluation toward the social, political, and religious problems of his day. What sets Thurman apart is that his analysis and criticism is partnered with a holistic vision/response – holistic in **scope** and holistic in **time**. As he describes the relationship between the past, the present, and the future, "I never renounce the past; I cannot ever escape the fact that I am a part of my past, that my experience of another period of life has entered intimately into the making of the present unit I call myself. . . . The present is a moment when the past and the future meet and greet each other. The present is a very satisfying thing, but it is never an isolate thing."[146] Though working from a particular and limited social space, Thurman nevertheless attempted to see beyond the interests of specific collectives whether they be of race, religion, denomination, culture, or tradition, and, instead, attempted to incorporate a more inclusive vision. Instead of producing solutions that were beneficial for one or a limited number of individuals or groups, Thurman envisioned responses that would not only lean toward the overall well-being of humanity but even to all the creatures that inhabit this world. In our modern religious and academic institutions which tend to be influenced by a wide variety of special interest groups, driven by the pressure toward specialization, and justified by a proclivity toward self-determined separatism, Thurman's theo-ethical approach is often difficult to

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[145] In *The Search for Common Ground* (particularly Chapter II), Thurman examines the "creative intent" demonstrated in various creation stories which articulate the intent God has for humanity and all living things.
[146] Howard Thurman, "Standing on Tip Toe," (lecture, January 4, 1948) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 3*, 249.

implement. Yet, his attention toward solutions of wholeness and harmony may be needed more now than ever.

As a practical dreamer, Howard Thurman responded to the problems of his day by holding the pragmatic and the visionary in tension. In many of his writings, sermons, and speeches, Thurman often analyzed the social, political, and cultural issues he encountered and followed with a theo-ethical response. In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman evaluates the problem of oppressive social systems and proposes a response of the love-ethic of Jesus (as opposed to fear, deception, and hatred), and in *The Luminous Darkness*, he evaluates debilitating systems of segregation and submits a theo-ethical response of hope. As mentioned above, the primary antagonist toward which Thurman applied his time, energies, thoughts, and professional career was the problem of division and fragmentation within Christianity, religion, and society. To restate the quote above from his autobiography, "religion had become so identified with sectarianism, and its essence so distorted by it, that I felt the need to bring to bear all the resources of mind and spirit on the oneness of the human quest."[147] To the problem of division, Thurman would respond in both pragmatic and visionary ways, creatively synthesizing these sometimes paradoxical goals in new ways of understanding and being. His responses were often prophetic both in theory and in practice, leading others into theo-ethical praxis.

From Thurman's perspective, if division and separation are the core problems at hand, then the solution(s) **should** bring the separated "together."[148] Thurman was not so naïve to think this process would be easy or quick (or even possible his lifetime or those that immediately

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[147] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 199.
[148] I understand that "together" is a vague term and conceptually speaking, there are multitudes of ways in which various components can be "together." For the purposes of this paper, it may be more helpful to articulate what "together" does **not** mean. Segregated, separated, divided and fragmented do not fall within the category of "together," and consistent with Thurman's understanding of the term, "together" also implies some relation to being more harmonious, whole, and cooperative.

followed), but he never abandoned the basic logic of this premise. He never relinquished his hope that if anything, we – as a society and a church – can strive to be more "together" and more harmonious than the current state. Thurman continued to hold onto his vision from Khyber Pass "to find out if experiences of spiritual unity among people could be more compelling than the experiences which divide them."[149] Thurman's introspection upon this experience "propelled him to experiment further with his developing sense of the power of religious experience to create human community among diverse ethnicities, religions, and cultures."[150] Again, if division as a manifestation of troubled human relatedness was the problem, Thurman's theo-ethical response was finding ways to create community and harmony that were more compelling than the reasons to separate. Thurman committed to this vision in thought, word, and vocation.

The inchoate vision Howard Thurman received at Khyber Pass in 1936 would slowly grow and mature in the years that followed. One significant step on this journey was the publication of his seminal text, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, in 1949. Here he proposes a theo-ethical response to the problems of discrimination, injustice, and division in society and the church. The middle chapters of this book explore the possibilities of fear, deception, and hate as responses to living in a world governed by a white majority who consistently demonstrate the will to dominate and control those who are different. Even though Thurman acknowledges the justifiable reasons of accepting fear, deception, and hate as responses in the situation many of the disinherited found themselves, he nevertheless steers the reader away from these options.

One of the reasons Thurman argues these "three hounds of hell" are insufficient responses to injustice is the effects they have on the individuals who embody them. "The

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[149] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 24.
[150] Fluker, et al. "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, xix.

penalty of deception is to **become** a deception, with all sense of moral discrimination vitiated. A man who lies habitually becomes a lie, and it is increasingly impossible for him to know when he is lying and when he is not."[151] According to Thurman, the effects of hatred are similar to that of deception. He writes, "Despite all the positive psychological attributes of hatred . . . , hatred destroys finally the core of the life of the hater. . . . Hatred bears deadly and bitter fruit. It is blind and nondiscriminating."[152] Finally, as a theo-ethical response, Thurman turns to the teachings of Jesus as a reminder to why hate must be avoided. He writes, "Jesus rejected hatred. It was not because he lacked the vitality or the strength. It was not because he lacked the incentive. Jesus rejected hatred because he saw that hatred meant death to the mind, death to the spirit, death to communion with his Father. He affirmed life; and hatred was the great denial."[153] In addition to the immediate consequences of fear, deception, and hate on the individual, Thurman also knew these responses were teleologically insufficient because they would only perpetuate the existing divisions within society and the Church – the privileged and the disinherited, the powerful and the powerless, the oppressors and the oppressed. Even though fear, deception, and hate potentially have merit as survival strategies, they nevertheless perpetuate a culture and society of discrimination and injustice for future generations, and this was incompatible with Thurman's teleological vision of humanity.

Instead of the "three hounds of hell" which most often tend to perpetuate dysfunctional forms of human relatedness, Thurman presents a theo-ethical alternative representative of the teachings of Jesus and consistent with Thurman's own teleological vision of harmony and wholeness. Based upon several of the teachings of Jesus regarding love (love of neighbor, love

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[151] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 65.
[152] Ibid., 85-86.
[153] Ibid., 88.

of self, and love of enemy), the "religion of Jesus makes the love-ethic central."[154] Thurman's love-ethic incorporates several of the foundational ideas and concepts mentioned above including the reverence of personality rooted in the belief that all persons are equally children of God. He writes, "the need for love is an essential element in the structure of personality. It is responsible for the establishing of a pattern of response to other human beings that makes possible all forms of community and of relatedness between human beings in society."[155]

Even though this need for love serves as an essential foundation in creating new and healthy forms of human relatedness, Thurman also recognized that much work needed to be done in the structures of society and the hearts of people before this can become a viable possibility.[156] One of these is a change of "will" by the powerful and oppressive. In 1929, Thurman shared, "When the will to dominate and control is relaxed, then the way is clear for spontaneous self-giving, for sharing all gratuitously. This new spirit finds its direction in the **will to love**. A group so disposed finds its security in a new kind of relationship."[157] Though the paths and challenges are different, the privileged and the disinherited alike will need to determine ways to transition away from various contentious forms of existence by implementing the love-ethic of Jesus and the will to love. Our futures depend on these transitions into healthier forms of human relatedness because for better and for worse our pasts, presents, and futures are not simply connected but interdependent.

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[154] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 89. For verses in the Bible regarding loving one's neighbor, see Matthew 22:39 and Mark 12:31; for verses regarding loving one's enemy, see Matthew 5:43-48 and Luke 6:27-38. Chapter 5 is Thurman's explication of the love-ethic of Jesus.

[155] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 106.

[156] Smith, *The Mystic as Prophet*, 16-17.

[157] Howard Thurman, "'Relaxation' and Race Conflict," (1929) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 149.

Theo-Ethical Response: Challenging the Norms

One of the unique attributes Thurman demonstrated throughout his life and career was his ability not simply to question the social, political, and religious norms of his day, but to overcome them with strategic action. Howard Thurman was not the only or even the best social critic of his day, but better than most, he was able to implement strategies which aimed to challenge long-standing beliefs and structures which maintained discrimination, injustice, and separatism within religious America. Unlike many who see social, political, and religious norms as impenetrable boundaries and immovable objects, Thurman saw them more as barriers to be overcome, walls to be torn down, and bridges to be crossed. In a time when black boys and girls in the South were rarely allowed to go to school beyond the 7th grade, Howard Thurman worked through great difficulty and hardship – including not having enough food to eat – to graduate from high school.[158] Even though black graduate students were rarely given the opportunity to attend white seminaries, Thurman was one of two black students admitted to Rochester Theological Seminary, and while there, he became the first black student to room with a white student – and did so voluntarily.[159]

In 1935-1936, Thurman led the Pilgrimage of Friendship to India, Burma, and Ceylon which constituted the first such endeavor where he, his wife, and two other colleagues went not as Christian missionaries to convert those in India to Christianity, but as fellow persons of faith trying to determine how to overcome racial and class segregation. During this trip Thurman had the privilege of meeting with Mahatma Gandhi for over three hours to discuss non-violent resistance and the evils of racial segregation.[160] In 1944, Howard Thurman helped found The

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[158] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 25.
[159] Ibid., 51-53.
[160] Ibid., 132.

Church of the Fellowship of All Peoples, arguably the first intentionally interracial, interreligious church in the United States, and when Thurman accepted the position of Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University in 1953, he became the first black American to head the chapel of a predominately white university.[161]

I mention all of this to demonstrate that throughout his career, Howard Thurman's theo-ethical responses were not simply rejections of existing norms or rebellions against unjust structures and systems, but they were also directed toward the creation of something "new" and different. Whether in the formation of a new kind of church based on an interracial and multicultural community or a new approach to a university chapel, Thurman's teleological vision moved him beyond the segregated and separated realities of his day to find new and different forms of human relatedness and community bent toward the pursuit of harmony, wholeness, and integration. For Thurman, these ideas were bound within a concept he called "potential" or "actualizing potential."[162] As he teleologically explains, "So long as there is conviction that a potential has not been actualized either in the individual, the society, or in the world, the rational necessity and possibility of a realized future must be honored."[163] Yet, what set Thurman apart was not the fact that he envisioned something "new" (there were countless people during his time period who wanted a new and different socio-political, religious, and economic reality), but what he envisioned and how he thought society and the Church could get there.

To return to Thurman's senior year in high school where the interracial meeting was divided vertically instead of horizontally, this story could serve as a metaphor for Thurman's approach to racial and religious division. To recall the story, neither form of dividing/separating

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[161] Fluker, et all, "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, xvii.
[162] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 7.
[163] Ibid., 45.

the lecture hall was acceptable to Howard Thurman. Deciding to divide the groups vertically

was not particularly something "new" because it was essentially just a variant form of pre-

existing separation/segregation. For Thurman, the only acceptable form of division was **none at**

all. In *The Search for Common Ground*, Thurman addresses this issue by challenging what he

calls "self-determined separatism." After the de-legislation of Jim and Jane Crow Segregation

and the subsequent growing influence of the Black Power Movement, Thurman writes the

following regarding the developing socio-political, cultural, and economic strategies:

> The tendency toward whole-making was at once self-defeating if it did not establish
> clear-cut and fixed boundaries. Without such boundaries freedom itself had no
> significance, so the reasoning ran. Therefore, it was only within fixed boundaries, **self-**
> **determined** – and that is the key word – that the goals of community could be
> experienced, achieved, or realized. The natural lines along which the boundaries should
> be set would be to separate those who had been historically victimized by society from
> those who had victimized them.[164]

As the quote shows, Thurman was empathic toward this approach and he sympathized with the

harm that had been done to the countless victims of centuries of racial injustice – indeed, he was

one of them. He understood that developing "new senses of community within self-determined

boundaries" seemed immediately realistic and practical.[165] He also understood that the existence

of the walls of division (due to both segregation and self-determined separation) created a sense

of "peace, well-being, and security" for both the privileged and the disinherited.[166]

Thurman was also able to see beyond the immediate needs and desires of such an

approach toward the greater *telos* of people from different races, ethnicities, religions, and

cultures learning to live together in peace and cooperation the United States. As Thurman writes

in a Christmas meditation, "I know that the experiences of unity in human relations are more

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[164] Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, 96.
[165] Ibid., 103.
[166] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 89.

compelling than the concepts, the fears, the prejudices, which divide. Despite the tendency to

feel my race superior, my nation the greatest nation, my faith the true faith, I must beat down the

boundaries of my exclusiveness until my sense of separateness is completely enveloped in a

sense of fellowship."[167] Teleologically speaking, learning how to live fellowship together in

more safe, just, and equitable ways cannot be accomplished fully from behind walls of separation

– forced or self-determined. As Thurman writes,

> The walls that divide must be demolished. They must be cast down, destroyed, uprooted. This is beyond debate. There must be a ceaseless and unrelenting pressure to that end, using all the resources of our common life. These barriers must be seen for what they are, a disease of our society, the enemy of human decency and humane respect. . . .When the walls are down, it is then that the real work of building the healthy American society begins.[168]

Thurman believed that the various forms of self-determined separatism were short-term solutions

at best, "a stop-gap, a halt in the line of march toward full community or, at most, a time of

bivouac on a promontory overlooking the entire landscape of American society."[169]

Metaphorically speaking, self-determined separatism is similar to dividing the lecture hall

vertically, and even though it is preferable to horizontal segregation, it still perpetuates the

practice of division and discrimination and in so doing ultimately prevents the progress toward

harmony, wholeness, and cooperation.

For Thurman, the limitations of self-determined separatism were not simply theoretical

(teleological or theological), but also practical. "The fact that such separatism is not a practical

procedure, that it cuts one off from the basic right to be a part of the common life, that it is

falling away from the sense of participation in a collective destiny – all these are often

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[167] Howard Thurman, "The Christmas Candles," in *The Inward Journey*, 29.
[168] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 92.
[169] Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, 103.

forgotten."[170] For Thurman, the "collective destiny" was not based upon a particular group or collective, but American society as a whole, and part of this understanding came from knowing what it meant (from personal experience) to **not** be allowed to participate in that collective destiny: to have others determine what one can and cannot do, where one can and cannot go, what one can and cannot be. Thurman had a deep conviction of the democratic ideal and he knew that to be left out of this process – an undeniable result of division, discrimination, and separation – was to prevent not only the freedom and liberty of particular individuals and groups, but also to hinder the progress of the country as a whole.[171] For this reason, Thurman consistently tried to find community and harmony where it existed and he often tried to create where it did not exist. He searched for "some quality of experience that could quarantine the sense of separateness that divided men [and women] into groups so that it would not continue to invade and become operative in the area of human relations." During his lifetime as a pastor, professor, public speaker, and university chapel dean, Thurman "found that it is quite possible to have experiences of unity with other human beings, which experiences seem to undercut the sense of separateness at all levels, except that of personal individuality."[172]

For Howard Thurman, this desire for creating new forms of community based on harmony and wholeness was constantly challenged by a wide variety of obstacles – both personal and professional. Professionally, Thurman encountered resistance from some of the educational and religious institutions of which he was a part and even strained some of the relationships with colleagues in these institutions.[173] These job changes also often included reductions in pay and

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[170] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 29-30.
[171] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 123.
[172] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 149.
[173] Fluker, et al., eds. "Biographical Essay," *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman*, *Vol 2*, xxxviii .
When Thurman decided to leave Howard University to pursue the co-pastorate of The Church of the Fellowship of

which made providing for his family more difficult. When Thurman decided to leave Howard

University and move to San Francisco to co-pastor The Church of the Fellowship of All Peoples,

the significant decrease in salary was a concern for Howard and Sue. Yet, as Thurman recounts

in his autobiography to this difficulty, "I gave a pious answer, but one that I believed utterly.

'God will take care of me.' I believed it then, and it remains to this day an affirmation of my

total self."[174] Related to but also distinct from these professional obstacles, Thurman also had

many personal questions, concerns, and doubts in the pursuit of his teleological vision. For

Thurman, these challenges were not simply psychological hurdles or emotional strains, but

challenges of his spirit. He writes,

> I have had to wrestle with many spiritual crises growing out of what seemed to be the
> contradictory demands of love and hate, of vengeance and mercy, and of retaliation and
> reconciliation. In all of these experiences there is a part of me that seeks ever for
> harmony, for community, for unity and creative synthesis in conflicting relations; and an
> equally articulate urgency within me for withdrawal, for separateness, for isolation, and
> for aggression.[175]

For Thurman, challenging socio-political and religious norms was never simply an act of

social protest or religious reform. As mentioned above, an aspect of Thurman's mysticism is

that he did not readily distinguish between the sacred and the secular, the social and the spiritual.

For this reason, the pursuit of harmony and wholeness in community was not just a social

strategy but a spiritual trial, and the challenges he faced along the way were not simply

professional obstacles but were also spiritual crises. Like most everyone else, Thurman felt the

temptation of hate, bitterness, retaliation, and withdrawal. But different than most, he was also

able to see the long-term effects of these strategies. And maybe more than most, Thurman was

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All Peoples in San Francisco, this decision was related to the growing strain between Thurman and his longtime
mentor and the president of Howard University, Mordecai Wyatt Johnson.
  [174] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 141.
  [175] Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground*, 77.

able to envision alternative forms of being and togetherness which promoted harmony and wholeness. With both the country and the Church seemingly in a perpetual crisis of human relatedness – in the past, present, and in the foreseeable future – Thurman's ideas and visions of harmony and wholeness seem at the same time impossible yet needed more than ever. In a time when economic disparity between races and classes is expanding, divorce rates remain high and constant both within the Church and society as a whole, and most solutions to problems of discrimination and injustice seem to fall hopelessly short, the wisdom of Howard Thurman may be more urgent and necessary than ever.

Theo-Ethical Response: Something Missed, Something Forgotten, Something New

We will now return to the original question at hand: Why has the Church largely been ineffective in addressing the problems of discrimination and injustice both in society and within its own fellowship? Why, some seventy years after Howard Thurman posed this question and fifty years after the end of the Civil Rights movements, is the Church and society struggling to minimize – yet alone eliminate – the effects of prejudice in regards to race, gender, religion, language, class, sexual orientation, political affiliation, etc.? Why are our and neighborhoods and churches still predominately racially divided and why have Christian denominations failed to overcome differences in order to worship the same God **together**. And why do minorities in this country – whether based on skin color, religion, language, or sexual orientation – still suffer discrimination and injustice at a higher rates than others of this country? Again, an exhaustive analysis of these problems is beyond the scope of this dissertation and all-encompassing solutions are far beyond my level of expertise, but like Thurman, I think this ineffectiveness is

directly related to the Church and society accepting and living into ideologies of separatism –

and in so doing, perpetuating the system of control and dominance of white normativity. I am

not convinced that separatist constructions of justice are effective or affective because, in the

end, separatist forms of justice just create multiple forms of particularized forms of justice

competing against each other. As such, I believe justice at its best is pluralistic and

collaborative, promoting justice for all and not just one particular collective. Thus, I believe we

should continue to look for methods and ways of understanding to overcome these social ills and

evils which are inclusive and collaborative. As Thurman shared in 1938, "We must search more

and more creatively how to devise methods by which good may supplant evil, by which the

hearts of men [and women] may be redeemed, and by which the world in which those hearts

must function may be redeemed."[176]

This search for "more" and "more creatively" often includes looking in different

directions and different places and not just utilizing the same ideological frameworks provided

by previous groups and systems – especially if these frameworks continue to promote

discrimination and injustice. As mentioned above, Howard Thurman's theo-ethical vision

allowed him to see how the past, present, and future were all connected. He not only learned

from those who had come before, but he also incorporated this knowledge into some of his own

ideas. In addition to this, Thurman also consistently let his teleological vision guide his present,

allowing his imagination to create the links between his current context and the better world in

which he envisioned. Incorporating this strategy is both helpful and necessary in addressing our

troubled forms of human relatedness.

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[176] Howard Thurman, "The Kingdom of God," (lecture, June 26, 1938, Northfield, MA) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, 170.

Advances in technology have created access to unfathomably "more" information and knowledge since Howard Thurman's time and, yet, in spite of this increase, both the Church and society have arguably made limited progress in the transition towards more just and equitable living for all. In spite of tireless efforts of well-intentioned academics, activists, politicians, clergy, lay, educators, economists, business persons, and countless others, the bridge between our current state of troubled human relatedness and the better world which we envision seems just as impossible to cross as it did during Thurman's time. Again, why has this transition been so difficult in spite of the increased knowledge and resources available to those who desire such changes? In light of this troublesome reality, I think it is prudent to see if there is anything vital that we may have "missed" or overlooked along the way as we have tried to make this transition. Is there an essential component or barrier which continues to prevent progress along the desired trajectory? And what if that component was installed or particular barrier was removed? Once again, I believe Howard Thurman may have profound insight into what we may have been missing along the troubled way to justice, harmony, and wholeness.

As mentioned above, one of the things that distinguishes Howard Thurman from others both in his time and after was that he did not see discrimination and injustice as the core problems to be addressed, but as symptoms of the deeper-rooted issues of division and separatism (which often lead to discrimination and injustice). In attempting to understand Thurman's overarching system of thought, this conviction cannot be overstated. Also, Thurman did not simply accept the divisions – racial, religious, and otherwise – society had in place as being inevitable or absolute.[177] These divisions and labels were created by humans and, thus,

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[177] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, xiv.

could be dismantled by humans as well. To blindly accept these divisions and accompanying labels as absolute was to empower the norms and systems which they supported.

On the contrary, he believed these barriers which framed these divisions were permeable, and if vulnerable, their inevitability and their value could be called into question. Thus, he consistently crossed and tried to dismantle them whenever possible for he believed these walls of separation and the labels associated with them prevented people from coming together – person to person, group to group – to overcome the social ills and injustices prevalent in society and the Church. As he states, "One of the central problems in human relations is applying the ethic of respect for personality in a way that is not governed by special categories."[178] I believe Thurman would argue that, historically speaking, these central problems in human relations perpetuate because these **special categories have actually governed the ethic of respect for personality**. Martin Luther King, Jr. noted something similar in his "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963 when he famously stated, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."[179] Unfortunately, this dream remains distant still because individuals and groups are still judged by the color of their skin, the religious covering on their head, and the color of their political affiliation **prior to** and **in priority over** their individual person and personality.

Howard Thurman believed this "central problem in human relations" was a consequence of the long-held social, political, economic, and religious norms of segregation and separation. He also understood that the belief in the inevitability and absoluteness of separatism would have to be abandoned if harmony and wholeness were to ever be realized in the future. He writes,

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[178] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 1.

[179] Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream . . ." (speech, Aug 28, 1963, Washington, D.C.), accessed October 1, 2018, https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf

"What one has discerned to be indigenous and of timeless value during the long period of enforced separation must be denied in the new order of relatedness."[180] If the Church and society are going to move beyond our multitude of forms of troubled human relatedness, the belief that separate is not only necessary but better can no longer be assumed. Even though separatism has its values, merits, and traditions, it also carries with it an inherent mood of friction and competition.   Instead, we will need to challenge these norms and find new – or possibly forgotten – frames of understanding to replace the long-held assumption of separatism.

As someone who was able to cross racial and religious divides more often and more adeptly than most in his time period, Howard Thurman understood the complexity of this endeavor. He understood that the transition from discrimination and injustice to harmony and wholeness was neither quick nor easy nor obvious. He also understood that the Church had not been on the forefront of instituting initiatives to minimize segregation and sectarianism, but that the Church has often followed the rest of society in this area. White evangelical Christianity's individualistic theology often "blocks the path" toward racial reconciliation and structural justice and mainline Protestantism's "strength was its ability to be a public Christian voice for racial justice, rather than a force for grassroots cultural or even ecclesial change."[181] In other words, in spite of claims to and language of reconciliation and ecumenism, much of white Protestant Christianity in the United States has been ineffective in addressing racial injustice and separatism in greater society. As Putnam and Campbell explain, "To 'adapt' and 'conform' are passive verbs, chosen because, in general, religion has not served a prophetic role and promoted greater racial diversity. Religious Americans are following the trend, not setting it."[182] Thurman, on the

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[180] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 33.
[181] Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 175-179.
[182] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 315.

other hand, promoted a prophetic vision in trying to initiate the trend of overcoming racial and religious separatism in thought, word, and deed. He believed with great conviction that religious experience could be a vessel by which these divisions could be overcome, but this religious experience would have to be understood and practiced in a new way.

In the development of his ideological framework, Thurman utilized a variety of terms and concepts, some of which he borrowed from various traditions and others which he coined himself (i.e., "respect for personality"). Many of these ideas contribute to his understanding of the journey from division to togetherness, from discrimination to justice, from competition to collaboration, from antagonism to harmony. Of the ideas, phrases, and terms Thurman used in his sermons, lectures, articles, and books, I intend to focus on one particular concept I believe to be vital in this transition from our current crisis of human relatedness to the *telos* of harmony, wholeness, and justice. Directly related to the problem of separatism that has plagued the Church and relevant as an essential component in his visions of a better world, **reconciliation** – as both a theological concept and theo-ethical practice – influences much of Thurman's thoughts and actions. Both explicitly and implicitly, reconciliation weaves its way throughout his writings, lectures, and life; so much so that I would claim that much of Howard Thurman's ideology is undergirded by an *ethos* of reconciliation.

Theo-Ethical Response: An *Ethos* of Reconciliation

Early in his academic career, Howard Thurman was exposed to the idea of reconciliation and its relevance to the issues of racial segregation and injustice. While attending Morehouse College, he joined several programs including the YMCA and the Fellowship of Reconciliation

(FOR – a Christian pacifist and social activist group which protested war, imperialism, and other social injustices). As an active participant and student leader in these groups, Thurman discovered the possibilities of collaboration with like-minded whites.[183] With the YMCA, FOR, and other collaborative efforts with white students, colleagues, activists, and fellow clergypersons in the years to come, Thurman would discover the widespread potential of reconciliation between black and white.[184]

Reconciliation would continue to serve as a primary theme throughout Howard Thurman's career whether in the practical attempts to create interracial Christian worship spaces or in the theoretical realms of his ideas expressed in his writings and sermons. Though more present in some of his texts than others, the idea of reconciliation can be found in many of his books including his first monograph (*Jesus and the Disinherited*) as well as his final books (*The Search for Common Ground* and his autobiography, *With Head and Heart*). For Thurman, reconciliation was not necessarily an independent or singular concept or idea, but intimately linked to other essential aspects of his ideology. As Luther E. Smith explains these connections in Thurman's thought:

> . . .essential to community is reconciliation. Thurman considers the term 'reconciliation' and 'love' to be synonyms. . . Love responds to an individual's basic need of being cared for. It participates in the attempt to actualize potential, and therefore completes the fragmented and unfulfilled personality. But at a larger level, it brings together separated lives. It makes apparent the significance of relationships by stressing how inter-dependence is inherent in all of life. Love makes community.[185]

These several sentences demonstrate the interconnectedness between reconciliation and the larger scope of Howard Thurman's system of thought and vision. For Smith to note the

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[183] Fluker, et al. eds., "Biographical Essay," *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, l-li.
[184] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 266.
[185] Smith, *Mystic as Prophet*, 50.

synonymous relationship between reconciliation and love – and its connection to "potential,"

"personality," "relationship," "inter-dependence," and "community" – demonstrates the

synergistic nature of reconciliation. In fact, this approach may provide a glimpse into the

problematic history of reconciliation in socio-political and socio-religious discourses. Instead of

viewing reconciliation as a singular idea or entity (which has often been the case), it may be

more fruitful to re-conceptualize reconciliation within a broader vision as an *ethos*, a theory, or a

theo-ethic. This synergistic understanding may also provide insight into our question at hand:

How can the Church and society transition from troubled forms of human relatedness to spaces

of harmony and wholeness? Maybe reconciliation – as a broader *ethos* or theo-ethic and not

simply as a singular concept – is the link that has been missing in this often-failed transition.

Historically speaking, talk and efforts of reconciliation in socio-political and socio-

religious discourses has often proven unfruitful and even restrictive in the transition away from

discrimination and injustice. Considering this, I deem it valid to ask a similar question of

reconciliation as Howard Thurman asked of Christianity in *Jesus and the Disinherited*:   Why is

it that "reconciliation" seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively, with the issues

of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race, religion and national origin? Is this

impotency due to a betrayal of the genius of the "concept," or is it due to a basic weakness in the

"concept" itself?[186] Similar to Christianity, I believe this failure has more to do with

misunderstanding and misapplication than as a basic weakness in the concept itself. As such, I

aim to re-examine and re-imagine reconciliation within a broader framework as an *ethos*, a theo-

ethic hoping to unlock its actualizing potential. Even though reconciliation is apparently limited

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[186] In her book, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2014), Jennifer Harvey examines the shortcomings of the "reconciliation paradigm" as traditionally conceived through the perspective of whiteness.

as an independent concept, as part of a synergistic *ethos*, it may be a vital missing component in the transition – or possibly, the transformation – from discrimination and injustice towards harmony and wholeness. In the journey from our troubled state of human relatedness to love and community, I cannot fathom a path that does not go through reconciliation at some point along the way. As someone who had more success in these attempts than most, I believe Howard Thurman will be an exemplary guide along that journey.

Raised in the South during Jim and Jane Crow Segregation, Howard Thurman understood that the various forms of separatism evident in society were not simply neutral forms of differentiation, but that these divisions were often accompanied by various forms of divisiveness. Especially in regards to race, but also evident in other socio-political classifications, division based upon difference was not just evidence of existing prejudice, but it also served as a justification for discrimination which then led to a multitude of antagonisms and injustices. In this, separatism was the manifestation of a deep-rooted problem of human relatedness. Instead of simply accepting this culture of separatism with its correlative discrimination, antagonism, and injustice, Howard Thurman challenged these social-political and religious norms by promoting an *ethos* of reconciliation believing that humanity was created for something better than contentiousness. Reconciliation becomes an essential step the process towards the betterment of humanity because separatism usually just perpetuates discrimination and injustice in society and the Church. Yet, before reconciliation can become a cultural norm, it is important not only to explicate the meaning and understanding – the *logos* – of the term, but it is also vital to examine the logic which justifies its necessity and potential.

CHAPTER 2: *LOGOS* – THE THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY AND
MORAL MEANING OF RECONCILIATION

> It is more or less a truism that an idea held in mind tends to express itself in action. Especially this is true if the idea carries with it an emotional fringe. We cannot properly appreciate and understand what is going on in objective experience unless we somehow get back of it to the great world of ideas – intangible, unseen – which controls human activity.[187]
>
> > – Howard Thurman, "College and Color"

Idea, Action, Will, and Experience

As a student at Rochester Theological Seminary, Howard Thurman began to further

expand the theoretical and theological foundations for his developing system of thought.

Particularly informative during these years were John Dewey's theories of pragmatic and

reflective thinking along with William James' theories on religious experience.[188] It was also

during his time here in New York that he also began to think more deeply and write about the

intersections of race and religion. The epigraph above is taken from "College and Color,"

Thurman's first essay written on the topic.[189]

For the purposes of this dissertation and its relevance to the topic at hand, this quote is

significant for several reasons. First, it explicates the relationship between "idea" and "action"

and even articulates how it is influenced by emotion and experience. In regards to race and

religion, to claim the "truism that an idea held in the mind tends to express itself in action" is

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[187] Howard Thurman, "College and Color," (April 1924), in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 37.

[188] Fluker, et al., "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, lvii.

[189] Ibid., lv.

particularly poignant. The idea that racial or religious prejudice held in the mind tends to express itself in action shifts the focus away from simply adhering to social norms and places individual accountability and ethical responsibility for one's actions. This quote also demonstrates Dewey and James' influence on Thurman's ideas regarding the role of experience – and religious experience in particular – in understanding what is going on in human activity. For Dewey, experience was life's great teacher, and it is our reflection upon our experiences which not only creates meaning but also provides a means to understand and navigate this world. As such, one's education and understanding come from the "continual reorganization, reconstruction and transformation of experience."[190]

With Thurman's self-reflection upon his life experiences, this relationship between idea and action in regards to race and religion had a peculiar manifestation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it was during his time at Rochester (the first time in his life where he was in a primarily white context) that Thurman began to examine an idea within his own mind: the belief that the "category of exception" applied to white persons in his community and that his relationships with them were essentially amoral.[191] For Thurman, neither prejudice nor exception was acceptable and he continued to examine his own heart and mind to find those beliefs with which he could rest with in his own spirit.

This chapter's epigraph creates the framework by which to examine alternative options to those commonly provided by society and the Church including prejudice, indifference, hate, distrust, and, in Thurman's case, exception. In the years following his time at Rochester, Howard Thurman would continue to explore this relationship between idea and action including

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[190] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1961), 50.
[191] Howard Thurman, "The Christian Minister and the Desegregation Decision," (May 1957) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 170-171.

the development of a concept he would refer to as the "will." Correctly interpreted, "will" is a

synthesis of intention and motivation because it carries more force than intention, yet, it has not

moved entirely into the realm of action. In a paper he wrote in 1929 titled, "'Relaxation' and

Race Conflict," Thurman examines the role of "will" in the creation and perpetuation of the

social, cultural, political, and religious climate. He claims the current socio-political status can

be traced to particular "wills" of the dominant group which will have to shift before any real

change can occur. He writes,

> When the will to dominate and control is relaxed, then the way is clear for spontaneous
> self-giving, for sharing all gratuitously. This new spirit finds its direction in the **will to
> love**. A group so disposed finds its security in a new kind of relationship. The relaxation
> of the will to control and to dominate becomes something very positive and dynamic.
> Nothing can take the place of or atone for this profound change of basic point of view.
> Anything less than this on the part of the dominant group is mere patronizing.[192]
> In addition to the shifting from the "will to dominate and control" to the "will to love,"

other "wills" will also have to be shifted in the pursuit of new kinds of relationships between

individuals and groups whose primary form of relatedness has been defined by contentiousness.

According to Miroslav Volf, one of the essential shifts in will includes the transition from

exclusion to the will to embrace:

> the will to give ourselves to others and 'welcome' them, to readjust our identities to make
> space for them, is prior to any judgment about others, except that of identifying them in
> their humanity. The **will to embrace** precedes any 'truth' about others and any
> construction of their 'justice.' . . . As I stress the priority of the 'will to embrace,' **my
> assumption is that the struggle against deception, injustice, and violence is
> indispensable**. (author's emphasis)[193]

Volf's understanding of the "will to embrace" is similar to Thurman's view of the reverence of

personality in that one's worth is initially found within one's humanity as a child of God and

everything else proceeds from that starting point. Yet, also similar to Thurman, Volf's view of

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[192] Thurman, "'Relaxation' and Race Conflict," (1929), in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 149.
[193] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 29.

embrace is not separate or independent from the struggles of truth and justice – the "will to embrace" is **both** an act of welcoming the other **and** that "the struggle against deception, injustice, and violence is indispensable."

The will to embrace as a response to exclusion is similar to other relevant concepts Thurman examines throughout his career. In 1944, still five years prior to the publication of *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Thurman wrote the following: "There can be no peace tomorrow until all [persons] are treated with a dignity becoming children of God. The will to [kinship] must be reinforced and the will to segregation relaxed and uprooted. This is the teaching of Jesus."[194] Again, Thurman sees a necessary shifting from one "will" to another and these shifts demonstrate the causal relationship between thought and action: the will to segregate inherently produces segregation, the will to divide naturally creates division and divisiveness. Based upon his belief that all persons are children of God, the will to kinship should serve to replace the will to segregate which should be uprooted and discarded.

Considering the troubled states of relatedness between various groups of God's children, I do not believe it would be too far-reaching to extrapolate the claim that the "will to kinship" would also include a shift toward the "will to reconciliation." Just as the will to segregate naturally creates segregation, it is the hope – or possibly faith – of people such as Howard Thurman that the will to reconciliation would eventually lead to the creation of reconciled human relationships. Though history would demonstrate that this causal relationship between idea and action is far from guaranteed, it is difficult to imagine transitioning from division to kinship and harmony without it. I think one could speculate that, at least in part, one of the reasons

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[194] Howard Thurman, "The White Problem," (1944), in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 3*, 149.

reconciliation has remained elusive within Christian and socio-political contexts is the lack of will to pursue reconciliation in any robust sense of the word. Even if Christians express a desire or even an interest in reconciliation, if it has not matured into more of a will, the commitment to the reconciliatory efforts may waver with time and difficulty. In a similar manner in which a person may express a hope for an end to world hunger or a desire for less pollution but if he or she does not alter his or her lifestyle toward those ends, this desire never matures into will and the idea does not sufficiently translate into action. If individuals and groups do not have a will to reconciliation in some capacity, there is a high probability it will not occur. As such, Thurman's concept of "will" as applied to reconciliation also indicates that reconciliation is not a singular concept or belief but multi-faceted in relation to idea, action, emotions, and other characteristics.

What is Reconciliation? Re-visiting the Concept and Its Context

Before proceeding in the examination and analysis of reconciliation as a theo-ethic, it will be both necessary and helpful to specify the meaning(s) of reconciliation as it relates to the current problem of human relatedness as well as Howard Thurman's ethics and system of thought. Even though the word "reconciliation" is not particularly unusual, it is also not overly common in everyday language and its meanings and understandings often vary depending on context. Beginning with a core definition from which to build upon, we can develop a broad understanding of reconciliation with its multiple nuances and applications.

As with any theoretical term or concept, discourse on "reconciliation" is often difficult to navigate due to inconsistencies regarding its definition(s), meanings, and understandings. Part of this difficulty is related to the fact that it can mean a variety of things depending on context,

framework, field of study, and perspective, and it is worthy to note that one's understanding of reconciliation can also be influenced by one's particular **experience** with reconciliation especially if an "emotional fringe" is associated with it. That is, if a person has had a very negative experience with an attempt of reconciliation, this would most likely produce a different understanding of reconciliation than someone who had a positive experience. With concepts such as reconciliation, these charged experiences influence understanding and it is simply helpful to note that even if our definitions are neutral, our understandings of such terms may not be and these different understandings can often lead to various levels of incommensurability. Not that this phenomenon can be avoided, but it nonetheless needs to acknowledged. As such, even though it is impossible to "turn off" one's previous experiences and understandings as they relate to reconciliation, it will be helpful to begin with more theoretical definitions and navigate the nuances from there.

For simplicity's sake, a lay understanding of reconciliation will serve as a reasonable starting point for conceptualizing the term. Traditionally, "reconciliation" or "to reconcile" implies the reestablishment a close relationship, as in a marriage; or to resolve a difference or dispute; to bring together that which has been separated. Beyond this basic understanding, there are several other "re-" words commonly associated with reconciliation. In addition to reestablish and resolve, other terms including repair, restore, restitution, resumption, repentance, and redemption are also understood as related to and even considered synonymous with conceptions of reconciliation. Even though these basic definitions address the general themes associated with the term, they only scratch the surface of the meaning, understanding, and interpretation of reconciliation within various discourses including theological, socio-political, and ethical.

From a strictly financial perspective, reconciliation usually refers to the settling of debts or a loan, or the balancing of accounts. Within this economic context – and particularly in regards to discourse on racial injustice – "reconciliation" is correlative with "reparations" in that both include aspects of "repair" and monetary compensation due to a harm done. According to religious scholar Jennifer Harvey, "the moral logic of reparations is justice. A debt has been incurred, it remains owed, and repayment of that debt is (morally) due. The moral logic of reparations is **decidedly not** charity or compassion."[195] It is also important to distinguish between some of the differences between reconciliation and reparations. Harvey also writes, "Reparations . . . necessarily and immediately invokes a perpetrator and a victim, an unjust beneficiary and an aggrieved party in ways that reconciliation simply does not."[196] As such, reparations does not necessarily imply an interpersonal relationship context, but it does assume a financial and/or socio-political relationship in some capacity.

Though only vaguely similar to financial renderings including reparations, reconciliation has a different meaning within individual perspectives and interpersonal relationships. One of the common uses of the term is in reference to a marriage or committed relationship that has become strained due to infidelity or any other number of reasons and the couple hopes to "reconcile" their relationship in some manner. Even though reconciliation in this context usually refers to attempts to "repair" the relationship as opposed to getting a divorce, the meaning shifts depending on a given situation. Beyond marriage, reconciliation can also be applied to various other forms of interpersonal relationships. In a recently published book, *Change of Heart: Justice, Mercy, and Making Peace with My Sister's Killer*, Jeanne Bishop recounts the story of how her understanding of her faith compelled her to seek reconciliation with the man who killed

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195 Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 144.
196 Ibid.

her sister.[197] For Jeanne, this conviction included the transition beyond forgiveness to mercy and reconciliation which eventually led her to develop a friendship (of sorts) with her sister's killer. For many Christian religious practitioners – though maybe not to the extreme case represented by Jeanne Bishop or even of marital infidelity – reconciliation is often understood in regards to various forms of interpersonal relationships.

These individual and interpersonal understandings of reconciliation (economic, experiential, and evangelical) do not provide the complete conceptual framework of the term for much of the common understanding of reconciliation has religious undertones – and overtones – which greatly influence how the term is conceived. Particularly within religious discourse and as it relates to the ideology of Howard Thurman, theological perspectives need be considered alongside these other perspectives. From a theological perspective within the Christian tradition, reconciliation is often conceived differently in that it is associated with and even used synonymously with other theological concepts such as salvation, justification, sanctification, atonement, forgiveness, redemption, and others. The meanings of these various terms associated with reconciliation also often have different meanings and usage depending on the particular tradition of context whether it be Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, or the wide variety of Protestant denominations. An exhaustive comparison and contrast of reconciliation is outside the scope of this dissertation, but in order to help provide some clarity, I will briefly attempt to distinguish some of the terms and concepts as they are used and understood within various Christian traditions.

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[197] See Jeanne Bishop, *Change of Heart: Justice, Mercy, and Making Peace with My Sister's Killer* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015).

The basic theological understanding within the Christian tradition regarding

"reconciliation" is that humanity's broken relationship with God was restored (i.e., "reconciled")

through the act of grace in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the atonement for our sins (Romans

3:24-25). As later articulated by preeminent 20th Century Protestant theologian Karl Barth,

> 'Reconciliation' is the restitution, the resumption of a fellowship which once existed but
> was then threatened by dissolution. It is the maintaining, restoring and upholding of that
> fellowship in the face of an element which disturbs and disrupts and breaks it. . . .The
> fellowship which originally existed between God and [humanity], which was then
> disturbed and jeopardized, the purpose of which is now fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the
> work of reconciliation, we describe as the covenant.[198]

This basic premise is consistent with the early church's[199] teachings on the term, and the patristic

leaders also developed several other theological beliefs and doctrines associated with

"reconciliation." One of the prominent theological themes associated with reconciliation is

soteriology (doctrine of salvation) which refers to humans being saved from the eternal

consequences of their sins. Theologically speaking, soteriology is understood as the corrective

to the broken relationship between God and humanity, salvation is the restitution of the

fellowship that existed before sin ruptured the relationship. Alongside soteriology, another

essential association with reconciliation is "justification" which refers to God removing the guilt

associated with sin and "justifying" humans by making them righteous through Jesus Christ.

Within many theological traditions, justification is based upon the premise that a Christian enters

this reconciled relationship with God through Jesus Christ via the sacrament/ritual of baptism

(Romans 6:3-5). For example, the early church believed that baptism marked the restitution of

one's relationship with God, and thus, any postbaptismal sin was a breach of the new covenant

with God and thus needed correcting. Influenced by these early doctrinal positions, within

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[198] Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 24.

[199] The term "early church" is a fairly vague term and is far from being monolithic. In this context, I am
using it to refer to the "Patristic Age" in Christianity which dates from roughly the New Testament times (1st
Century CE) through roughly the 5th to 8th Century CE.

Roman Catholicism reconciliation becomes correlative and even synonymous with other theological concepts and practices such as "confession" and "penance" in that they each represent aspects of the restoring the broken relationship with God due to sin.

This connection between justification, salvation, and reconciliation remains within Protestantism as well. As stated by Christian theologian Jürgen Moltmann, "Through Anselm in the middle ages, through Hegel in the nineteenth century, and through Karl Barth in our own time – even if in different ways – 'reconciliation' was made in the quintessence of soteriology, and the framework for understanding christology as a whole."[200] In other words, Jesus Christ and salvation could not be properly understood without reconciliation – and vice versa. This understanding of reconciliation as repairing a broken relationship between either a person and/or humanity with God (via Jesus Christ) has continued throughout the centuries in the Church whether it be part of formal doctrine or even personal faith. It is safe to say that Christianity and the Christian faith would not exist **as we know it** without some belief in reconciliation, and as such, reconciliation is not just a helpful idea or suggestion but an essential theological tenet of the Christian faith.

Though essential within the Christian tradition as a theological concept and even as a doctrine, reconciliation has a wide variety of interpretations and nuances within the various branches and traditions of Protestant Christianity. Traditionally conceived within Protestantism, reconciliation was understood as a single trajectory of God's action toward restoring right

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[200] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 187. Moltmann was a member of the German army during World War II and he surrendered to the British and subsequently spent the next several years in various prisoner-of-war camps. During this time, Moltmann experienced "a feeling of profound shame at having to share in shouldering the disgrace of one's own people." He was overcome with guilt and depression but eventually was gradually raised out of the depression by reading the Bible and reflecting upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As such, Moltmann's understanding of "reconciliation" is complex because it comes out of his own struggle of reconciling his own self with his German identity and the Nazi regime. See, Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 29-31.

relationship with humanity through Jesus Christ. According to Barth, because humanity broke

its covenant with God, humanity needs to be reconciled with God and our relationship restored,

yet, this form of reconciliation is uni-directional for "God does not need reconciliation with

[humanity], but [humanity] need[s] reconciliation with [God]."[201] This original construction has

expanded over the years including a particular nuance by Barth himself,

> To get a complete view of the event of reconciliation of man with God as the fulfillment of the covenant we have so far looked in two directions: first upwards, to God who loves the world, and then downwards, to the world which is loved by God; first to the divine and sovereign act of reconciling grace, then to the being of man reconciled with God in this act. We must now look at a third aspect, between the reconciling God above and reconciled man below. Even when we looked in those two directions we had continually to bear in mind that there is a middle point between them. . . .But that one thing in the middle is one person, Jesus Christ.[202]

With Jesus as the mediator/reconciler between God and humanity, reconciliation was understood

primarily in this "vertical" context as the justification of humanity through Christ enabled by the

love of God. Though dominant within many Christian theological traditions, this vertical

framework does not fully encompass the overall understanding of "reconciliation" as a

theological concept.

In addition to the vertical aspect, several Christian traditions have also included a more

"horizontal" trajectory which addresses the relationship between humanity and itself. In a

similar manner in which vertical reconciliation demonstrates the love of God for humanity

through justification and salvation, the horizontal component demonstrates the love of God to

humanity through "sanctification" or the process of continually being made "holy" or

"sanctified."   Several biblical passages have provided the foundation for this theological belief

including John 13:34-35, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I

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[201] Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 89.
[202] Ibid., 144-145.

have loved you, you also should love another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (NRSV). According to this perspective, Christians are intended to receive love from God via justification and extend this love with humanity as sanctification (broadly applied both in interpersonal relationships and in social acitivity).

Reconciliation has continued to have significance within evangelical Protestantism as well. Utilizing the more personalized "relationship" language of evangelicalism, it is commonly believed that the "theological foundation of our faith is reconciliation. When our relationship with God was broken, God brought us back – reconciled us – to [Godself]. . . . Now [God] has called us to be [God's] ambassadors and has given us the ministry of reconciliation."[203] For many evangelical Christians, this idea of the "ministry of reconciliation" is interpreted from 2 Corinthians 5:17-21(NRSV) and determined by the synthesis of justification and sanctification (though my assumption is most evangelical Christians in the U.S. would not use the words "justification" and "sanctification" in their description):

> So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Participation in the "ministry of reconciliation" can mean a variety of things depending on the particular Christian tradition, but for those with strong evangelistic leanings, the ministry of reconciliation primarily (and maybe even exclusively) refers to sharing the message of justification with others who have not heard and received this message yet. In this, the ministry

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[203] Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls: A Model for Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 108.

of reconciliation can look a lot like proselytizing. Christian lay interpretations of "the ministry

of reconciliation" often synthesize restoring one's relationship with God with proclaiming the

forgiveness of sins available in Christ.[204] Sanctification is primarily understood in relation to

justification, or to use more evangelistic terminology, Christians join in the ministry of

reconciliation by sharing the message of salvation in Jesus Christ with the lost. Even though this

justification/sanctification synthesis is dominant within many evangelical perspectives, there are

also other interpretations of the "horizontal" aspect of reconciliation.

For example, according to Jesuit liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, the connection

between the vertical and horizontal trajectories of reconciliation is also related to the fellowship

amongst humanity. He describes this vertical/horizontal relationship through the concept of

God's reign:

> [I]t is clear that the Old Testament conception of God sees two aspects in God's reign,
> which is part of his very essence. First, human beings are to orient themselves toward
> God vertically: i.e., the grandeur of divine filiation. Second, there is to be fellowship and
> reconciliation between human beings: i.e., [kinship]. And since God is inseparable from
> his 'reign,' both aspects are indissolubly linked as primary realities embodying our
> relationship to God and God's relationship to us.[205]

In this view of reconciliation, the manifestation of God's reconciliatory love is also the initiation

of the reign of God here on earth demonstrated by fellowship and reconciliation between

humans. Based upon his theology of hope and belief in a God of hope, Moltmann describes a

similar goal regarding the vertical and horizontal goals of justification: "The immediate

[soteriological] goal is the justification of human beings, but the supervening goal is the

justification of God, while the common goal is to be found in the reciprocal justification of God

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[204] ""What is the ministry of reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5:18?", www.GotQuestions.org, accessed
August 26, 2018, https://www.gotquestions.org/ministry-of-reconciliation.html
[205] Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), 45.

and human beings, and in their shared life in justice and righteousness."[206] With reconciliation, the eschatological reign of God is manifested in the temporal reign of God on earth which has the goals of fellowship, justice, and righteousness.

Besides the potentially burdensome jargon of these theological explications, what is also significant is what appears to be **absent** in these descriptions of horizontal reconciliation. In particular, what seems to be missing in these understandings is any explicit description of socio-political interpretations and applications of reconciliation. For example, Sobrino mentions "there is to be fellowship and reconciliation between human beings," yet cursory socio-political empirical glances would indicate that society is more determined by separatism and discord. Moltmann mentions "their shared life in justice" yet a significant portion of shared life in the United States and world is based upon relationships of injustice. In light of the overwhelming presence of division and oppression amongst the children of God, if these socio-political interpretations are accurate, reconciliation just becomes an eschatological myth or theoretical farce. Thus, even though this justification/sanctification model of reconciliation has dominated theological discourse for centuries, for others, reconciliation can (and should) also include social and political aspects in order that justification can be more just and sanctification can demonstrate the sanctity of life on earth.

Liberation and Reconciliation

Prior to addressing the socio-political aspects of reconciliation, one important note should be made regarding this theological framework of reconciliation, justification, sanctification, and

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[206] Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 183.

soteriology. Even though I will examine this specific topic more thoroughly in the following

chapter, it needs mentioning here in that it is directed related to – and potentially provides an

explanation for – the apparent gap between the theological and socio-political understandings of

reconciliation. Around 1970, a "new"[207] approach and/or ideology began to find its way into

mainstream religious academic theological discourse. With the publication of the James Cone's

seminal texts, *Black Theology and Black Power* (1969) and *A Black Theology of Liberation*

(1970), partnered with Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez's *A Theology of Liberation* (1971,

translated into English in 1973), liberation theology began to make its imprint on theological

discourse. Liberation theology broadly claimed that freedom from oppression was an essential

component of the gospel message, and as such, liberation was a vital component of Christian

theology. In particular, liberation theology brought to the forefront the liberation of the poor and

oppressed from their real-lived struggles and hardships, or, in the words of Cone, "Any message

that is not related to the liberation of the poor in a society is not Christ's message. Any theology

that is indifferent to the theme of liberation is not Christian theology."[208] Cone not only defines

liberation theology in relation to the gospel message, but claims that liberation is the **essence** of

the gospel message that is Jesus Christ."[209]

Holistic conceptions of liberation not only refer to the "good news" aspect of Christian

theology but they have strong soteriological affiliations as well. Salvation is not just the

absolving of human sin (justification), but liberation from sin. The vertical/horizontal

framework of reconciliation is also helpful in understanding these various forms and

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[207] I signify "new" because the ideas, concepts, attitudes, and approaches of liberation theology had existed
within the communities from which they came for some time. Liberation Theology was "new" only as an inchoate
approach within academic theological discourse.

[208] James Cone, "Preface to the 1970 Edition," in *A Black Theology of Liberation: Twentieth Anniversary
Edition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), v.

[209] James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

manifestations of sin. Being liberated from sin is not just a singular concept, for as Miguel De

La Torre states, "salvation, in its truest sense, becomes liberation from sin – sins committed by

the individual and, just as important, those committed to the individual through social

institutions."[210] James Cone often interprets salvation and liberation as being synonymous,

> Today the oppressed are the inhabitants of black ghettos, Amerindian reservations,
> Hispanic barrios, and other places where whiteness has created misery. To participate in
> God's salvation is to cooperate with the black Christ as he liberates his people from
> bondage. Salvation, then, primarily has to do with earthly reality and the injustice
> inflicted on those who are helpless and poor.[211]

In this, liberation is not just an individualistic or singular soteriological concept, but it is

multifaceted and plural in that it inherently binds individuals to groups and to institutions and to

systems as well. As it relates to the problem of human relatedness in the United States, these

horizontal sins are both individual and systematic – racial prejudice and racism, sexist prejudice

and sexism, class prejudice and classism, etc. As such, liberation not only implies a "vertical"

trajectory of salvation (justification), but it also promotes a more expansive "horizontal" aspect

through the potential sanctification of systems as well as individuals.

It is important to mention these various theological associations with both reconciliation

and liberation because within much modern religious and theological discourse, reconciliation

and liberation are not always seen as parallel or complimentary but are often juxtaposed against

each other. For example, womanist theologian Jacquelyn Grant questions the validity of the

"language of 'reconciliation,'" because it often "proves to be empty rhetoric unless it is preceded

by liberation."[212] In fact, reconciliation can also be perceived as being **preventative** of liberation

because it shifts the focus away from the various forms of systematic sins. I mention this

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[210] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 45.
[211] Ibid., 128.
[212] Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women's Chris and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 191.

because from a theological perspective, reconciliation and liberation **could** be interpreted as having significant theological overlap. Not only do reconciliation and liberation both have significant positions within soteriology and christology, but they are also both connected to other theological concepts such as justification and sanctification. As such, instead of being oppositional or conflicting, one could make the argument that they are, in fact, theologically compatible and even complementary.   As early black theologian J. Deotis Roberts shares, "It is my view that liberation and reconciliation must be considered at the same time and in relation to each other."[213] Metaphorically speaking, reconciliation and liberation could be interpreted as being two sides of the same **theological** coin.

Howard Thurman did not see reconciliation and liberation as oppositional or conflicting. As with other aspects of his ideology, he did not place these ideas within an "either/or" dualistic frame, but considered them concurrently as a "both—and" partnership. Technically speaking, the majority of Thurman's life and work occurred prior to the inauguration of liberation theology in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but Thurman was aware of and worked towards many of the goals and aspirations present in liberation theology. For example, more than two decades prior to the publication of James Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Thurman claimed that the gospel of Jesus Christ was particularly relevant for the poor and oppressed in society, those "with their backs against the wall." As Vincent Harding explains in the Foreword to *Jesus and the Disinherited*, "For although it is possible to glean elements of a liberation theology from its pages, this richly endowed, seminal work can be more accurately and helpfully described as a

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[213] J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 1.

profound quest for a liberating spirituality, a way of exploring and experiencing those crucial life points where personal and societal transformation are creatively joined."[214]

Even though both Thurman and Cone stress the importance of the welfare of the oppressed in their **theologies**, they nevertheless end up on different **ideological** trajectories. One possible explanation could be the generational and experiential gap between Thurman and Cone. "Thurman, like many of his peers at Howard, was consistent in his emphasis on integration and interracialism as the best way to achieve black equality."[215] Cone, on the other hand, was of the generation that followed which, in some senses, responded to the shortcomings and failures of the integrationist pursuits of Thurman's generation including the overall lack of equal, fair, and just integration. Instead of continuing in along the integrationist paradigm, James Cone and others of his generation switched trajectories as influenced by the Black Separatist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. As such, whereas Cone and other liberation theologians see a conflicting tension between liberation and reconciliation, Thurman understood them to be more complimentary. Further examination of this difference will be addressed in the following chapter, but a perfunctory explanation for the strenuous relationship between liberation and reconciliation within religious discourse is most likely related to different perspectives on the purposes and goals of the various terms and the socio-political application associated with them.

Prior to the examination of reconciliation in a socio-political context, it is important to note that these various perspectives of reconciliation – interpersonal, theological, and socio-political – do not necessarily overlap in understanding or application. "For example, in social

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[214] Vincent Harding, "Foreword," in *Jesus and the Disinherited*.
[215] Fluker, et al., "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, xxxvii.

ethics it can denote the making of peace between classes, races, and nations,"[216] but this does not always necessarily assume a direct correlation to personal relationships or theological understanding. Just because someone believes in the value of reconciliation in personal matters does not necessarily correlate to the same value being associated with socio-political and economic matters such as racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, etc. As Reinhold Niebuhr stresses in his seminal text, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, "ethical considerations which govern relations between individuals are not the same as those which govern inter-group relations. . . . A group is not just the sum of its individual members. A group can have a consciousness and value system which differ from those of its individual members."[217] This concept can be extrapolated even further in that systems and societies can also have different value systems than the groups and individual members that constitute its membership. This often becomes an ethical dilemma when individuals and groups have different value systems and forms of consciousness than society. In fact, Niebuhr argued that society (i.e., a nation) is inherently dishonest in its political policy, and thus, it is incompatible with both the emotions and the minds of moral persons and groups.[218] As such, dialogue regarding reconciliation from both individual and socio-political contexts can become convoluted and confusing.

This lack of correlation can often lead to challenges and barriers in reconciliatory discourse because one person could be talking about reconciliation from an interpersonal perspective and another from a socio-political perspective, and they are talking about the same thing and simultaneously talking about something completely different. As such, reconciliation

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[216] Gerhard Sauter, "Reconciliation," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, *Vol 4*, edited by Erwin Fahlbusch, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 504.

[217] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), xxii-xxiii.

[218] Ibid., 95-96.

is often understood in a variety of ways and these complicate the discourse, but considering the primary problem at hand – the problem of troubled human relatedness – interpersonal, theological, and socio-political perspectives are **all** relevant and necessary.

Within a socio-political framework (including individual, group, and systematic perspectives), the overall aim of reconciliation, broadly speaking, is to put "an end to conflict, and make undiminished coexistence possible."[219] Yet, in order to adequately address the problems of discrimination and injustice as mentioned by Thurman, it is imperative that we provide a thorough understanding of reconciliation from various social, political, and ethical perspectives and contexts including racial, ethnic, and religious inequality and injustice, discrimination in housing, education, penal system, medical care, etc., as well as the widespread effects and remnants of injustice and inequality due to institutional slavery and colonialism. As such, the socio-political ideas of reconciliation have been associated with numerous contexts including the racial injustices in the United States and South Africa, the religious and political tensions in the Middle East, the social stratification in India, as well as various other forms of strained relationships whether it is on group, systemic, national, or even international levels.[220] In many ways, these socio-political understandings of reconciliation are quite **dis**similar to theological definitions, meanings, and associations found within the Christian tradition. For this reason, it may be helpful to examine reconciliation not only through a theological lens, but an **ethical** one as well.

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[219] Sauter. "Reconciliation," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, *Vol 4*, 504.
[220] Several books on racial and ethnic reconciliation in these various contexts include: Tony Campolo and Michael Battle, *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005); Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999); Elias Chacour, *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2001).

Theological Versus Ethical Definitions of Reconciliation

Comparing the Christian theological definition(s) of reconciliation to the social and political understandings mentioned above, an apparent incongruence seems to exist between them. In fact, a comparison of two of the dictionaries published by Westminster John Knox Press further highlights this inconsistency. In *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (emphasis added), under the heading "Reconciliation" it reads, "see Atonement, Forgiveness."[221] Yet, according to *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, reconciliation "refers to a change of attitude from hostility to amity, of God toward humanity, humanity toward God, and of individuals toward each other."[222] First of all, it is worthy to note that in spite of the various theological definitions, conceptions, and explications previously mentioned, this **dictionary** by a leading religious publisher does not even provide a **definition** of reconciliation, and in so doing, demonstrates the significance – or lack thereof – of the term in dominant theological discourse. It is also worthy to note that from this particular theological perspective, reconciliation is vaguely associated with salvation but no indication is given in regards to any form of repair of relationship – with God or with others. As evidence by these Westminster Dictionaries, it appears that very little overlap exists between theology and ethics in regards to reconciliation. Unfortunately, this circumstance is not an anomaly. Of the theological dictionaries I researched, very few included both the theological and the social/ethical definitions of reconciliation. In fact, one of the only theological dictionaries to include both the theological and socio-political

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[221] See Allan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983).

[222] Oliver O'Donovan, "Reconciliation," in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, edited by James F. Childress and John Macquarrie (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 528.

definitions happened to be produced by Justo Gonzalez, a Cuban-American theologian within the

Latin American theological tradition.[223]

Within the discourse of Christian Ethics, this apparent incongruence between the

theological and the social-political-ethical definitions must not be minimized for the

ramifications of such a theoretical disconnect can be far-reaching in personal, social, economic,

religious, and political contexts. Even though these various understandings of reconciliation

acknowledge a restoration of a broken relationship due to sin (of some sort), from the Christian

theological perspective, it is not consistently clear which relationship is being addressed:

between God and humanity or between humanity and itself. Regarding this relationship, three

reasonable possibilities exist: the former, the latter, or both. It appears that through much of the

Christian theological world, the latter understanding (between humanity and itself) has never

been accepted as the **sole** definition. It also appears that for centuries the former understanding

(between God and humanity) has dominated Christian theological thought. Yet, it also appears

that a possible shift is taking place to prefer the third option – both. According to Gerhard Sauter

in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*,

> This shift in meaning that equates reconciliation with the ending of strife and the making
> of peace at different levels expresses a deep-seated change of consciousness that has
> developed over the last 200 years and especially in more recent decades. Reconciliation
> now must take place between opposing individuals, groups, and peoples. Reconciliation
> between God and the world puts an end to a disrupted relationship and evokes responsive
> action in us.[224]

The understanding that reconciliation refers both the restoration of relationship between

God and humanity and also between humanity and itself seems to be the prevalent interpretation

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[223] Justo Gonzalez, "Reconciliation," in *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 149.
[224] Sauter. "Reconciliation," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, *Vol 4*, 505-506.

in modern Christianity in the United States. Still, this does not solve our dilemma regarding a

potential incongruence for a second question also needs to be addressed: If reconciliation refers

to both the relationships between God and humanity and humanity and itself, what is the

connection between the two relationships? In other words, are the two relationships separate and

independent or are they interrelated in some way? This question has received various responses

over the years. One answer can be found within the theology of Karth Barth. In *The Doctrine of*

Reconciliation, he describes the relationship(s) of reconciliation as follows,

> The love of God in Jesus Christ brings together [Godself] with all [people] and all
> [people] with [Godself]. But at the same time it is obviously the coming together of all
> [people] one with another. . . . In this horizontal dimension Christian love is love to the
> neighbor or the brother [or sister]. This must be distinguished from love to God which is
> Christian love in the vertical dimension. It will not take place without love to God. . . .
> But while it can only follow, and must follow, this prior love, it is an autonomous loving,
> for God in heaven and the neighbor on earth are two and not one.[225]

A cursory comparison of Barth's explication of reconciliation with Thurman's demonstrates

several similarities giving evidence of Barth's possible influence on Thurman. In particular,

both Barth and Thurman frame reconciliation around Christian concepts of love: love of God,

love of neighbor, and love of the children of God. Within both of their understandings of

reconciliation, the process begins with the love of God – the prior, autonomous loving of God.

Yet, where Thurman departs from Barth (to be examined more thoroughly in Chapter four) is in

the relationship between the vertical love of God and the horizontal love of Christians because

Thurman assumes these two loves are interdependent and representative of the same love

whereas Barth believes them to be separate – "are two and not one." Again, this difference has

potential ramifications in the ethical pursuits of social justice.

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[225] Barth, *Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 126.

Barth's theological position is common among many traditional Christian theologians but is not representative of Christianity as a whole. Justo Gonzalez presents an alternate position which is consistent with the trend mentioned by Sauter above. Gonzalez write, reconciliation "is also used for the restoration of the bonds of love and respect that ought to exist among humans, which have been broken by sin. In this context, the point is repeatedly made that reconciliation with God implies and requires reconciliation among believers."[226] Or, as Howard Thurman reminds us, "we come upon the stark fact that the insistence of Jesus upon genuineness is absolute; [humanity's] relation to [humanity] and [humanity's] relation to God are one relation."[227]

From a Christian **ethical** approach (and not simply theological), it becomes important to acknowledge and incorporate these various perspectives into the definition(s) of reconciliation recognizing the interrelatedness and complexity of the issues at hand. In fact, part of the difficulty surrounding reconciliatory discourse in the past has been the narrow definitions and subsequent shallow conceptions used to understand and apply the term. To rely primarily on a theological definition while neglecting the social and political implications not only seems incomplete but unjust. To only think of reconciliation on the level of personal relationship while ignoring the collective and systemic levels can come across as myopic. To focus the socio-political without also acknowledging personal relationships appears to ignore the relatedness between the two, and to neglect the theological aspects of reconciliation is to abandon one of the primary motivators behind such efforts. In short, a robust definition of reconciliation should be comprehensive by incorporating these various perspectives into a holistic understanding. In other words, a **theo-ethical** understanding of reconciliation will balance – or possibly, hold more

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[226] Gonzalez, *Essential Theological Terms*, 149.
[227] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 72.

in a paradoxical tension – the interpersonal, social, and political aspects alongside the theological and relational. Though not perfect, Howard Thurman's "both—and" approach to religion should provide profound insight toward a more holistic theo-ethical understanding of reconciliation.

The Logic of Howard Thurman's Theo-Ethic of Reconciliation

As evidenced by this chapter, reconciliation is a fairly complex concept with a wide variety of understandings and perspectives that can be applied in a multitude of diverse contexts which, in turn, influence how it is understood. Yet, alongside this theoretical complexity is a basic simplicity in the logic of reconciliation. Simply stated, in order to transition from a troubled state of relatedness to one demonstrating peace, harmony, and wholeness, the relationship will have to be reconciled (i.e., repaired) in some capacity. Troubled and broken relationships – whether due to personal discord or systematic forms of injustice – cannot miraculously transition from conflict to harmony, from combatant to friend. Racial and ethnic relationships strained by personal racial prejudice and/or systematic racism reinforced by ideologies and traditions of separatism will not be able to move into cooperative and collaborative forms of relatedness without repairing the interpersonal relationships and socio-political spaces. Reconciliation is not the first, the last, or the only step in this transition, but it undoubtedly will have to be passed through at some point along the way. For Thurman, the ultimate destination along this journey was not some eschatological vision achieved only by the redemption of the entire cosmos, but relational spaces he believed were possible to be obtained – maybe not in his lifetime or the next, but eventually, humanity could reach these ultimate destinations. It could be debated what these ultimate destinations of human relatedness should

be, but Thurman was consistently drawn toward several in particular because he believed that "life seeks always to realize itself in wholeness, harmony, and integration."[228]

Thurman's understanding of reconciliation consistently projects toward something new and typically does **not** imply the relationship will "return" to some previous state. First of all, for some human relationships, unlike the theological understanding of vertical reconciliation with God, there is often no healthy or ideal state of relationship to return to (i.e., pre-"Fall"). Another reason for this is because there is a high probability that going through the process of reconciliation will, in fact, create a "new" relationship in some form or capacity.[229] One possible misunderstanding of reconciliation is the actual "re-" aspect of the word. As the definitions above demonstrate, there are multitude of "re-" words associated with reconciliation (reestablish, resolve, repair, restore, restitution, resumption, redemption, etc.), but "return" is not necessarily one. The relation between humans is not mechanical like cars or washing machines where "to repair" essentially means to make it function as it prior to being damaged or broken.[230]

In human relations, to repair a relationship often means that new and/or different forms of relatedness will replace old ones. After marital infidelity, even if reconciliation does occur between the marriage partners, the relationship will not mysteriously "go back" – nor should it – to a previous state prior to the infidelity. All parties involved were not only affected but changed in some capacity during the troubled state of relatedness which implies that it is actually impossible to return to the previous state and a new state of relatedness must be found. The ethical question then becomes, what will that new state of relatedness be? In regards to race

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[228] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 7.
[229] The "vertical" theological understanding of reconciliation could possibly assume some form of reconciliation as "return to a previous state," but in this, "return" is just as easily understood as "restore," "reestablish," or "repair."
[230] Howard Thurman, "Keep Open the Door of Thy Heart," in *The Inward Journey*, 42.

relations both in Thurman's time and our own, the idea of reconciliation as "return" to a previous

state of relationship not only seems illogical but unjust and even harmful – there was no previous

healthy or harmonious state to return to! The only relationship to return to would be the current

state of contentiousness and injustice. Thus, though not without particular merit, returning to the

past becomes only temporarily functional, and instead, Volf recommends the possibility of

"letting go" of past wrong in order to be able to move into a new form of relatedness. He writes,

> to 'cover' or 'forget' wrongs, we must remember them in the first place! . . . we must
> remember them truthfully. But truthful memory does not have to be indelible memory.
> The purpose of truthful memory is not simply to name acts of injustice, and certainly not
> to hold an unalterable past forever fixed in the forefront of a person's mind. Instead, the
> highest aim of lovingly truthful memory seeks to bring about the repentance, forgiveness,
> and transformation of wrongdoers, and reconciliation between wrongdoers and their
> victims. When these goals are achieved, memory can let go of offenses without ceasing
> to be truthful.[231]

Though not easy and possibly counterintuitive to human responses to hurt and harm, Volf's

suggestion is worthy of consideration in the pursuit of a hopeful and harmonious future.

The Idealism of Howard Thurman's Theo-Ethic: Creative Intent

For Howard Thurman, if there was a "previous state" to "return" to, it would be the

theoretical state of harmony found in the "creative intent" of the Creator. As Thurman explains,

> Something deep within reminds that the intent of the Creator of life and the living
> substance is that men [and women] must live in harmony within themselves and with one
> another and perhaps with all life. When [humanity] seeks to achieve it, even in [its] little
> world of belonging and meaning, what is at first the dim racial memory stirring deep
> within becomes the paean of a great transcendent chorus rejoicing on [humanity's]
> way.[232]

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[231] Mirsolav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids, MI:
William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 64-65.

[232] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 28.

Within Thurman's theo-ethic of reconciliation is the belief that humanity has had a yearning for harmony placed deep within them by the Creator, and even though it begins as a "dim racial[233] memory stirring deep within," this creative intent reminds humanity to seek harmony in this life with themselves and with one another. As such, even though the creative intent of harmony and wholeness were placed within us by the Creator in the past (Thurman does not explicitly say how or when this imbuing occurs), it primarily functions teleologically in guiding us and motivating us toward that for which we are yearning and striving for.

This belief that humanity has an inner drive towards peace and harmony may be a bit optimistic even if it is inspiring, but such a claim can hardly be considered "logical." Just a cursory empirical glance of human history tends to indicate that the human race tends to be bent towards separation and conflict. Thurman himself recognized this, "We have no really authentic records of a time when there was peace in the world; the most you can say is that we have records of those moments of treacherous quiet between armistices. Yet the human spirit constantly affirms its interest in, and the necessity of the logic of peace."[234] Thus, in spite of – or possibly in response to – these historical realities, these types of idealistic beliefs are essential aspects of the logic of Howard Thurman's theo-ethic, for "the integrity of the religious experience and the ethic which it inspires are never finally dependent upon empirical validation."[235]

As stated above, Thurman's context and framework are **primarily religious** and many of idealist concepts such as "creative intent" stem from his religious mysticism and the reasoning of

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[233] In *The Search for Common Ground*, Thurman's use of "race" and "racial" predominately refers to the human race (*homo sapiens*) as a whole and not a particular race within humanity.

[234] Thurman, "The Power of the Spirit and the Powers of this World," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4,* 23.

[235] Ibid.

his theo-ethic. Thus, it is important to remember that most of Thurman's ideas are only **secondarily** oriented to social activism. As Luther Smith reminds us, for Thurman, "The transformation of social structures and development of social mechanisms for justice were important to him, but they did not captivate his interest as the fundamental issues nor as the arenas of thought and action to which he could speak with authority and confidence."[236] From his context as pastor, professor, and dean of a university chapel, Thurman's greater "interest was in developing a model for inclusive religious fellowship."[237] Again, religious personalism and experience formed the center from which he moved out in theory and practice.

Being religious in orientation, Thurman's idealistic beliefs are not simply abstract concepts but ethics that are manifested in humanity's stories, our religions, our ecosystems, our theories, our relationships, and our actions.[238] His ethics were an outgrowth of the black, southern, and Christian culture in which he was raised and educated, but his ethical views were also a unique bricolage resulting from his studies, travels, and encounters with the great diversity within humanity. Thurman's extensive travel not only across the United States but also his multiple international trips (primarily via bus and boat because he was afraid of flying) was not just uncommon for a black man in his time period, it was truly spectacular considering the restrictions placed upon blacks and his vulnerability while traveling to new places during Segregation and after. His ability to navigate these racialized spaces with relative ease was not only an anomaly during his time but would still be considered extraordinary by today's standards.

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[236] Smith, *The Mystic as Prophet*, 161.
[237] Ibid., 162.
[238] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 80.

Thurman's creation of interracial religious spaces based on his theo-ethical beliefs of reconciliation, harmony, and wholeness amongst God's children was an impressive achievement – both as a moral imperative and ethical conviction. Yet, it is also important to recognize that in spite of these feats, Thurman also had his internal struggles. "He was, in the best of times, a deeply sensitive man, subject to cavernous depressions and profound mood swings. He never developed the thick skin needed to deflect such incidents from the core of his personality, and racial slights could make him physically ill."[239] Yet, in spite of all the challenges and obstacles, Thurman was able to affect the world in profound ethical ways. In fact, part of the logic of Thurman's ideology is keeping the ethic as the "subject" and keeping the social problems as "object." As Thurman eloquently explains, "The curiously marvelous thing about using ethical means to effect changes (if you can hold out) is that he means are derivative from the ethical insight and the ethical experience. The means move out from that center to attack the society, rather than letting the means be determined by the stubborn character of the thing one is trying to shift or change."[240]

In addition his religious mysticism, another prominent influence in – or maybe a manifestation of – Thurman's idealism was related to his understanding of religious personalism and his conviction that humanity's full potential cannot be achieved while the barriers of separation continue. As shared by his longtime friend and colleague George Mackchnie, "Thurman's dream, his quest, the object of his striving was to break through the barriers of divisiveness that separate individual from individual, group from group, nation from nation, race

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[239] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 146.
[240] Thurman, "The Power of the Spirit and the Powers of this World," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 25.

from race – barriers that create suspicion, hatred, violence, and death."[241] In addition to creative

intent, Thurman's theo-ethical vision was supported by a deep conviction in the potential of

democracy both as a worldview and as form of political governance. As Thurman interpreted

various democratic ideals, he believed them not only relevant but capable in addressing the

problems of divisiveness and separation in society.

The Idealism of Howard Thurman's Theo-Ethic: Democracy

In theory, the fulfillment of democracy (i.e., the equal and ubiquitous application and

enforcement of democratic principles in all aspects of society) would contribute to the

minimization of the separate and unequal realities for minorities and other underprivileged

peoples in the United States. In a manner similar to which Thurman believed in the potentials of

creative intent in spite of a historical reality that most often showed otherwise, he also believed

in the potentials of democracy in spite of a troubled history of application in the United States.

Thurman was a firm believer in the principles of democracy, but for blacks and other persons of

color, he observed and experienced a prevention and restriction of participating in that

democratic process **as citizens**. He writes, "It is important to point out in this connection that

generally speaking the Negro is not a citizen. He is several steps removed from active

participation in those social, economic, political arrangements by which our common body

politic is controlled. . . . The practical problem is then, how can American democracy confer

upon the Negro persona which means the status of an individual with a sense of social

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[241] George Makechnie, *Howard Thurman: His Enduring Dream* (Boston: Howard Thurman Center, Boston University, 1988), 2.

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responsibility and worth?"[242] Howard Thurman was not a revolutionary wanting to overthrow the entire system; however, he saw great flaws in the practice and application of democracy within the United States through its denials of the rights **and** responsibilities of full citizenship to all of its citizens. In this sense, he was more of a reformer than a revolutionary – he saw a need to reform the application of American democracy for the equal and equitable distribution of democratic rights, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship. In this, he served as a forerunner for future activists including Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cornel West who also tried to reform the democratic system through strategic acts of accountability and application. In other words, Thurman desired the American democracy to actually be the democracy it claimed to be in its founding papers and ideology.

Luther Smith explains Thurman's approach to democracy as follows: "Though he witnessed injustice and severe castigations of blacks, he could locate within America's founding principles, as manifested in the *Constitution* and *Declaration of Independence*, ideals which declared equality among and the right to justice of all of the country's citizens."[243] Reinforced by – and possibly even conflated with – his religious personalism, the affirmations of personhood from the country's original democratic documents furthered his belief in the possibilities of democracy. Given during a speech in 1955, Thurman shares his conviction in these ideals:

> The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the Government of the United States rest upon a simple but profound spiritual insight – 'all men [and women] endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.' These rights are not conferred upon [persons] by their fellows, acting individually or in formal conclave or deliberation.

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[242] Howard Thurman, "A Native Son Speaks" (lecture, May 17, 1940, Chicago, IL) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, 250-251.
[243] Smith, *Mystic as Prophet*, 154.

They are not the predicates of any human subjects. They are not contingent upon status or any social classification whatsoever. They belong to [humanity] as a child of God.[244]

This synthesis of religious personalism and democratic idealism became a determining factor in Thurman's social activism. As Dixie and Eisenstadt explain,

> But if there was to be a social revolution, for Thurman it had to be a democratic revolution, one realized through the principles of American democracy, or what he thought the principles of democracy should actually be. His social radicalism was joined to a fierce, essentially Jefferson belief – Thurman greatly admired Jefferson – in realizing the equality of all people through maximizing democratic values.[245]

For Thurman, the idealism and values of democracy were not only valid within local, state, and national governments, but also within religious spaces such as churches and even within the intimate confines of families. As best as he knew how, Thurman attempted to implement democratic forms of leadership and participation in the churches in which he pastored as well as his own home which he shared with his wife and two daughters. As Thurman shares regarding decision-making in the Thurman household, "It had been our family custom for many years to arrive at all decisions which affected us as a unit by a democratic device which we called the 'House Meeting.'"[246] Elizabeth Yates notes that for Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman, "Family living was a small laboratory in democracy. . . . Even early in the small family assembly, discussion could be seen as a vital part of life; disagreement could be made with zest; agreement could be gained with warmth. Respect for the individual as a human being was the one rule."[247]

Thurman also led Fellowship Church by incorporating democratic values into its modes of governance. In 1947 under the guidance of Thurman, The Church for the Fellowship of All

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[244] Howard Thurman, "Freedom under God," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 112.
[245] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Vision of a Better World*, 123.
[246] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 32.
[247] Yates, *Portrait of a Practical Dreamer*, 13.

Peoples published a 16-page pamphlet outlining the purposes, goals, vision, commitments, budget, implementation strategies, etc. of the congregation. This pamphlet includes various descriptions of the democratic values utilized to run an interracial and cross-cultural church and all the complexities that accompany it.[248] Even though Thurman was firm believer in the principles of democracy, he was not perfect in its implementation. When Fellowship Church was only several years old, the church had the opportunity to stay in its current community which was rapidly becoming predominately black or move to a more diverse neighborhood. Even though a majority of the congregation wanted to stay in the current neighborhood, Thurman used his authority and influence to initiate the move. As he explains,

> I insisted, however, that if the church remained in the Fillmore district and developed as a neighborhood church, in an incredibly short time it would become a Negro church. In my judgment this would merely herald the appearance in San Francisco of one more segregated religious institution, and I would have no sympathy for this basic denial of the true meaning of the gospel of God.[249]

For Thurman, the purpose and intent of Fellowship Church as an interracial and diverse congregation was more important than the democratic process in this circumstance, but as the church's leader, he felt this exercise of authority was necessary. Despite this example, he nevertheless maintained his conviction in the potentials of democratic values and processes as capable to address the problems of human relatedness he saw in the Church and society. As Thurman writes, "And it is on the basis of the doctrine of the social worth of the individual that all the concerns by which we are surrounded having to do with decency in life, with the so-called

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[248] "The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples," (pamphlet, 1947) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 3*, 215-219.
[249] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 44-45.

democratic order, or with the fulfillment of the democratic dogma. It is out of this basic

underlying belief that all of the social concerns arise."[250]

If one were find fault in Howard Thurman's ideology, it could be in his overarching

acceptance of democratic idealism, or maybe more specifically, that the government of the

United States was a functioning democracy and that it consistently applied the principles of the

Declaration of Independence and *Constitution* in its actual governance. James Baldwin, a

contemporary of Thurman, struggled with this question as well even though he was less

optimistic in regards to the functioning of democracy in terms of skin color. As Baldwin

eloquently explains in 1955,

> The conundrum of color is the inheritance of every American, be he/she legally or
> actually Black or White. It is a fearful inheritance, for which untold multitudes, long ago,
> sold their birthright. Multitudes are doing so, until today. This horror has so welded the
> past and present that it is virtually impossible and certainly meaningless to speak of it as
> occurring, as it were, in time.[251]

Baldwin believed the United States had "sold its birthright" of democracy long ago due to

slavery and the perpetuation of racism in its history. If Thurman, like Baldwin, had thoroughly

questioned the validity of democracy based upon the actual **application** of the democratic

principles in the U.S. government, would his ideology of social activism been different? Or to

extrapolate this question further, one could argue that Thurman's deep conviction in religious

personalism and the theoretical idealism of democracy may have also contributed to his

optimistic belief in the potential for equality, justice, and harmony within and through the

democratic government of the United States.

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[250] Howard Thurman, "An Imperative to Understanding," (lecture, Oct 23, 1960, Boston) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 291.

[251] James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), xii.

Yet, in spite of these potential objections, I do not believe Thurman was naïve even if he was a bit optimistic. Once again, his teleological vision is essential in understanding the logic of his ideology because, for him, the past, present, and future are all interrelated. For Thurman, the current human condition – individual, collective, national, etc. – is not fixed or static, but dynamic and malleable, for "the contradictions of life are not ultimate contradictions," including the disparities between the principles and realities of democracy.[252] His teleological vision assumes one address the current state of being as is and then work toward moving it closer to the desired *telos*. This basic methodology applies to interpersonal relationships, groups, and systems, and though simple in theory, the implementation is often anything but. "Democracy was, in Thurman's view, the greatest and yet most demanding political effort to find common ground in human history."[253]

The Idealism of Howard Thurman's Theo-Ethic: Freedom

One of the reasons Thurman held firmly onto to the ideal of democracy was because he found it compatible with one of the most necessary elements of his theo-ethical vision: Freedom. As a black man who was not only raised in the segregated South but whose grandmother (his primary caregiver) had been enslaved until the American Civil War, the concept of freedom was simultaneously cherished and elusive. Even though Thurman's own socio-political freedom was often limited, through his relationship with his grandmother, he was also aware that socio-political freedom could be taken away entirely. Yet, it was also his grandmother who instilled in him an understanding of freedom that is not solely determined by governments or socio-political

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[252] Thurman, "The Power of the Spirit," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 23
[253] Fluker and Tumber, eds., "Introduction," in *A Strange Freedom*, 9.

standings but a given simply because we are all children of God.[254] As Thurman reflected

toward the end of his life in 1976, "When I think about freedom it is always from the point of

view of the true distinction between freedom and liberty. As I interpret the American story,

liberty has to do primarily with elements of the social contract. It can be given, it can be taken

away. It can be wiped out. . . .freedom is a quality of being. It cannot be given and it cannot be

taken away."[255] Thus, for Thurman, "liberation" would have been more closely aligned with

liberty, but "freedom" was similar yet different.

As evidenced by this quote, Howard Thurman did not understand freedom only in a

socio-political sense, but he believed **freedom** was more of an **internal aspect** of being human.

Again, with Thurman, this is not an "either/or" proposition but a "both—and." Freedom is still

undoubtedly socio-political, but it is also spiritual and ethical. He states, "Freedom is the process

by which, standing in my place where I am, I can so act in that place as to influence, order, alter,

or change the future – that time is not frozen, that life is not so fixed that it cannot respond to my

own will, my own inner **processes**."[256] Because one's sense of freedom directly affects one's

own identity and self-worth, it is important not to grant all of that influence outside of one's self

and in the hands of the socio-political system.[257] Again, Thurman's religious personalism rings

loud and clear in that one's worth and freedom comes from God – and that cannot be taken away

– even while living in a society that does not grant full socio-political freedom.

In this, "Thurman came to understand freedom as the freedom to choose not only the

character of one's actions, but the emotional and spiritual quality of one's **reactions**." [258] In

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[254] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 21.
[255] Howard Thurman, "America in Search of a Soul," (1976) in *Strange Freedom*, 270-271.
[256] Ibid., 271.
[257] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 98.
[258] Fluker and Tumber, eds., "Introduction," in *A Strange Freedom*, 10.

Thurman's own words, "[F]reedom is my own responsibility for my own reactions **to** the events, the forces, the influences that impinge upon my life, that are not responsive to my will, however good that will may be – impersonal forces that don't even know that as an individual I am here."[259] In other words, the theo-ethic of freedom is both initiative and response, understanding that a person is responsible for both, and this "radically contingent portrait of the human condition suggests that the abstract, ideal notion of human freedom is ultimately bound by responsibility to others."[260]

As evidenced by Thurman's own life in which he consistently challenged socio-political and religious norms and encouraged others to do the same through democratic and pacifist forms of social action. In 1955, Thurman gave the plenary address at the Lambda Kappa Mu Human Relations Dinner. Founded in 1937, the Lambda Kappa Mu sorority is a "sisterhood of college educated, business and professional women," and was an affiliate of the National Council of Negro Women and a member of the Black Women's Agenda.[261] During his speech, Thurman encourages the audience members to be more socially active: "I cannot overemphasize the importance of individual effort. Too often we have underestimated the power of individuals to influence the course of events." We need people to ring doorbells and to vote, to "take the time to write letters to their representatives in Congress, or in the State legislature, or in the local municipal government about matters of deep concern to them, these individual personal letters have far more effect than you dream."[262] Even though Thurman may not have been as active in some forms of social activism as others would have liked, he nevertheless understood that the

[259] Thurman, "America in Search of a Soul," in *A Strange Freedom*, 272.
[260] Christopher Driscoll, *White Lies: Race and Uncertainty in the Twilight of American Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 9.
[261] "Membership," Lambda Kappa Mu Sorority, Inc., accessed October 1, 2018, http://www.lkmsororityinc.org/history/index.php
[262] Howard Thurman, "Speech at Lambda Kappa Mu Human Relations Award Dinner," (speech, Nov 19, 1955, Boston) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 134,

exercise of freedom comes in more than one form, and for Thurman's personality type and realm

of influence, addressing the internal and religious aspects of freedom was where he felt both

gifted and needed. As Luther Smith explains,

> Likewise, his intellectual energy was primarily given to issues which corresponded with
> his temperament. The transformation of social structures and development of social
> mechanisms for justice were important to him, but they did not captivate his interest as
> the fundamental issues nor as the arenas of thought and action to which he could speak
> with authority and confidence.[263]

Yet, like social activists, Thurman's understanding of freedom was directed toward the

betterment of the human condition and better forms of human relatedness, and that the exercise

of freedom is meant to improve the quality of day-to-day life as well as work toward teleological

ends. As Thurman shares,

> Ultimately, freedom means the ability to actualize potentials. It is to live day to day with
> the conviction that there is a way for [men and women] by which, if [they] live, . . . will
> become increasingly human, humane, and whole, full of health and peace. To choose
> such a way is to put at the disposal of the individual life the boundless resources of the
> Creator of life.[264]

Howard Thurman's Revolutionary Theo-Ethic

When evaluating Howard Thurman from a strictly social ethic or activist perspective, it is

easy to see how his system of thought may seem inadequate for the enormous task of

overcoming discrimination and injustice in society. Due to his belief in the idealism of

democracy and the democratic process, his socio-political ideas and methods may seem quite

non-revolutionary from some modern perspectives which question the legitimacy of democracy

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[263] Smith, *The Mystic as Prophet*, 161.
[264] Thurman, "Freedom under God," (Feb 1955, St. Louis) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4,* 117.

in the United States due to its inconsistency, frequent misapplication, as well as its failures to support basic populism.[265] Even though Thurman was not only sympathetic to but encouraging towards social activist causes, it is important to remember that social activism was neither the primary context nor method of his interests and purpose. Primarily being religious in context, Thurman's ethical orientation was dictated more by the love-ethic of Jesus more than the revolutionaries of his day. Thurman's revolution was not simply about "resistance" against the authorities, but more about the transformation of the system from the inside out. Thurman's revolution also was not violent. "A nonviolent revolution does not destroy its opponents. Either they are changed or, cowed and chastened, they slink from the scene, utterly beside the point."[266] In a similar manner in which Jesus was not a Zealot trying to overthrow the Roman Empire but tried to transform the states of human relatedness through interpersonal relationships, Thurman preferred to affect society through the transformation of the Church. Thus, even if Thurman's theo-ethic seems wanting as a form of social activism, it nevertheless was quite radical and **culturally** revolutionary – and it still is! As Howard Thurman explains,

> Implicit in the Christian message is a profoundly revolutionary ethic. This ethic appears as the binding relationship between [persons], conceived as children of a common . . . God. The ethic is revolutionary because the norms it establishes are in direct conflict with the relationship that obtains between [persons] in the modern world. It is a patent fact that attitudes of fellowship and sympathetic understanding across lines of separateness such as race, class, and creed are not characteristic of our age.[267]

Instead of allowing the forms of human relatedness to be determined by the separatist and contentious ideologies of white Americanism, Thurman looked to the creative intent of God to serve as the model of determination of human interaction.

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[265] See Yascha Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).
[266] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 116.
[267] Howard Thurman, "Judgment and Hope in the Christian Message," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol* 3, 243.

Thurman's theo-ethic is revolutionary not just because it aims to change norms within American churches, but that in attempting to establish new norms in these spaces it is also creating new attitudes and understandings across the lines of separateness in the American culture as well. As a theo-ethic, reconciliation is concerned about both of these aspects: challenging separatist norms **and** creating new forms of relatedness. Stemming from his upbringing within the Black Church tradition, Thurman's theo-ethic was both hopeful and holistic: Hopeful in the possibilities of being liberated from oppression and holistic in that "[The Black Church] has the responsibility of ministering to the physical, psychological, social, economic, political – all are basic needs of blacks."[268] As such, the happenings within the church were directed to life outside the church. Even though his ethic is applied within the Church first, it is concurrently applied to society because the Church is also part of society (again, the lines between sacred and secular were often blurred within Thurman's system of thought).[269]

Thurman's own life was a witness to this ethic. The Black Church had imprinted upon Thurman that he was a child of God; however, due to the restrictions of racism and racialized spaces, this concept primarily applied to those within in his own black community and church. His Christian experience continued to be largely determined by segregated spaces during his education at Morehouse College, but as he matured and began to encounter more racial and ethnic diversity as a student at Rochester Seminary, his vision and faith began to expand beyond the racialized religious spaces of his upbringing. Already knowing that he was a child of God,

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[268] J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Religion, Black Theology*, edited by David Emmanuel Goatley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 80.

[269] Howard Thurman, "The Christian Minister and the Desegregation Decision," (May 1957) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 171.

Thurman expanded this understanding to include everyone else. Yet, it was his vision from Khyber Pass which prompted him to transform this theoretical concept into a revolutionary ethic.

The creation of an interracial and interreligious church and multicultural worship services at universities challenged the socio-political and religious norms that had dominated the country's landscape for centuries. Creating interracial spaces and sympathies across lines of separateness continues to be revolutionary because it takes the dominant normative ideologies of white supremacy and separatism and turns them on their heads. These revolutionary acts were not simply the embodiment of Thurman's religious beliefs but the manifestation of his democratic idealism as well. As Langston Hughes writes after visiting Fellowship Church in 1944, "These churches here by the Golden Gate seek to apply true Christian ethics to American democracy. They are what I have always thought all churches should be. Since there is no white or colored heaven, white or colored hell, no Jim Crow in eternity as far as I know, I do not see why all people should not worship together here on earth."[270]

Even though the creation of these interracial and multicultural spaces by Thurman was a radical cultural act, it is important to remember that these spaces were not ends in and of themselves. For Thurman, the act of coming together across lines of difference was important, but more fundamental to his ideology was **how** people related to one another in these spaces. As interracial co-pastors Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice share, "It is one thing to be 'integrated,' but quite another to be 'reconciled.'"[271] It is quite possible to have interracial and multicultural spaces where the relationships between the individuals and groups where the relationships are governed by an *ethos* of toleration, professionalism, or limited comradery (work environments

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[270] Langston Hughes, "Dixie in the Golden Gate," *Chicago Defender*, May 6, 1944.
[271] Spencer Perkins and Chris Rice, "Loving God and Loving People," in *Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together & Doing it Right* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 108.

and sporting events come to mind), but I would not describe these as "reconciled." For Thurman, reconciled relationships should include various attributes including mutual respect of personality, kindness, and civility and bestow attributes of friendship or kinship. Yet, Thurman knew people had (or would create) their own reasons and justifications for separating from each other because, in the end, the culture of separatism had made fear, deception, indifference, preference, oppression, and hatred normative. Thurman was searching for something more fundamental, more compelling, than these typical justifications for separation.

In this searching, Thurman found meaningful experience – and religious experience specifically – to be the essential piece in creating a new form of human relatedness because he believed the transformation of the church and society would, in the end, require a shift in the way people related to each other. This is the counter-cultural and revolutionary love-ethic of Jesus: We are not only to love God, but we are also to love ourselves, our neighbors, **and** our enemies. In this, "Thurman's experimentation with religious experience as a resource within the church was concerned not only with interracialism but also with the transformation of culture."[272] The creation of an interreligious religious space was not the singular goal, but a necessary step in determining and constructing new forms of human relatedness.

When approached by white Presbyterian minister Alfred G. Fisk regarding the creation of Fellowship Church, Howard and Sue Bailey Thurman believed they had two particular gifts that equipped them for such an unprecedented endeavor:

> . . . a profound conviction that meaningful and creative experiences between peoples can be more compelling than all the ideas, concepts, faiths, fears, ideologies, and prejudices that divide them; and absolute faith that if such experiences can be multiplied and

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[272] Fluker, et al., "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol* 3, xx-xxi.

sustained over a time interval of sufficient duration **any** barrier that separates one person from another can be undermined and eliminated.[273]

Written by Howard Thurman in his autobiography, this quote embodies the core principles of his revolutionary theo-ethic. Undoubtedly, the vision projected here requires "profound conviction" and "absolute faith" – both in initiative and in sustainability. Yet, with these two radical ideals (assumptions) as the lynchpins, the logic of Thurman's theo-ethic comes together. If the first half of this quote represents the idealism of Thurman's vision, the second half is more pragmatic in regards to cultural transformation. The Thurmans understood that overcoming hundreds of years of racial and religious separatism and divisiveness was not a quick process because the effects of this history are both internal and external. As Thurman shares, "We cannot be in a hurry in matters of the heart. . . . Very often this demands a reconditioning of our nervous responses to life, a profound alteration in the tempo of our behavior pattern."[274] The overcoming of a culture of separatism will require consistent effort in sustaining, growing, and repairing in order to eventually create a more normative form of togetherness in this world.

The creation and maintenance of such reconciled spaces is no minor task – it may be one of the most challenging endeavors in human history. Yet, the betterment of the human condition and the world may just depend on initiatives such as this. Again, the moral reasoning behind a theo-ethic of reconciliation is that it does not simply aim to reestablish and repair troubled relationships, but in so doing, it creates the space, framework, and, hopefully, the motivation to initiate new forms of human relatedness. By challenging relational cultural norms based on separatism, prejudice, distrust, and divisiveness and replacing them with new forms of relationship based creative and meaningful experience, a theo-ethic of reconciliation enables

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[273] Thurman, *With Head and Heart*, 148.
[274] Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, 126-127.

other essential principles – like peace and justice – to transition further along the trajectory toward harmony and wholeness. An ethic of peace only requires the removal of strife and contentious forms of relatedness, but this often only leads to some form of neutrality – a truce, a ceasefire, or as Thurman states, "moments of treacherous quiet between armistices."[275] A theo-ethic of reconciliation can take the difficult work of peace and move it further toward harmony.

Justice, which often promotes peace, demands that discrimination and injustice be addressed, punished (when appropriate), and removed, but the end result still lies within the realm of neutrality. Specifically, as it relates to Thurman's vision, the removal of discrimination and injustice is necessary to remove the social ills and evils that plague humanity, but disarming injustice does not necessarily deduce the dismantling of the *ethos* of separatism, which, if it remains, will most likely create new forms of discrimination and injustice due to competition and tribalism. Like Thurman, I believe the creative intent for humanity is aimed at harmony and wholeness and not simply a state of armistice or neutrality between warring parties (though considering our current state of affairs, neutrality is more than welcome). Reconciliation has the capability of helping humanity further along this journey. Whereas justice and peace lead to neutrality, reconciliation creates the relational framework to assist in the transition from destruction to construction, from neighbors and enemies to friends. An ethic of reconciliation aims to create new forms of relatedness through the repairing of troubled relationships and the creation of new healthy relationships where none had existed. In addition to this, a theo-ethic of reconciliation aims to move beyond mere healing and towards growth because "somewhere deep inside us we seem to know that we are destined for something better."[276]

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[275] Thurman, "The Power of the Spirit and the Powers of this World," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 23.

[276] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 264.

As a theological tenet, reconciliation holds a prominent – if not essential – position within Christian theology. One could justifiably argue that Christianity would not exist as is without a belief in reconciliation in some capacity. Without Jesus as Christ reconciling humanity to God, Christianity would not be what it is today what it means it means to be a Christian would be drastically different. Yet, in spite of this theological prominence, reconciliation continues to be ignored or disregarded within many Christian theological and ethical discourses. One of the challenges limiting the engagement of reconciliation within these discourses is the complexity of the term as well as the incongruence between theological and ethical definitions with the former focusing more as soteriological and eschatological components whereas the latter addresses more socio-political aspects. Unlike many traditional understandings of the term, Howard Thurman believed these "vertical" and "horizontal" aspects of reconciliation are not only congruent but interdependent. Based upon the ideals of creative intent, democracy, and freedom, Thurman's theo-ethic of reconciliation promotes a revolutionary ethic which challenges the culture of separatism that is deemed normative both within the Church and society. Even though it needs to be reconceived and re-conceptualized in a more robust manner in order to better address socio-political aspects, reconciliation contains both the theological and ethical logic to challenge the traditions, systems, and culture of division and divisiveness prominent in the Church and society. Even though a more robust conceptualization is essential in promoting reconciliation as a theo-ethic, unless the emotional aspects – the *pathos* – associated with reconciliation are also addressed alongside the *logos*, its effectiveness will be limited.

CHAPTER 3: *PATHOS* – THE BROKEN HEART OF RACISM

> I was a very sensitive child who suffered much from the violences of racial conflict. . . . life became more and more suffocating because of the fear of being brutalized, beaten, or otherwise outraged. In my effort to keep this fear from corroding my life and making me seek relief in shiftlessness, I sought help from God. I found that the more I turned to prayer, to what I discovered in later years to be meditation, the more time I spent alone in the woods or on the beach, the freer became my own spirit and the more realistic became my ambitions to get an education. Here at last was something I could do with my life. But it would call for a different emphasis in the religious life and experience from that which I saw around me in the community.[277]

– Howard Thurman, "Footprints of a Dream"

Howard Thurman's teleological vision of peace, reconciliation, harmony, and wholeness is more than a just a naïve religious projection of a theoretical world. Even though it is optimistic and hopeful, Thurman's vision is a direct response to his own lived-reality which was rarely peaceful or harmonious. Throughout his life, even as Thurman searched for a common ground for which people of various races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions could come together, he also knew that the actual life experiences of black Americans and other persons of color were an explicit contradiction to this vision.[278] As the quote above addresses, like many people of color during his time period, Thurman's life was often controlled and dictated by racial conflict and the multitude of violences that accompanied it. Beyond the actual violences themselves, the fear of violence became a suffocating force which threatened to corrode the quality of his life, and he turned to God not only for relief but to find a way to respond to the world which constantly threatened him. In other words, the search for harmony and wholeness

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[277] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 16.

[278] Thurman, *Search for Common Ground*, 77-104. In Chapter VI, Thurman examines the paradox of the black experience in the United States as it relates to the visions of harmony and wholeness.

through God was a response to both the emotions and the lived-realities which he was experiencing. Thus, in examining of the potentials of a theo-ethic of reconciliation, it is important to acknowledge the role of emotions – the *pathos* – of human existence and relationships because emotions are not simply something we feel but they are also related to who we are and what we do. As related to reconciliation and the wrongdoings within relationships, Miroslav Volf writes, "The more severe the wrongdoing, the more likely we are to react rather than respond, to act toward wrongdoers the way we **feel** like acting rather than the way we **should** act."[279] Beyond the necessity of overcoming physical and psychological distances between separated persons, reconciliation also requires the acknowledgement and repairing of the emotional damage that has occurred. As the last sentence in the quote above indicates, Thurman was called to a "different emphasis in the religious life and experience," and thus, his understanding and responses to these life experiences are most likely a bit different than the perspectives of those around him.

In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman begins his book by presenting the case for the relevance of the religion of Jesus for "those with their backs against the wall." In the concluding pages of the first chapter, he writes,

> The striking similarity between the social position of Jesus in Palestine and that of the vast majority of American Negroes is obvious to anyone who tarries long over the facts. We are dealing here with conditions that produce essentially the same psychology. . . . It is the similarity of a social climate at the point of denial of full citizenship which creates the problem for creative survival.[280]

Following this claim, Thurman examines the some of the psychological and spiritual challenges facing the disinherited including the presence of the "three hounds of hell" – fear,

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[279] Volf, *The End of Memory*, 8.
[280] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 34.

deception/hypocrisy, and hatred.[281] He understood the importance of addressing the internal

aspects of the underprivileged as they directly correlate to the problems of creative survival and

human relatedness. As Thurman explains, "[Jesus] recognized with authentic realism that

anyone who permits another to determine the quality of [one's] inner life gives into the hands of

the other the keys to his [or her] destiny. . . . It is [one's] reaction to things that determines their

ability to exercise power over him [or her]."[282] One's inner life and emotions are not dissociated

elements of one's humanity, but they are intimately connected with every aspect of one's being

including one's thoughts, will, identity, and actions. As Jürgen Habermas explains,

> Our feelings of indifference, contempt, malevolence, satisfaction, recognition,
> encouragement, consolation, etc., have innumerable nuances. Among them the feelings
> of guilt and obligation are of course crucial. . . .all of these emotions are embedded in a
> practice of everyday life . . . . This gives the web of moral feelings a certain
> ineluctability: we cannot retract at will our commitment to a lifeworld whose members
> we are.[283]

In other words, due to their interconnectedness with our beingness, their embeddedness in our

everyday lives, and our commitments to the lifeworlds of which we are a part, emotions cannot

simply be "turned off" at will. These inner aspects should be acknowledged and addressed

because these types of emotions (fear, bitterness, hatred, etc.) are often more than feelings but

actual psychological and spiritual wounds from one's social climate. From the perspective of the

disinherited, "If we are not intentional about dealing with these hurts, if we say that all we have

to do is act in Christian love and the problems will go away, we are engaging in denial, a mere

bandage covering a deep wound. The healing must happen from the inside out, or infection will

set in and fester until it destroys the body."[284]

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[281] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 29.
[282] Ibid., 28.
[283] JürgenHabermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, translated by Christian Lenhart and Sheirry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 47.
[284] Washington and Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls*, 134.

Within a theo-ethic of reconciliation, it is important to address the emotional wounds of the disinherited because until this repairing begins, attempts at reconciliation just become hindrances to justice and equality and make claims to health, harmony, and wholeness a farce. Yet, it is also necessary to distinguish between the **emotional wounds** of the disinherited compared to the **emotions** of the privileged and the powerful. In our racist, sexist, and classist systems of power imbalances and unequal distribution of resources and rights, even though we often use the same words for the emotions of the disinherited and the privileged, we should not assume they are the same thing for the former are a response to an unjust system and social climate whereas the latter are the outgrowth of the pathology of the system itself. *Pathos* and pathology are not synonymous, but both must be acknowledged and addressed in the pursuit of reconciliation because without repairing the source of the wounds (the unjust system of whiteness), attempting to repair the troubled relationships within the system will be significantly more difficult if not impossible.

The *Pathos* of the Disinherited: Fear, Deception, and Hatred

Being raised in the Segregated South, Howard Thurman was acutely aware of the various forms of *pathos* that plagued the social situation of the disinherited including fear, deception, and hatred. As he explicates in *Jesus and the Disinherited*, violence and the threat of violence not only undergirded the system of Segregation but also the emotional responses of the disinherited to that system. As he writes, "When the basis of such fear is analyzed, it is clear that it arises out of the sense of isolation and helplessness in the face of the varied dimensions of violence to which the underprivileged are exposed. Violence, precipitate and stark, is the sire of the fear of

such people"[285] Yet, it is important to note that for the disinherited, it is not just the partnership between fear and violence which creates emotional and psychological trauma, but it is also the helplessness associated with being within a socio-political system which deems them powerless and others powerful. "In a society in which certain people or groups – by virtue of economic, social, or political power – have dead-weight advantages over others who are essentially without that kind of power, those who are thus disadvantaged know that they cannot fight back effectively, that they cannot protect themselves, and that they cannot demand protection from their persecutors."[286]

During most of Thurman's life, this fear was systematized in the governance of Jim and Jane Crow Segregation, but this fear still remains amongst the marginalized and the underprivileged because violence and threats of violence still persist. Due to unjust legal and penal systems of enforcement in the United States, just as they were during Segregation, "black Americans were once again confronted with the harsh reality that their lives were virtually unprotected, if not dispensable."[287] For many persons of color, not only can they not consistently receive "protection from their persecutors," in many circumstances in recent history, it is often those who are supposed to protect them (i.e., police officers) who are the actual persecutors.[288] The frequency of police brutality against persons of color perpetuates the fear amongst the disinherited because, again, it is not just the violence but the threat of violence which causes the fear, which in turn, becomes one of the tools for maintaining the system of oppression and the restriction of the disadvantaged. As Thurman explains,

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[285] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 37.
[286] Ibid., 37-38.
[287] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, xii.
[288] "2017 Police Violence Report," accessed October 3, 2018, https://policeviolencereport.org/

The threat of violence within a framework of well-nigh limitless power is a weapon by which the weak are held in check. Artificial limitations are placed upon them, restricting freedom of movement, of employment, and of participation in the common life. These limitations are given formal or informal expression in general or specific policies of separateness or segregation. These policies tend to freeze the social status of the insecure.[289]

In addition to the threats of violence, it is also important to note the role of separatism in this system of control in that the formal and informal policies that separate the privileged from the powerless restrict the various forms of freedom of the disinherited. In other words, separatism functions as a co-conspirator with violence in the fear and oppression of the powerless.

In addition to the fear of violence amongst the marginalized and the underprivileged, Thurman recognized another aspect of fear that often follows them and not only has emotional but spiritual and ontological consequences as well. He writes, "it is not the fear of death that is most often at work; it is the deep humiliation arising from dying without benefit of cause or purpose. . . . The whole experience attacks the fundamental sense of self-respect and personal dignity, without which a [human] is not [human]."[290] For this reason and others, Thurman believed religion was not only helpful but necessary in the struggle for freedom, justice, and equality because, for Thurman, the primary source of respect and dignity is God, and this sense of worthfulness is needed to challenge inhumane systems based on fear and violence.

In addition to fear, Thurman also recognized several other forms of *pathos* that affected the disinherited both in psyche and spirit. Deception and hatred are also significant internal challenges because they not only affect one's internal and moral self but they also often affect one's relationships. As a technique of survival, Thurman notes the function and justification of deception amongst the disinherited, but he also reminds that the utilization of deception is not

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[289] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 41.
[290] Ibid., 39.

without negative consequence. As he writes, "The question of deception is not academic, but profoundly ethical and spiritual, going to the very heart of all human relations. For it raises the issue of honesty, integrity, and the consequences thereof over against duplicity and deception and the attendant consequences."[291] According to Thurman, these "attendant consequences" have more to do with personal integrity than social affect. Thurman rhetorically asks, "If a [person] continues to call a good thing bad, [one] will eventually lose [one's] sense of moral distinctions. Is this always the result? Is it not possible to quarantine a certain kind of deception so that it will not affect the rest of one's life?"[292]

For Thurman, the question of deception is not necessarily about reasoning or justification ("academic") but about the consequence of such strategies on oneself ("ethical" and "spiritual"). In this, he is careful not to project the claim that the ends justify the means – even if those means are survival. From Thurman's perspective, "The penalty of deception is to **become** a deception, with all sense of moral discrimination vitiated. A [person] who lies habitually becomes a lie, and it is increasingly impossible for him to know when he is lying and when he is not."[293] This reality is why he often treats "deception" and "hypocrisy" as synonymous because deception is not simply the act of deceiving another but also about being inconsistent or hypocritical with one's moral self. If a person is willing to deceive one's enemy, it opens the door for the justification of deceiving others as well. If one is incapable of distinguishing between truthfulness and deception within oneself, to make any moral claims of another becomes a form of hypocrisy. In the end, Thurman rejected deception because of its unavoidable consequences on the person doing the deceiving, even if it serves as a strategy for survival.

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[291] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 62.
[292] Ibid., 64.
[293] Ibid., 65.

Similar to deception, hatred was another type of *pathos* utilized by the disinherited for survival but not without consequence. As Thurman shares, "It is clear, then, that for the weak, hatred seems to serve a creative purpose. It may be judged harshly by impersonal ethical standards, but as long as the weak see it as being inextricably involved in the complicated technique of survival with dignity, it cannot easily be dislodged. Jesus understood this."[294] Similar to deception, Thurman understood the reasoning and justification for hatred amongst the poor and powerless, but he also knew that hatred affects the hater and hated alike: "Despite all the positive psychological attributes of hatred, . . . hatred destroys finally the core of the life of the hater. . . . Hatred bears deadly and bitter fruit. It is blind and nondiscriminating."[295]

Similar to deception, Thurman also questioned the viability of hatred because of the spiritual and ethical consequences associated with it. As he writes, "The logic of the development of hatred is death to the spirit and disintegration of ethical and moral values."[296] Both of these consequences are the deadly and bitter fruit of hate: Hate not only destroys one's own spirit but it also rearranges one's ethical and moral values by justifying how one feels towards another person or group and also by justifying what unethical and immoral actions one might do to them. Throughout history, many reprehensible actions have been justified by the logic of hate and often these actions initiate reciprocal actions of hate by another, often creating a vicious cycle of deadly and bitter fruit. For these reasons, "Jesus rejected hatred. It was not because he lacked the vitality or the strength. It was not because he lacked the incentive. Jesus rejected hatred because he saw that hatred meant death to the mind, death to the spirit, death to

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[294] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 86.
[295] Ibid., 85-86.
[296] Ibid., 87-88.

communion with his Father. He affirmed life; and hatred was the great denial."[297] "Both are positive, but hatred is **positive and destructive**, while love is **positive and creative**. To balance the positive similarity, there is that crucial difference."[298]

Again, like fear and deception, Thurman also believed ideologies and systems of separatism contributed to the proliferation of hate amongst the privileged and the disinherited alike. As he states, "hatred often begins in a situation in which there is contact without fellowship, contact that is devoid of any of the primary overtures of warmth and fellow-feeling and genuineness."[299] When contacts between the marginalized and the privileged are governed by separatism, the interactions themselves are often restricted by the ideologies which undergird the systems including racial superiority/inferiority, control, competition, etc. For this reason, Thurman believed it was essential that the privileged and the disinherited find common spaces of fellowship based upon mutuality, warmth, and respect, and he believed the Church and religious experience could and should be such a space. Instead of allowing the interactions of God's children to be governed by ideologies and systems of separatism feeding off fear, deception, and hatred, Thurman believed followers of the religion of Jesus should find and create spaces governed by the love-ethic of Jesus. For this reason, Thurman encourages the disinherited: "You must abandon your fear of each other and fear only God. You must not indulge in any deception and dishonesty, even to save your lives. Your words must be Yea-Nay; anything else is evil. Hatred is destructive to hatred and hater alike. Love your enemy, that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven."[300] This is the challenge of *pathos* for the disinherited.

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[297] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 88.
[298] Thurman, "Love Your Enemies," in *The Growing Edge*, 5.
[299] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 75.
[300] Ibid., 35.

These emotional challenges facing the marginalized and underprivileged are not simply independent personal psychological and spiritual trials to be overcome, but as mentioned above, they are the consequences of ideologies and systems of separatism which govern and restrict contacts between various groups within society.   Yet, it is also important to note that there is more to the equation than these two aspects. Thurman was also aware of how the *pathos* of the disinherited was a direct consequence of the **pathology** of the privileged determined by unjust systems of racial superiority and separation. He writes, "The fear that segregation inspires among the weak in turn breeds fear among the strong and the dominant. This fear insulates the conscience against a sense of wrongdoing in carrying out a policy of segregation. For it counsels that if there were no segregation, there would be no protection against invasion of the home, the church, the school."[301] This insightful quote highlights particular aspects of the pathology of whiteness as it relates to fear amongst privileged whites – not simply the fear of persons of color, but fear of having their white spaces "invaded" by others.

According to womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas, the myth of racial superiority by whites "gave way to America's grand narrative of exceptionalism," which, in turn, developed what she identifies as "'stand-your-ground culture.' This culture itself is generative. It has spawned various social-cultural devices – legal and extralegal, theoretical and ideological, political and theological – to preserve America's primordial exceptional identity."[302] Supported by beliefs in their exceptionalism, powerful and privileged whites initiate a "stand-your-ground culture" (which loosely claims a right to the protection of one's property) as a need to protect

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[301] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 44.
[302] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, 4.

themselves from inferior and deviant others, and subsequently, they have "produced and sustained slavery, Black Codes, Jim Crow, lynching, and other forms of racialized violence against black bodies."[303] Similar laws and systems have also been initiated to "protect" whites and white spaces from other persons of color including various ethnic and religious immigrants via border and immigration policies including the recent building of the wall at the United States and Mexico border. These laws and systems of racial separation are evidence of the pathology of whiteness.

This pathology often functions as a racial and ethnic hermeneutical lens by which the privileged view and interpret their world. Through these lenses, two young black men walking down the street are not simply two young black men walking down the street, but they are interpreted as threats, potential criminals that need to be feared not for what they have done but because of they **could** do – and prejudicially interpreted, as what they **will** do if given the opportunity. With this same hermeneutical lens, immigrant families coming across the border from Mexico are not seen as fleeing oppression and starvation and looking for places where their families can be safe and well-fed, but they are interpreted as criminals who are lazy and just want to mooch off the U.S. welfare system. Thus, these immigrant families need to be feared because they will take the jobs and wealth away from "American" families and communities. Again, these fears exhibited by the privileged are due to a particular pathological interpretative lens and they are not the same fears experienced by the disinherited. These fears felt by the privileged continue to function in the various forms of separatism demonstrated in racially homogenous neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and churches.

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[303] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, xiii.

In addition to fear, the pathology of whiteness also creates various other emotional responses common amongst the privileged especially in regards to racial relations. As an academic in multicultural education and as a consultant in anti-racism training, Robin DiAngelo has over twenty years of experience facilitating sessions on racial and social justice issues in private, non-profit, and governmental organizations.[304] Many of these consultations on race relations have been with primarily white groups, and one aspect of these training sessions includes the explication and acknowledgement of our racial history including the definitions and forms of racism in the U.S. In these sessions, she describes common emotions including fear, anger, resentment, hatred, and guilt. Again, many of these emotions are the products of a pathological hermeneutical lens of white supremacy and exceptionalism through which the privileged interpret their world – sometimes real-lived, sometimes perceived. In many circumstances, these emotions are linked together in a process DiAngelo calls "white fragility" which functions to "reinstate white equilibrium" and return to "racial comfort" in the face of racial conflict. Maybe most significant, these emotions linked to white fragility also function amongst whites to "maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy."[305]

As ideological frames, white supremacy, white fragility, white privilege, and white normativity tend to create distorted views of reality whether in regards to race, ethnicity, class, religion, or any other forms of social classification. In turn, these distorted ideological frames both create and perpetuate various emotional responses to racial and ethnic realities. These emotional responses, though real in experience, cannot be understood nor addressed outside the framework of the (dis)orientation of ontological whiteness – the *pathos* are the symptoms of the

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[304] "About Me," Robin DiAngelo, accessed 10/1/2018, https://robindiangelo.com/about-me/
[305] Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 2.

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pathology. As such, addressing the emotions of the privileged should be two-fold: **both** engaging the emotions themselves **and** understanding how the emotions are related to the pathology of whiteness.

Though not exhaustive, the wisdom, insights, and ethics of Howard Thurman can be an invaluable resource for whites in the process of engaging the pathologies of whiteness and its effect on others. Even though Thurman's approach may be limited in various socio-political aspects, his theo-ethic based on religious experience and the religion of Jesus helps address some of the individual and collective spiritual and psychological struggles resulting from functioning out of an ideology of whiteness. Religious experience can serve as an important initial step in addressing the internal pathological consequences of whiteness, and in so doing, hopefully the privileged and the powerful will be able to begin the difficult work of psychological and spiritual healing within themselves. In so doing, they will hopefully begin to understand how their pathology has devastating consequences for the marginalized and the disinherited. Guided by Thurman's theo-ethic, the healing within will hopefully initiate a desire – a moral imperative – to begin the healing of society through the disruption of the pathology of ontological whiteness.

For Thurman, emotions can be death-dealing for the individual and for others because often in life fear begets fear, anger begets anger, indifference begets indifference, guilt begets guilt, and hatred begets hatred. For this reason, experiencing the love of God and the love of one's self become essential precursors to loving one's neighbor and one's enemy. The transition from death-dealing aspects toward those oriented toward life, reconciliation, harmony, and wholeness is not easy or quick, and human history has demonstrated time and time again that as a species, we are incapable of this kind of transformation on our own. In the words of Elias Chacour, a Palestinian Israeli who lives for peace and reconciliation, "We are weak and poor.

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Only God can give us the power to overcome hatred and bitterness. Only God can give us the

compassion to face our enemy, doing everything possible to convert the enemy to a friend, and a

friend to a brother or sister. Without God's love and compassion we will take the sword and kill

the enemy."[306] Therefore, "it is necessary to see to it that whatever [one] condemns in society

does not exist in [one's] own heart. Furthermore, [one] should always respond to opportunities

which will help to bring about relationships in which the Christian can really function."[307]

Learning to love others as oneself creates new possibilities for peace and cooperation

instead of the perpetuation of bitterness or indifference. "There is hope that a new situation

could come about when enemies might become friends again, when the dehumanized perpetrator

might be helped to recover his [or her] lost humanity."[308] This is the *telos* of reconciliation, the

reclaiming of humanity – for both the disinherited and the privileged – and the transformation of

neighbors and enemies into friends, just as humanity was reconciled to God. This is why

Thurman understood reconciliation to be initially and largely a spiritual activity, and as he

recognized that deep spiritual and emotional healing is needed within the U.S. both amongst the

disinherited and the privileged, and this kind of healing can only come from the Spirit of God.

As Thurman shares, "A profound piece of surgery has to take place in the very psyche of the

disinherited before the great claim of the religion of Jesus can be presented. The great stretches

of barren places in the soul must be revitalized, brought to life, before they can be

challenged."[309] I believe the same applies for the privileged and the powerful: due to the

pathologies of whiteness, great stretches of the privileged soul must be revitalized before they

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[306] Elias Chacour, *We Belong to the Land: The Story of a Palestinian Israeli Who Lives for Peace and Reconciliation* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2001), 163.

[307] Howard Thurman, "The Missionary Spirit and World Peace," (April 1935) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 251.

[308] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 158.

[309] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 68.

can be challenged. Again, this healing must involve both the *pathos* and the pathology, to

address the emotions and the causes because to do otherwise is to treat the symptoms without

curing the disease. In the end, humanity is in the struggle towards reconciled forms of human

relatedness together, and this pursuit is ripe with emotional and spiritual challenges. Thus, as

Thurman poetically shares in "Be Ye Not Overcome by Evil,"

> I seek the strength to overcome the tendency to evil in my own heart.
> I seek the strength to overcome the evil that is present about me.
> I recognize the evil in much of the organized life about me;
> The evil in the will to power as found in groups and institutions and individuals;
> I recognize the terrible havoc of hate and bitterness which makes for fear and panic in the common life.
> I seek the strength to overcome the evil that is present all about me.
> I seek the strength to overcome evil for I must not myself be overcome by evil.
> I seek the purification of my own heart, the purging of my own motives;
> I seek the strength to withstand the logic of bitterness, the terrible divisiveness of hate, the demonic triumph of the conquest of others.
> What I seek for myself, O God, I desire with all my heart for friend and for foe alike.
> Together we seek the strength to overcome evil.[310]

Recounting the Past

At its best, reconciliation attempts to repair broken relationships and transition humanity

from an existence grounded in fear and separatism to one representative of love and mutuality,

and do this in spite of history filled with hate, oppression, and distrust. Within the Church, a

monumental challenge rests in the "fact that once upon a time in U.S. history the 'peculiar'

institution of slavery was biblically supported, religiously justified, spiritually legitimized, and

ethically normalized" and acknowledgment of this history "raises serious questions concerning

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[310] Howard Thurman, "Be Ye Not Overcome by Evil," (16 May 1954, Boston, MA) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 81. Thurman modified this meditation from a poem he had previously written "To Overcome Evil" in *Meditations of the Heart*, 164-165.

the objectivity of any particular code of ethics originating from that dominant white culture."[311] This reality raises serious obstacles in efforts of reconciliation because the disinherited will rightfully question an ideology or theology coming from those who have used ideologies and theologies to oppress them both in the past and in the present. Thus, within reconciliatory discourse, the past and the present sometimes have a tenuous relationship with the teleological future. For the disinherited, the links between the lived realities of the past and present are more difficult to connect with the hypothetical *telos* of harmony and wholeness; whereas for the privileged, this transition may seem more feasible. Part of the reconciliatory task becomes to reconcile these various perspectives on the past and present with their connection to the future.

Howard Thurman had many distinctive attributes which not only made him unique but uniquely gifted toward the work of reconciliation. One of the most significant was his prophetic vision, the ability to creatively imagine future possibilities of humanity and the world. This prophetic vision was not simply teleological because Thurman was often able to see the connections between the present and a better future. Even though this prophetic vision is a necessary component for the transformation and progress of the Church and society (as opposed to stagnation or regression), sometimes forward-thinking can restrict not only how one understands the past but also how the past continues to inform the present. In many ways, this has been the case with many attempts at reconciliation on personal, communal, and socio-political levels. Before reconciliation can occur in the future, a **full** recounting of the past needs to be remembered and acknowledged in order to better understand how the past is still

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[311] De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*, 5.

manifested today. "We can no longer be afraid of the truth about race in this country – past,

present, and future – because our fears will keep us captive to all kinds of untruths."[312]

A holistic recounting of the past includes a re-telling of history from the perspectives of

those whose voices that have been silenced and ignored. Katie Cannon, one of the progenitors of

womanist ethics, reminds us that for "more than three and a half centuries a 'conspiracy of

silence' rendered invisible the outstanding contributions of Blacks to the culture of

humankind."[313] A history told from the perspective of whiteness only tells part of the story, and

this limited perspective of history has occurred across the globe. As Tutu explains from his

experience in South Africa,

> Most whites saw things from their own perspectives, which is not surprising. Their
> values were seen as universally valid; everyone had to measure up to those Eurocentric
> values or be considered inferior, a maverick, odd, an outcast. These were unexamined
> assumptions shared by most whites and they were likely to be best preserved by the status
> quo that protected white vested interests so efficiently.[314]

A cultural narrative told from the perspective of whiteness "must array all the forces of

legislation and law enforcement: it must falsify the facts of history, tamper with the insights of

religion and religious doctrine, editorialize and slant news and the printed word."[315] Beyond the

problematic state this perspective creates for all non-white persons, this ideology of whiteness

creates shallow and narrow concepts of history and reconciliation because history as told by

whiteness is not just limited but perpetuates the tragic history of the disinherited and the

marginalized.

A new re-telling of the past will be necessary in order to give a full account of these

ignored perspectives, but simply re-telling is not enough because our country's history comes

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[312] Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, xxiv.
[313] Katie Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 1-2.
[314] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 219.
[315] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 71.

with a lot of painful baggage. As Thurman reminds us, "There can be no escape from the past by an attitude of hostility toward the past."[316] Instead, history needs to be retold in a new way with new voices and even with new attitudes. As Stacey Floyd-Thomas teaches, our retelling must be more than mere revision but a reclaiming of history which will be an act of revivification for the oppressed, particularly the voices, perspectives, and lives which have been silenced and written out of history.[317] As such, an important act of reconciling history is to tell these stories, often for the first time, as a part of the full narrative of U.S. history. In South Africa, this process of telling and listening was a necessary component of the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In these sessions, for the purposes of the rehabilitation of "the human and civil dignity of the victims," the victims were allowed to come and "tell **their** stories in their own words," probably for the very first time.[318] The ability to tell these stories was not simply cathartic for the victims, but for some it initiated the process of healing and restoration. For the white perpetrators, the hope was that in listening to the stories of their abuse to the black men, women, and children of South Africa, it would spark the beginning of a healing process in them as well – a healing from their diseased and malformed sense of humanness, or in the words of Tutu, "the dehumanized perpetrator might be helped to recover his [or her] lost humanity."[319]

The retelling and reclaiming of history is not only for the marginalized, but it will be a necessary process for the powerful and the privileged as well because until we begin to see the world from perspectives other than whiteness, the destructive systems and social realities will not change. For many blinded by the ideologies of whiteness including white supremacy, while privilege, and white normativity, the first step in this process of retelling history is actually not

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[316] Howard Thurman, "To Frances Geddes," (letter, August 16,1960, Edinburgh, Scotland) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 277.
[317] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 106.
[318] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 26.
[319] Ibid., 158.

"telling" at all, but an act of listening, a deep listening to the witnesses of those who have been

victimized and oppressed by the racist ideologies and systems empowered by whiteness. As

DiAngelo notes, this exposure to different historical perspectives will undoubtedly include

various forms of cognitive dissonance as privileged whites are confronted not only with their

own "comfortable illusion" of racism but also the tragic realities of the oppressed they were

unable or unwilling to see prior.[320] As part of a reconciliatory process, this **re-**listening to their

own society's history from alternate perspectives will hopefully lead to a reclaiming and a

retelling of their own history; however, this process will be less of a **re**claiming act and more of

a **claiming** – possibly for the first time – of one's complicity and even responsibility for

participating in a system that has oppressed peoples of color for the benefit of whiteness.[321]

In 1955, Thurman published *Deep River: Reflections on the Religious Insight of Certain*

of the Negro Spirituals as an effort to tell the stories and share the wisdom of the community that

had formed him. In these reflections, Thurman uses the spirituals as rich source material for

learning, embracing, and teaching from the wisdom of his forebears as they applied to the many

challenges of both life and death.[322] As stories of life and death, these spirituals express the pain

and sorrow of their lives as well as their hopes, even if only in the afterlife. These spirituals tell

the stories of persons of African descent which are typically ignored from the narrative of U.S.

history, denying their personhood, their personality, and their worth. In more recent decades,

"Womanist ethicists have been unapologetic students of slave narratives. Embedded within

these narratives lie not only the stories of individual black women and their people's strivings for

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[320] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 101.

[321] For a brief example of "seeing" history from a non-white perspective, see "Chapter 1: History in Black," in Anna Stubblefield, *Ethics Along the Color Line* (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 2000), 22-68.

[322] Originally published in 1945 as *Deep River: An Interpretation of Negro Spirituals*, and then again in 1955 as *Deep River: Reflections on the Religious Insight of Certain of the Negro Spirituals*, "Deep River" was later combined with other writings into the book: *Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Friends United Press, 1975).

freedom from oppression, but also the horrific truth concerning the social manufacturing and religious roots of racism, sexism, and classism as American core values."[323]

In addition to the perspectives found in spirituals and slave narratives, the histories and current stories of the multitude of peoples marginalized by white normativity narratives will provide depth and complexity to the recounting and reclaiming of history and humanity's story. Including Latinx, Black, Indigenous American, Asian American, Feminist, Mujerista, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Atheist, and Queer voices into the historical account with not only give a more holistic understanding of the diversity of the United States but also revel the widespread oppression and marginalization done by whiteness. In spite of the often whitewashed narrative projected by white normativity, the actual history of the United States includes many diverse peoples and in order to finds reconciled space for everyone in the future, it is also imperative to acknowledge their presence, contributions, and influence in the past and present.

Retrieving the narratives of U.S. history from death-grip of white Americanism is an important step in the movement toward justice, peace, and reconciliation, and the incorporation of diverse voices into the retelling is essential in gaining a holistic understanding of the past, present, and the teleological future. Even though retelling our country's history is important in order to expose the often hidden tragedies of institutional racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, and various other forms of systematic oppression, it is also important to note that these narratives are not completely tragic. Against all of the odds, empowering narratives have emerged not only in the individual lives of the disinherited but also their communities and their institutions. Particularly influential in Howard Thurman's upbringing and development was the Black Church tradition which helped form his identity through understanding his race and his religion.

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[323] Floyd-Thomas, *Mining the Motherlode*, 115.

In the first centuries of the United States' history, enslaved Africans were often

introduced to Christianity via their slaveholders and the religion they were taught inherently

came from the perspective of white supremacy, imperialism, and dominance, and it was most

often taught by white preachers. Yet, the motives behind the Christianization of the enslaved

were not exactly "Christ like." "The white man's fear of [black] independence was an important

a factor in the matter as the white man's concern for the [black person's] soul," thus, it became

necessary to "supervise their religious exercises carefully."[324] As some of these enslaved

Africans eventually accepted Christianity, they recognized very early on that what they received

was not "white mans' religion," but something different. Occasionally, if an enslaved man or

woman was able to gain his or her freedom, participation in the church was limited by the laws

of Segregation and the freed blacks were relegated to balconies, designated pews in the back of

the church, or worse. With time, these

> [e]nslaved and free persons of African descent developed their own unique forms of
> Christian interpretation, worship, and practice that came from and spoke to their lived
> realities. Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier called this the 'invisible institution.' In secret
> places away from the view of the slaveholder, African Americans formed their own
> religious communities. These were precursors to African American congregations and
> denominations.[325]

As Gayraud Wilmore writes, "All of its deficiencies and excesses notwithstanding, the religion

that the slaves practiced was their own. It was unmistakably the religion of oppressed, but not

entirely conquered, people."[326]

As the Black Church grew and became more independent of white churches, it moved

from separate pews to separate churches. With the organizing of the first black congregation on

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[324] Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 248, 252.
[325] Curtiss P. DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49.
[326] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 35.

a plantation on the Bluestone River in Virginia in 1758 and the forming of the first black denomination in 1807 in Wilmington, Delaware, the Black Church was setting the precedent of being radical by rejecting the oppression of the religion of white America and reinterpreting it on their own terms.[327] Initiated by Richard Allen, the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopalian Church, the Black Church continued to redefine itself and articulate its *telos*. Allen's insistence that the Black Church must take an uncompromising stance against slavery was radical to both white and black churches.[328] Essentially, Allen believed the Black Church must redefine itself outside the context of slavery and within the parameters of freedom and self-respect, and within a prejudiced society, this redefinition could best and maybe only occur within the walls of the newly independent black churches. Thus, in spite of the great individual, collective, and systematic racism built around them, these early black Christians developed strategies and behaviors that would enable them to grow and mature in the face of great oppression and perpetual obstacles of racism.

One of these strategies within black communities was intentional separation. "In the face of this denigrating deference, however, the leaders of the Black Separatist movement made it clear that, at least in the short run, black people needed to separate themselves from the white community until they had developed the security and self-assurance necessary to engage whites as equals."[329] As paradoxical as it sounds, sometimes reconciliation can only occur after a period of intentional separation because in those periods of separation redefine themselves in order become empowered to fight for justice and to stand beside whites as equals. As Thurman writes, "if a man's ego has been stabilized, resulting in a sure grounding of his sense of personal

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[327] Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, 104-105.
[328] Ibid.,122.
[329] Tony Campolo and Michael Battle, *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 59.

worth and dignity, then he is in a position to appraise his own intrinsic powers, gifts, talents, and abilities. He no longer views his equipment through the darkened lenses of those who are largely responsible for his social predicament."[330] The Black Church helped develop and nurture this process. Within the Black Church, leaders honed their leadership skills and oratory abilities and leaders and lay alike were able to appraise their talents and abilities in order to calculate the potential for change. In some regards, the Black Church enabled many blacks to feel free in spite of living in a racist nation for within the walls of black churches all were equal. The Black Church is emblematic of the role of self-determination of blacks in this country, but it is concurrently the primary marker of the development of America's original sin – the sin of racism.[331] As such, the Black Church is a positive reminder to white churches of that sin even if they do not like being reminded of it. A reconciled and harmonious future cannot exist as long as racism – and all other forms of institutionalized discrimination and injustice – are allowed to function unchallenged.

<center>The Broken Heart of Racism and Cheap Reconciliation</center>

As brilliant as Howard Thurman's insights may be within the realm of interpersonal relationships and possibly within particular group settings as well, some of his ideas and approach seem limited in their efficacy in regards to socio-political and cultural issues such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, political polarization, etc. Even though Thurman's "commitment for social transformation encouraged the activism of others," his ideas and approach demonstrated "his limitations as a technician of social mechanisms."[332] This limitation

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[330] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 53.
[331] Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, xxi.
[332] Smith, *The Mystic as Prophet*, 180.

can also be applied to his theo-ethic of reconciliation. That is, if Thurman's theo-ethic only functions well on the interpersonal level, can the requirements of **full** reconciliation be met with his approach? In other words, are his methods sufficient for socio-political and cultural transformation?

This question is especially pertinent to the topic of reconciliation because of the troubled history the concept has within Christian religious discourse, particularly regarding race. In recent years, much negativism has been associated with the term reconciliation primarily due to its troubled history and application. In spite of its positive theoretical understandings and definitions, reconciliation has a negative history of inadequate implementation. Specifically, the term "reconciliation" has been distorted through its misapplication and misuse as it relates to racial and religious conflict in the United States. As Jennifer Harvey notes in her recent book, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation*, reconciliation has served as the primary paradigm of justice-oriented (predominately white) Christians for addressing racial conflict and division within the United States.[333] She writes, "The overwhelming emphasis becomes the need to heal division, to come together in just and mutual ways across that divide. This basic framing of the question or problem of race – with its emphasis on division or failed inclusion and its vision of unity and interracial togetherness – is what I describe here with my use of 'reconciliation paradigm.'"[334] Even though the sentiments of the reconciliation paradigm are positive and even desirable, the application of said paradigm has often been much less so, especially from the perspective of the marginalized.

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[333] Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 2.
[334] Ibid., 20.

Liberation theologians and ethicists have also questioned the validity of socio-political

and cultural reconciliation due to its strained relationship with liberation primarily due to

reconciliation being conceived from a too narrow perspective and often applied prematurely.

Paulo Freire, progenitor of liberation pedagogy writes,

> Some who promote white theology propose an even greater passivity for the oppressed classes by disregarding the link between reconciliation and liberation. For them, reconciliation is nothing more than the capitulation of the dominated to the will of the dominant. Reconciliation becomes a kind of pact between dominant and dominated, rich and poor; a pact that accepts the continuation of the oppression but promises the dominant efficient and modernized social assistance.[335]

One of the problems associated with reconciliation is that it has often been defined and

implemented from the perspective of the dominant and privileged – that is, from whiteness. As

a consequence, reconciliation has often functioned as a tool of the powerful and privileged and

just looks like just variant form of assimilation (though hidden within religious and theoretical

jargon). For this reason, De La Torre states,

> It is important to recognize that those who benefit from the present power structures cannot be relied upon to define reconciliation, or to determine how to go about achieving it. Embedded within the social structures that have endowed them with power and privilege at the expense of the marginalized, those 'at the top' cannot remain neutral about the nature of domination and oppression.[336]

This understanding of reconciliation from the position of power demanded very little from the

privileged but also did not provide any significant benefit for the underprivileged. From the

perspective of the marginalized, "the problem with whites' conception of reconciliation, many

claimed, was that they did not seek true justice – that is, justice both individually and

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[335] Paulo Freire, "Foreword to the 1986 Edition," in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, ix.

[336] Miguel De La Torre, *Liberating Jonah: Forming an Ethics of Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 2.

collectively. Without this component, reconciliation was cheap, artificial, and mere words."[337]

In other words, white persons and groups will often claim they desire reconciliation on an

individual level (that is, person to person), but do not see the necessity of collective or systematic

reconciliation. The problem with this perspective is that it is limited in its capacity to repair.

Thurman's theo-ethic has been deemed insufficient by some more revolutionary perspectives due

to his privileging of interpersonal reconciliation over systemic. For some liberationists, "The

issues of liberation, justice, and power are so central to the dynamic of struggle that

reconciliation among revolutionaries means 'a needed realignment of power relations' rather

than a concept of love which stresses understanding, fellowship, caring, and the elimination of

contradictions."[338]

From the socio-political and cultural levels, the primary sources of the troubled state of

relatedness – discrimination and injustice within the various systems of oppression – still remain

with the interpersonal view of reconciliation. The wounds of the disinherited not only remain

but are constantly remade due to the oppressive system of which they are a part (the system

created by the powerful and dominant). In other words, until the causes of these injuries are

addressed, the love-ethic of Jesus and the process of religious experience can come across as just

a vicious cycle of injury and repair, re-injury and repair, with very little hope of permanent

healing and relief. As mentioned above, Thurman believed these moments of healing from

religious experience with the divine enabled him to endure the pains and pressures of his

environment, but, at the same time, without the transformation of the socio-political and cultural

systems, this method could be understood as merely short-term survival technique. In the

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[337] Emerson and Smith, *Divided by Faith*, 58.
[338] Smith, *The Mystic as Prophet*, 156.

meantime, the underprivileged are struggling through this cycle, the privileged continue to live on in, well, privilege.

Howard Thurman was definitely aware of these wounds and the depth of their injury. He writes, "the disinherited [person] has a sense of gross injury. He finds it well-nigh impossible to forgive, because his injury is often gratuitous. It is not for something that [she] has done, and action resulting from a deliberate violation of another. [She] is penalized for what [she] **is** in the eyes and the standards of another."[339] Howard Thurman's insight is important because it reminds us that with racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, religious prejudice, etc., the injury done to the marginalized was not because of what they did, but because of who they are. These wounds are not simply emotional issues to address, but serious injuries which need healing. Thus, Thurman correctly understood these injuries as a spiritual matter and that healing will never be complete until justice occurs through the elimination of the source of the injuries. Jim Wallis concurs, "There will be no superficial or merely political overcoming of our racial sins – that will take a **spiritual** and moral transformation as well."[340] The "as well" component is an essential modifier in Wallis' statement: If racism is to be overcome, it will need to be political, spiritual, and moral, but not simply relational.

The myopic conceptions and historical misapplication of reconciliation by the privileged have tended to stain the term to the point that some scholars avoid using it altogether. Christian theologian Willie James Jennings, has decided to avoid the term because the negativity of its baggage outweighs its benefits. In his book, *The Christian Imagination*, he writes,

> I have purposely stayed away from the theological language of reconciliation because of its terrible misuse in Western Christianity and its tormented deployment in so many

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[339] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 107.
[340] Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 34.

theological systems and projects. The concept of reconciliation is not irretrievable, but I am convinced that before we theologians can interpret the depths of the divine action of reconciliation we must first articulate the profound deformities of Christian intimacy and identity in modernity. Until we do, all theological discussions of reconciliation will be exactly what they tend to be: (a) ideological tools for facilitating the negotiations of power; or (b) socially exhausted idealist claims masquerading as serious theological accounts. In truth, it is not at all clear that most Christians are ready to imagine reconciliation.[341]

Jennings' final statement in this extended quote is significant because it highlights an important motivational aspect that is often overlooked or ignored within reconciliatory discourse, or maybe more accurately, the **non**-motivational aspect of reconciliation. As Harvey highlights, just because many white Christians believe in the reconciliation paradigm does not mean they actually have the motivation to implement **all** that is necessary to create reconciliation across racial lines – the internal work, the relational repair, and the socio-political transformation. "Our emphasis on reconciliation misses critical aspects of what race is, and as a result it causes those of us who rely on it to fundamentally misunderstand important truths about the nature of racism and racial division. These misunderstandings directly undermine our hopes for actually realizing racial reconciliation."[342]

From positions dictated by the pathology of whiteness, narrow constructs of reconciliation not only fail to acknowledge what is necessary to make reconciliation a reality, but it also often fails to acknowledge how much more is required of those who have been victimized by these oppressive systems. Thurman recognized there was security and safety behind the walls of separation and moving beyond those walls to potential spaces of reconciliation required being exposed in a manner the privileged could not comprehend. Even though he thoroughly believed in the potentials and necessity of reconciliation, Thurman also had his own reservations at times:

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[341] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 9-10.
[342] Harvey, *Dear White Christians*, 43.

"Perhaps I hesitate to seek reconciliation because, in the seeking, I myself become too vulnerable."[343] Thurman understood that when reconciliation is attempted between the powerful and the powerless or the less powerful, the risks are not equal because the underprivileged are usually more vulnerable to the reactions of the powerful than vice versa. The powerful most often have higher levels of security – social, political, economic, cultural, etc. – backing them based upon their position of privilege whereas the disinherited have very little security or support due to their socio-political classification. Also, in attempting to pursue true reconciliation, underprivileged persons will most likely have to expose some of the deep hurts and wounds incurred in the troubled relationship. This exposure often creates a sense of vulnerability among the powerless whereas the persons in power do not necessarily have the same struggle.

Desmond Tutu noted similar realities for the indigenous people of South Africa during the dismantling of Apartheid. As a source of comparison and correlation, it is important to note some of the similarities and differences between South African Apartheid in South Africa and Jim and Jane Crow Segregation in the United States. Generally speaking, both were forms of governance based upon a combination of unequal distributions of power and resources (in which whites had access to and control of the majority of both) and both had formal and informal systems of racial separation. Unlike the United States where whites are both the most powerful and majority racial/ethnic group, in South Africa, whites represented the ruling class but were a minority in population. In regards to racial reconciliation, another important difference is that in South Africa the method and space of reconciliation was created by the federal government through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whereas in the United States, no such method or space has been created, and from my knowledge no comprehensive system of reconciliation,

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[343] Thurman, "Confronting the Enemy," in *Growing Edge*, 9.

secular or religious, exists in any real capacity. In spite of these differences, it is helpful to acknowledge some of the similarities in *pathos* from both contexts, and even though the contextual differences do not make for seamless correlations, insights and perspective can be gained by noting some of the emotional challenges in the pursuit of reconciliation.

Before proceeding, it is important to acknowledge that in spite of the ambitious and hopeful aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is debatable whether the Commission should be a considered a "success." A full examination of the effects of the Commission is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is important to note that twenty years after the monumental effort towards forgiveness and reconciliation, racial inequality, injustice, and poverty still permeate South Africa's socio-political system in spite of the shift in governance towards indigenous leadership. Even though one could argue that various forms of personal and cultural healing resulted from the Commission, it is also important to note that many socio-political and racial injustices were not addressed and racial discrimination and inequality still exist in South Africa. As such, I reference South Africa and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission not as a successful model to emulate, per se, but acknowledging that attempts at reconciliation can be informative not only by learning from various successes but also by learning from the failures and shortcomings of such pursuits. It is also important to remember that decades and even centuries of racial injustice cannot be "fixed" quickly or easily, but healing the emotional wounds of racial injustice and restructuring the systems that made such wounds possible is often a long and difficult process, thus making reconciliation a challenge.

Regarding the challenges and risks involved in reconciliation for the underprivileged, Tutu shares,

Forgiving and being reconciled are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong. True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the pain, the degradation, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but in the end it is worthwhile, because in the end dealing with the real situation helps to bring real healing. Spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing.[344]

In spite of these vulnerabilities, risks, and reservations, both Tutu and Thurman ultimately believed reconciliation was a necessary step in the process of healing – real healing. They determined that the benefits of reconciliation outweighed the risks and the unknown potentials of reconciliation were more compelling than the reality of continuing to live in unreconciled spaces with unreconciled relationships. Yet, it is also important not to jump pre-maturely into reconciliation based on shallow and narrow conceptions which often neglect to address both the emotional wounds and the socio-political realities of the disinherited. As Tutu reminds us, "spurious reconciliation can bring only spurious healing."

This "spurious reconciliation" correlates with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's concept of "cheap grace." In his seminal text, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer distinguishes between two conceptions of grace: "cheap" and "costly." Cheap grace focuses on the removal of sin by grace but demands very little of the person as a response to the removal of sin. This grace "costs" the person who sinned very little. Costly grace, on the other hand, requires something in response to receiving the grace from God – it requires one to follow Jesus Christ with one's life. That is, costly grace requires discipleship and obedience by the follower of Jesus in the work of Jesus.[345] The result of a faith based upon "cheap grace" is a Christianity without discipleship, which in turn, creates a distorted understanding of Christianity itself, whereas "costly grace" manifests itself in a holist and active faith joining Christ in the work of the Kingdom of God.

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[344] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 270-271.
[345] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan,1966) 43–53.

Several parallels exist between Bonhoeffer's "cheap grace" and modern conceptions of reconciliation particularly that neither demand much of the recipient in the process of the removal of "sin." As such, "cheap reconciliation" demands very little of the privileged and powerful in the removal of "sin" (in the forms of racism, classism, sexism, etc.,) yet they still get to claim reconciliation. Instead of this cheap conception of reconciliation, it may be more holistic, healthy, and honest to understand reconciliation in a "costly" sense, one that demands something of the recipients in the process of the removal of the sins of our country including our original sin – racism. This means that a robust understanding of reconciliation inherently includes not only the repairing of troubled relationships but also the pursuit of justice and the dismantling of the systems which have caused so much pain, suffering, and oppression to the children of God in this country. Particularly in the Church, if we are going to attend to the emotional relational wounds caused by centuries of inequality and oppression, as Jennings reminds us, "we must first articulate the profound deformities of Christian intimacy and identity in modernity."[346]

Though limited in various forms of socio-political engagement, Howard Thurman's approach demands more of its participants/recipients than other "cheap" conceptions of reconciliation. To be examined more thoroughly in the next chapter, Thurman's theo-ethic of reconciliation via religious experience and the love-ethic of Jesus engages these issues of Christian intimacy and identity on various personal and interpersonal levels. It is significantly more complex and attentive to the internal aspects of personhood compared to many of the reconciliatory efforts of the privileged, and in so doing, it has the potential to address some of the problems of relatedness that continue to plague humanity including separatism and divisiveness.

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[346] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 10.

In order to overcome its troubled past as well as to be relevant in our current moment and project towards our teleological future, reconciliation needs to be more robust both in concept and in application compared to previous conceptions stemming from ideologies of whiteness and privilege. We must continue to reject "spurious" or "cheap" forms of reconciliation which require very little change and sacrifice on the part of the privileged while demanding great vulnerability from the underprivileged and marginalized.

The purpose of reconciliation is not simply to transcendentally love each other and to treat each other more humanely – though learning how to better love each other and treat each other more humanely would go a long way in strengthening the reconciliatory process. Reconciliation is more than just an attitude adjustment; it is also ethical action. In reconciliation, "the ethical task before both those who are oppressed and those who are privileged by the present institutionalized structures is . . . to dismantle the very structures responsible for causing injustices along race, class, and gender lines, regardless of the attitudes bound to those structures."[347] In reconciliation, the path for the disadvantaged will be different than the path for the privileged for they have very different starting points; however, their *telos* is the same: peace, cooperation, mutuality, harmony, and wholeness. As Howard Thurman teaches, "The religion of Jesus says to the disinherited: 'Love your enemy.' Take the initiative in seeking ways by which you can have the experience of a common sharing of mutual worth and value. It may be hazardous, but you must do it."[348] And in a similar fashion, the religion of Jesus says to the privileged: Love your neighbor and begin the work of healing the wounds of the pathology of whiteness in order that you can be open to experiences of a common sharing of mutual worth and value with those who are different. It may be challenging in that you may have to forfeit some of

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[347] De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*, 17.
[348] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 100.

your power, privilege, comfort, and change the way in which you see the world, but you must do it for the benefit and well-being of all humanity.

Like Howard Thurman, I share the conviction that the world we live in is failing to meet many of its potentials due to its troubled forms of human relatedness, but, like Thurman, I also believe that the religion of Jesus directly speaks to many of these issues. Humanity as a whole could benefit from learning better to how love one another and the reconciliation of troubled relationships is an important step in that process. A holistic and robust rendering of reconciliation is more than just the repairing of relationships but also includes processes of healing – the healing of deep emotional wounds and the healing/repair of a broken socio-political system based on the pathology of whiteness. Though not exhaustive, Thurman's insights into the emotional challenges facing the disinherited including the struggles of fear, deception, and hatred provide a helpful reminder of the deep spiritual work that needs to be done in order for healthy, reconciled relationships to be possible. Even though these emotional and spiritual insights by Thurman are invaluable, I also agree with Luther Smith that "Thurman needed to provide more discourse on the complexities and ambiguities of his social witness concepts" and that his theo-ethic is limited due to these voids.[349]

To supplement this shortcoming of Thurman's approach, the inclusion of more socially-critical approaches would serve to bolster Thurman's theo-ethic. The inclusion of insights from liberationist discourses (including various liberation theologies and liberationist ethics: Latinx, Black, Indigenous American, Asian American, Feminist, Mujerista, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Atheist, and Queer voices) with their diverse yet distinct perspectives and contexts would add richness, breadth, depth, variety, and nuance to the complex socio-political and

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[349] Smith, *The Mystic as Prophet*, 159.

cultural situation largely determined by inequality, inequity, and injustice. These various perspectives serve to analyze, question, and challenge the various forms of white normativity from differing marginalized spaces while contributing to a holistic framework of understanding.

In addition to liberationist perspectives, the inclusion of racially- and ethnically specific perspectives would also serve to critically engage the role of race and ethnicity in the socio-political and cultural situation of the United States. In particular, scholarship specializing in critical race theory and critical whiteness theory would serve to bolster conceptions of reconciliation in regards to race, racial injustice, and the socio-political implications of race and ethnicity in the United States. To include these voices would serve as a preventative measure in the perpetuation of cheap constructs of reconciliation and would contribute to the critical engagement of whiteness. In many ways, the pathology of whiteness (in the forms of white supremacy, white privilege, and white normativity) is not only one of the primary causes of the emotional and physical wounds of the disinherited but it also contributes to the malformations of emotion and ideology of the privileged and powerful. In order to be effective and affective, a theo-ethic of reconciliation will need to be "costly" and holistic both in construction and application, not only addressing the functioning of *pathos* but also the forms of pathology which infect the socio-political system. In light of both the magnitude (systems) and intricacies (emotions) of the social situation, it becomes important to ask the looming question: Is reconciliation even possible? As Jennings states, "In truth, it is not at all clear that most Christians are ready to imagine reconciliation."[350]

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[350] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 10.

Is Reconciliation Even Possible?

Examining the life and ministry of Howard Thurman as well as our current social, political, and religious context, a question regarding the possibility of an actual holist and robust reconciliation lingers. Is it possible to create religious experiences of reconciliation and unity among people that are more compelling than the socio-political and cultural experiences which separate them? Is reconciliation possible in the United States considering its troubled history and the separatist ideologies and systems that still persist? The questions are as searching as they are troubling. Undoubtedly, the spectrum of responses to this question will range anywhere from a resounding "no" to an energetic "yes" because "all things are possible with God."[351] In spite of the struggles, Thurman never wavered on his conviction of this hopeful possibility for humanity. Raised within the Black Church tradition, Thurman embodied the ideology of racial uplift, but over time, he grew to believe this concept did not only reside with one's own race but the **human race** as a whole. He also believed in a conceptually high "ceiling" for this uplift – the idealisms of harmony, integration, and wholeness – and that humanity could only get to these teleological spaces together as an interdependent whole. Even amidst his own struggles of doubt, anger, bitterness, and failures to reconcile interpersonal and institutional relationships in his own life, Thurman never lost hope in humanity actualizing its potential.[352]

I also believe these possibilities remain because if peace, harmony, and wholeness are a mere illusion, then the purpose of life becomes much more ambiguous (outside of some eschatological redemption narrative). If the purpose of human life does not include some aspect

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[351] This paraphrase of the biblical passage from Matthew 19:26 is a common lay response to questions regarding "possibility" in life.

[352] One of Thurman's strained personal relationships that was never reconciled was his relationship with his successor at Fellowship Church, Francis Geddes. Fluker, et al., *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 276-277.

of holistic and complete sense of well-being – as opposed to a partial or incomplete *telos* of

neutrality – then meaning becomes more elusive. Like Thurman, I believe teleological visions

are necessary in order to assist humanity in the betterment process. Yet, even with a conviction

in the possibility of a something better in this world, the question remains: Why is reconciliation

so difficult and elusive – specifically in the Church?

In *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Karl Barth makes a definitive statement regarding

reconciliation within Christian faith and theology, "It would be possible and quite correct to

describe the covenant fulfilled in the work of reconciliation as the heart of the subject-matter of

Christian faith, of the origin of Christian love, of the content of Christian hope."[353] One would

think reconciliation would be one of the **most** discussed topics in theological discourses and

Sunday morning sermons. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the Church or in the

academy. In spite of the belief that reconciliation is a core tenet of Christianity, "the heart of the

subject-matter of Christian faith," reconciliation is often avoided, ignored, or dismissed within

theological and religious discourses. This begs the question: Is it reasonable to think

reconciliation is possible in action if it is hardly even discussed in theory?

Part of the difficulty regarding any discourse on reconciliation within the Church is the

problematic reality of separatism, injustice, and inequality in the Church, in communities, and in

society. It is difficult to accept reconciliation dialogue as relevant when race, class, and gender

inequalities are so rampant, which in turn, makes the inclusive principle of Galatians 3:28 seem

shallow and theoretical.[354] As Thurman states regarding his own time period, "Historically in

this country, the church has given the sweep of its moral force to the practice of segregation

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[353] Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 2-3.
[354] Galatians 3:28 states, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

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within its own community of believers. To the extent to which this has been done, the church

has violated one of the central elements of its own commitment."[355] In addition to the inequality

and racial injustice that still exists, the proliferation of division within the Church also makes talk

of reconciliation not just unreasonable but even hypocritical. The American Church remains

fractured with hundreds of denominations and tens of thousands of uncooperative congregations,

and reconciliation still seems more a mirage than an actual possibility. As South African

theologian John de Gruchy notes,

> Reconciliation is not an ahistorical idea or an academic theory but a tangible experience
> of living together in community. Theologically speaking, this refers to the sacramental
> embodiment of the new humanity. Understood in this way, the Church is an agent of
> reconciliation, representing the embodiment in history. But the Church is by no means a
> paragon of reconciliation, quite the contrary is too often true.[356]

One of the challenges in analyzing the ineffectiveness of implementation of (horizontal)

reconciliation within the Church is determining the origin of the cause. In other words, is the

ineffectiveness in the Church due to the proliferation of separatism and injustice in broader

society **or** is the ineffectiveness of the Church due to a failure of the Church itself to implement

reconciliation within its own fellowship – or it is a combination of both. Unfortunately, the

Church is not alone in struggling to create social spaces and systems aimed at reconciling

troubled relationships whether in regards to religion or race. Even though many work places and

recreational spaces have become more diverse in recent decades, the U.S. "has virtually no large-

scale, widely distributed civic institutions that are equipped to nurture strong relationships across

racial divides," and in spite of the efforts of the ecumenical movement and interracial churches

within Christianity, the same can be said about the religious divides as well.[357]

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[355] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 103-104.
[356] John de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 5.
[357] Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 161.

In some regards, this becomes a "chicken and the egg" conundrum in the cause-and-effect relationship between the barriers preventing reconciliation in society and the Church. Yet, considering Thurman's primary frame of context was the Church, I think he would argue the Church's primary focus should be to address the troubled relationships within its fellowship first but not exclusively. In his lecture titled "Our Underlying Spiritual Unities," he stated, ". . . over and over again we give the sanction of our religion and the weight of our practice to those subtle anti-Christian practices expressed in segregated churches even in segregated graveyards. Can we expect more of the state, of the body politic, of industry than we expect of the church?"[358] Another way to frame this situation is to see it as an opportunity instead of seeing it simply as a failure of the Church. Desmond Tutu saw efforts in reconciliation in the Church as an opportunity to lead the way in the struggle towards justice and peace. He wrote, "If the churches, with their immense potential as agents of reconciliation, could not reconcile with each other it could very well send the wrong message to the politicians and the people of God. If the churches, despite their distressing baggage, could find one another in a public act of forgiveness and reconciliation, that would be a massive shot in the arm for a peaceful transition."[359] Both Thurman and Tutu believed the Church could and should practice reconciliation within its fellowship before trying to be a voice for peace and reconciliation in greater society. In some ways, this is an example of the wisdom in Jesus' metaphorical rebuke, "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye."[360]

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[358] Howard Thurman, "Our Underlying Spiritual Unities," (May 1941, Chicago) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol. 2*, 287-288.

[359] Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, 277.

[360] Matthew 7:5 (NRSV)

One of the other obstacles facing reconciliation is that the walls of racial and religious separatism have become so ingrained in the minds' of American culture, society, and the Church that Christians believe these walls are actually permanent. Thurman understood this mindset, "The situation is apt to be aggravated by the fact that the wall has existed so long that it may no longer be regarded as a symbol but as the thing itself."[361] We have forgotten that these walls of separation are human social creations and they can be dismantled by the same process. As Thurman emphatically states,

> The walls that divide must be demolished. They must be cast down, destroyed, uprooted. This is beyond debate. There must be a ceaseless and unrelenting pressure to that end, using all the resources of our common life. These barriers must be seen for what they are, a disease of our society, the enemy of human decency and humane respect. . . .When the walls are down, it is then that the real work of building the healthy American society begins. The razing of the walls is prelude – important, critical, urgent, vital, but prelude nevertheless. About this there must be no mistake.[362]

Instead of assuming the permanence of division through the lenses of the past and the present, he also understood the walls as preventative of a better future. To combat beliefs of this permanence, he balanced his understanding of the past and present with the teleological ideals of harmony and wholeness found in concepts like "creative intent," the "corroborating unity fundamental to life," and the "racial memory of a lost harmony."[363] Though the walls of separation seem formidable, they are not absolute, and the hopefulness of harmony and wholeness can be just as, if not more, powerful as the fear that keep the walls in place. As taught within the love-ethic of Jesus, "I must reduce the psychological distance between me and [them]. This Jesus did by associating with [them]. This was taking a long step because it exposed Jesus

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[361] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 91.
[362] Ibid., 92.
[363] In *The Search for Common Ground*, Thurman uses several of these phrases to portray his understanding that all of life is drawn toward unity, harmony, and wholeness.

to the bitter judgment of guilt by association."[364]   Thurman knew this task was not an easy request, but he also understood that this fear had to be addressed at some point otherwise transitioning through reconciliation towards harmony and wholeness (individually and communally) would be impossible.

Unfortunately, when it comes to racial and religious divisions, it often appears as though fear is actually an easier response than hope, and "it is easier to galvanize collective negative emotion **against** something or someone than it is to organize collective positive emotion **for** something or someone."[365]   In addition to this, within separatist frameworks with divisiveness, the fear between the oppositional parties is often reinforcing and reactive responses. In his book on the anatomy of Segregation, Thurman notes, "The more Negroes lose their fear, the more white people increase their fear."[366]   Yet, the cycle does not stop there: The more white people increase their fear the more defensive and aggressive they can become, which in turn, creates more fear among blacks and other marginalized peoples. Even though Thurman made this observation in 1965 in the heat of the Civil Rights movements, I believe this cycle is also evident with the manner in which U.S. society has responded to the its two most recent Presidents. With the Obama administration, blacks and other minorities began to lose their fear and have more hope in their future, but at the same time, many whites entrenched in the ideologies of whiteness increased their fear due to the assumed changes that would come to their way of life. Then, this increase in fear amongst many whites contributed to the election of a white President spouting white supremacy and racist ideology, which undoubtedly magnified the fear amongst people of color, . . . and the cycle continues.

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[364] Thurman, "Confronting the Enemy," in *The Growing Edge*, 11.

[365] Robert Schreiter, *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1998), 10.

[366] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 26.

Fear amongst separated and divisive parties is most often a viscous cycle without escape. One possible solution is to try to "break" the cycle of fear at some point. From my perspective, the most obvious break **should** occur at the point with the increased fear of whites after the loss of fear by people of color. Theoretically, the loss of fear within someone else is not inherently also an attack upon oneself. Unfortunately, in current socio-political and cultural systems of separatism and divisiveness which promote competition amongst the various groups, racial uplift is often interpreted as a "zero sum game" where the rise of one requires the fall of another. Within the pathology of whiteness, many whites assume this "fall" will be forced upon them, and thus, they often feel threatened and become defensive when people of color and other minorities advance. As such, even something positive like the socio-economic rise of oppressed persons becomes just another factor which divides the nation. For this reason, any "talk of reconciliation is shallow and fruitless without a careful and thoroughgoing investigation of the difference that divides the nation,"[367] and considering the prevalence of such perspectives in the Church, Jennings' doubt rings clear: "[I]t is not at all clear that most Christians are ready to imagine reconciliation."[368]

In spite of the "cheap" ideological constructions and narrow applications of reconciliation including its misuse, misapplication, and shallow conceptual rendering, I do not think the concept of reconciliation is devoid of meaning nor is it beyond redemption. We should not abandon the concept simply because it has been theologically restricted, ideologically watered down, and historically misapplied by the privileged. I agree with liberationist scholars who

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[367] Charles Villa-Vincencio, "Telling One Another Stories" in *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches*, edited by Gregory Baum and Harold Wells (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 33.
[368] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 10.

approach such concepts with skepticism and trepidation – and rightfully so.[369] Yet, instead of simply assuming the concept inept, would not the Church and the academy both benefit from re-conceptualizing the term with its full theological richness and re-envision it with stronger socio-political and cultural aspects. The church and religious academy are replete of concepts and terms which have historically been narrowly conceived and insufficiently implemented – i.e., grace, love, justice, kindness, peace, and even liberation. I believe the skepticism and socio-political vision of liberationists would not only provide a more robust re-conceptualization of reconciliation but also a greater accountability in application.

As an essential theological tenet within Christianity and as a necessary step toward the telos of harmony and wholeness, reconciliation – robustly conceived and appropriately applied – has significant potential in making this world a better place by guiding us in the difficult work of repairing our troubled forms of human relatedness. Part of the genius of Thurman's method of religious experience is that, as Christians, we are continually changing and growing into our potential. This concept can be applied to our ideological conceptions as well: love, peace, justice, liberation, and reconciliation are also actualizing their potentials in human relationships. In spite of the challenges and obstacles, reconciliation need not be abandoned as either a theology or an ethic. In fact, due to the rampant separatism, uncooperativeness, and injustice still within the Church and society, one could make the argument that a theo-ethic of reconciliation is needed now more than ever – not only a response to the current reality but also a vision of the future, something to strive for. Yet, according to Robert Jones, "All of this leads to the stark conclusion that if Americans are going to bridge the racial divide, we are going to have

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[369] De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*, 5.

to build something new – or at the very least, transform existing institutions."[370] An examination of Thurman's life reveals that he thought it was actually **both** – we need to create something new (Fellowship Church) **and** we need to transform existing institutions (Boston University). In so doing, the Church could and should be a model of an inclusive, integrated, and reconciliatory space, and by so doing, it could also be a beacon of hope to the rest of society.

As a theo-ethic, reconciliation has the potential to transform some of the troubled forms of human relatedness within the Church and society. Yet, one of the greatest obstacles facing the implementation of reconciliation is addressing the emotional aspects of human relations because emotions are just as significant in decision-making and action as cognitive evaluation. In particular, before reconciliation can be applied in a holistic manner, the emotional wounds of the marginalized and disinherited must be healed. In order to accomplish this difficult task, it is important to acknowledge the difference between the *pathos* of the disadvantaged compared to the pathology of racism which is often the source of the emotional wounds. Before the Church and society can move toward the teleological future of harmony and wholeness, the process of healing both the emotional wounds of the disinherited and the diseased pathology of racism will require addressing various components regarding both the past and the present. Two of these aspects include recounting the past in order to incorporate the silenced voices and perspectives into a more honest and expansive understanding of history and also moving beyond "cheap" conceptions of reconciliation which typically require very little of the privileged in the pursuit of relational repair. Within Thurman's theo-ethic of reconciliation, the engagement of the divine – *Theos* – in religious experience becomes an essential step in this transition and potential transformation.

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[370] Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, 163.

CHAPTER 4: *THEOS* – GOD, JESUS, LOVE, AND THE CHURCH

> But there is another dimension of the encounter [with the God of the universe]. It is at the level of [kinship] and community with the children of God. This encounter is instinct with the demand that all broken harmonies with our fellows be repaired and restored. Where there is estrangement, there must be reconciliation. Wounds must be healed, crooked paths made straight, and the turbulence of human conflict subdued by the tranquility of forgiveness and the will to community. Hatreds upon which life has fed must be uprooted by great contrition and the felt necessity for forgiveness.[371]

> – Howard Thurman, "The Twofold Encounter"

As a pastor, professor, social justice mentor, and public speaker, Howard Thurman's attentiveness to spirituality and matters of the heart was not merely for his own personal well-being but was concurrently projected outward to his environment and the spiritual yearnings of the people he encountered. Being so oriented, one of the most important aspects of his understanding of faith and religion was the encounter of the divine in religious experience. For Thurman, there was no substitute for the stripping down of oneself to the core of our human existence with all of one's faults, struggles, joys, and hopes exposed, and to meet God for love, healing, and growth. As a minister, he understood both the challenge and the necessity of this process for himself as a spiritual leader. He reflects,

> I am a minister; again and again I am impressed with the fact that it is not easy to grow in sympathy and understanding of other people. It is very easy to become professionally a religious person, professionally a minister, and let my knowledge of the Bible, my knowledge of the history of the Church, my knowledge of the psychology of religion, become a substitute for getting on my knees, seeking forgiveness of my sins, wrestling with my spirit in the presence of God. If I let my knowledge become a substitute for understanding, then the light that is in me becomes darkness. If the light that is in me becomes darkness, what a darkness.[372]

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[371] Howard Thurman, "The Twofold Encounter," in *The Inward Journey*, 137.
[372] Howard Thurman, "The Light That is Darkness," in *The Growing Edge*, 143.

Experiencing God becomes an opportunity for healing and growth – individual experiences aimed toward the reconciling of relationships with others and for the repairing of broken harmonies in fellowship. God is the subject matter of the religious experience and the community of the children of God is the object of that same experience. As such, religious experience is both a personal and communal matter and is often best engaged in fellowship with God's children.

Howard Thurman spent much time and energy helping others as they tried to find their way through life with all of its struggles and contradictions. He understood that at its core, the religion of Jesus was not only about the giving and receiving of God's love, but it was also a reconciliatory ethic for repairing broken relationships between God's children and the for the betterment of humanity in the journey towards harmony and wholeness. Even though this reconciliatory ethic is relevant and even urgent in most all areas of society, Thurman understood his calling was primarily to the Church and to all those searching for God. For those claiming to be followers of the religion of Jesus, the trials of love and reconciliation often begin in the Church with the multitudes of divisions and broken relationships whether in regards to race or creed or any other reason for separatism.

After his experience at the Khyber Pass in 1936, Thurman began to implement this reconciliatory ethic in the churches in which he preached and the religious communities of which he was a part, and after 1944 when he helped establish Fellowship Church, Thurman's audiences were often interracial and multi-cultural. Even though Thurman continued to speak at predominately black venues throughout his career, he also consistently preached at racially and ethnically mixed spaces as well, and "probably no black minister of his time was as comfortable

or spoke as extensively and frequently before white audiences, as he crossed and recrossed the racial divide on an almost weekly basis."[373] In spite of Thurman's ability to deftly overcome racial barriers, he avoided speaking about race relations in public forums because he often found it to be a matter of futility, especially amongst white audiences.[374] Yet, Thurman's reluctance to speak publically on race relations was more complicated than mere futility, as he explains, "My training and main interest are in the field of religion. I do not accept invitations to discuss the race question; not because I do not think that the race question needs to be discussed, but I am determined to make my contribution along the lines of my preparation and my chosen field of activity. I cannot do this if I become merely a propagandist or a sociologist."[375] Again, Thurman's primary context was religion and his audience (particularly after leaving Howard University in 1944) most often included persons from various races, ethnicities, nationalities, and even different religions. Consistent with his Khyber Pass vision, he continued to try to find ways to bring people together that were more compelling than those which separated, and for Thurman, the religious experience of God was one of these things, and for those within the Church, the religion of Jesus was another.

Howard Thurman's Love-Ethic

In *Jesus and the Disinherited* (published in 1949 while he was a minister at Fellowship Church) Howard Thurman argues that Jesus Christ, both as a historical figure and as the ideological figure of the religion that bears his name, is relevant to the faith and lives of the

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[373] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 131.
[374] Ibid., 131-133.
[375] Howard Thurman, "To William M. Ashby," (letter, February 7, 1938, Washington, D.C.) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, 121.

disinherited. In spite of the troublesome reality that Christianity has been used by the privileged

and ruling classes to oppress and control the poor and oppressed throughout its history, the

teachings of Jesus are still pertinent to the underprivileged in society for meaning and purpose.

Beyond simply highlighting this often neglected fact, Thurman argues that the religion of Jesus

is particularly relevant to the disinherited for Jesus lived and taught from a position of an

oppressed socio-political class (poor Jew) amongst a powerful ruling class (Romans).[376] As

such, the teachings of Jesus are relevant not only in navigating the difficulties of living in an

oppressed racial and ethnic reality in the United States, but also in living faithfully though these

conditions without being overcome by the evils manifested in the socio-political environment.

In the final chapter of *Jesus and the Disinherited* Thurman explicates his theo-ethical

response to these real-lived realities: The love-ethic of Jesus. Though primarily written for

underprivileged, the moral imperative of this ethic is not exclusive to the disinherited. The

religion of Jesus and the love-ethic of Jesus are relevant not only for the disinherited but also for

the marginalized and for the privileged. As an inclusive ethic, the love-ethic of Jesus presents

principles aimed at the worth, value, and well-being of all persons and groups regardless of racial

and social classification. That said, just because the religion of Jesus and the love-ethic of Jesus

are relevant for all persons regardless of classification, one should not assume relevance implies

sameness. The four aspects of the love-ethic of Jesus – the love of God, love of self, love of

neighbor, and love of enemy – are applicable for all persons, yet these four components will

most likely not be interpreted nor implemented the same way for all persons. In particular, due

to different socio-political and cultural realities, the love of self, love of neighbor, and love of

enemy are probably going to manifest differently for the privileged compared to the

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[376] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 18.

marginalized and the disinherited. Yet, within Thurman's vision, because the privileged and the

disinherited have interconnected and interdependent realities, they also share a *telos*: the

creation of an interdependent environment with mutual sharing of worth and value, or to use

different terminology, the creation of a reconciled and reconciling space.[377]

Before proceeding, it will be helpful to determine what exactly Howard Thurman means

with his use of "love." As a professor of mine once said, "There is something vague about the

word 'love' when you can use it to describe how you feel about your mom and also about pizza."

Unfortunately, Thurman does not provide an explicit definition of love in *Jesus and the*

Disinherited or any of his other writings which engage the topic of love or the love-ethic of

Jesus. Within Christian discourse, traditional concepts of love are often based upon ancient

Greek language and culture which, in turn, influenced the *koine* Greek, the language with which

New Testament was written. In ancient Greece, "love" was often understood in three ways: *eros*

– romantic love, erotic; *filia* – friendship, brotherly, sisterly love; and *agape* – unconditional

love, often associated with divine love.[378] In addition to these three, famous Christian author C.

S. Lewis adds a fourth in his popular book *The Four Loves: storge*, which he translates as

"affection" and represents the mutual "need-give" love between parents and offspring, but

functions beyond these familial spaces to other relationships of fondness.[379] As mentioned

above, Thurman himself does not specifically define his concept of love and he does not

distinguish between these three Greek concepts of love either. Deducing from his other

concepts, ideas, and teachings, Thurman's singular use of "love" is probably best understood as a

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[377] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 98.
[378] Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, "Quilting Relations with Creation: Overcoming, Going Through, and Not Being Stuck," in *Deeper Shades of Purple: Womanism in Religion and Society*, edited by Stacey Floyd-Thomas (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 181.
[379] C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1988), 31-32.

blending between *filia*, *storge*, and *agape*, though with Thurman's holistic thought, *eros* is not necessarily irrelevant either.

It is also important to note that Thurman (unlike other Christian perspectives including C. S. Lewis) does not readily distinguish between a divine form of love (i.e., *agape*) and human forms of love (i.e., *eros*, *storge*, and *filia*); God's love is not something completely different than love between humans. Interestingly, even though he was probably familiar with the term, Thurman essentially never uses the phrase "unconditional love" even when referencing God's love toward humanity. Yet, based upon his understanding of religious experience and religious personalism, Thurman believed love was not necessarily something that was earned. As he shares, "Love has no awareness of merit or demerit; it has no scale by which its portion may be weighed or measured. It does not seek to balance giving and receiving. Love loves; this is its nature."[380] As with other aspects of his system of thought, Thurman's understandings of love do not easily fit traditional classification or labels, but by examining the love-ethic of Jesus, we may gain a more firm grasp of this essential component in his theology and ideology, and by using the love-ethic of Jesus as a lens into the religion of Jesus, we may begin to dismantle the malformations of Christianity which have often been overdetermined by ideologies of supremacy and manifested through deeds of control and power.

Even though Thurman did not specifically define his use of the word "love," it is important to note that he was specific about another element of this essential idea: the **ethical** aspect of love. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Thurman did not necessarily see distinct lines separating thought, emotion, will, experience, and action, but they often blended together. The same applies to love. Love is not simply an emotion, but it is also a thought, a will, an

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[380] Howard Thurman, "The Experience of Love," in *The Inward Journey*, 35-36

experience, and an action.[381] Labeling it a love-ethic helps create the theoretical framework to

incorporate these multiple aspects and prevent it from being misunderstood as a singular concept.

By labeling it an ethic, Thurman also addressed one of the problematic tendencies associated

with the word, primarily the tendency "to let the ethical insight of love remain transcendent in

[one's] relationships but never imminent in them."[382] It is easy to let love become a theoretical

ideal which then frees one from the ethical demand of manifesting it in one's life. Particularly

disturbing to Thurman was the expression of this tendency within the Church (and churches).

From his perspective, "to be a part of the Body of Christ is to share the love of all those who are

a part of the Body of Christ."[383] Unfortunately, this ideal seems distant both during Thurman's

time and our own. Thurman continues,

> The tragedy is that even among those whose profession of faith subscribes completely to
> the above, the total relationship gives evidence of another kind. In fact, it is precisely
> accurate to say that the church, which is the institutional expression of the doctrine, has
> given little indication that being a member of the Body of Christ has any bearing on how
> one member relates to the other members.[384]

This tendency of failing to apply the doctrine or basic idea of love with other Christians has

taken a variety of forms over the centuries. During Thurman's time the most obvious example

was racially segregated churches which were later followed by racially separated churches, but

similar observations can be made regarding the different traditions and denominations within

Christianity. Thurman writes, "The point must be clear that the commitment to love as it stands

at the center of the Christian doctrine of God has not prevented the Christian from excluding

Negroes from his [or her] Christian fellowship, nor has it prevented the Christian who is Negro

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[381] In several of his writings, Thurman specifically used the phrases the "Experience of Love" and "the will
to love." See Howard Thurman, "The Experience of Love," in *The Inward Journey* and Howard Thurman,
"'Relaxation' and Race Conflict," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol. 1*.

[382] Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change," (1939) in *Strange Freedom*, 119.

[383] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 102.

[384] Ibid., 103.

from excluding white people from his [or her] Christian fellowship."[385] As mentioned above,

this exclusion (i.e., failing to apply the ethic of love) has also been manifested along

denominational, theological, economic, and socio-political lines by countless others who have

also claimed a faith regarding the love of God, the love of Jesus, and loving the Church.

For Thurman, these failures to love were not just unfortunate social realities but ethical

tragedies denying God's love to humanity and restricting the actualizing of humanity's potential.

For centuries, the powerful in this country (white people) have enslaved, raped, murdered,

beaten, humiliated, and oppressed women, men, and children of color. Initiated by ideologies of

racial superiority and justified "stand-your-ground culture," whites have initiated multiple forms

of racialized violence against black bodies including slavery, Black Codes, and Jim and Jane

Crow Segregation.[386] The execution of these abhorrent laws and acts led Thurman to view

segregation as "a complete ethical and moral evil."[387] As Thurman reminds us, "segregation is a

sickness and no one who lives in its reach can claim or expect immunity. It makes [persons]

dishonest by forcing them to call an evil thing good; it makes them discourteous and rude when

it is contrary to their temperaments and sense of values to be so."[388] Thurman asks the probing

question regarding love and separatism, "Can we teach trust when we are bound by a vast

network of impersonal social relations which create the kind of climate in which trust cannot

possible thrive? . . . How can we teach love from behind the great high walls of separateness?"[389]

In many ways, Thurman's decision to leave Howard University to co-pastor The Church

for the Fellowship of All Peoples was a response to this tendency within Christianity in the

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[385] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 104.
[386] Douglas, *Stand Your Ground*, xiii.
[387] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 98.
[388] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 65.
[389] Howard Thurman, "Will to Segregate," in *Strange Freedom*, 217.

United States. Due to the proliferation of segregation in society and the Church as well as the

abuse and exploitation of people of color by privileged whites, many Christians not only

practiced separation, but they preferred it. The majority of whites preferred separation due to

pathologies of superiority and preferences of comfort, and blacks and other persons of colors

were forced into segregated churches and often preferred this arrangement due to the abuses

suffered at the hands of whites. As such, segregated and separated churches became the

normative model for Christianity in the United States.

Even though he was sympathetic towards the reasoning behind the formation of racial

and ethnic churches (both white and non-white), Thurman viewed racially monolithic churches

as also contributing to the problem of separatism. Instead of leading the way in the dismantling

of racial segregation, churches and other religious institutions most often just reified the power

of separatism, and even when Fellowship Church struggled to maintain its multicultural

character, Thurman held firm to his conviction that the church must intentionally remain

interracial. Even though there were justifiable reasons for the church to be monoracial including

being dedicated to the neighborhood of which it was a part, Thurman also knew "that religious

institutions all over America had been made agents of segregation."[390] Most often, churches

would bend to the cultural norms of the segregated neighborhoods instead of the other way

around in which interracial churches would lead the neighborhoods into being more racially and

ethnically diverse. In this, Thurman believed the Church should be a beacon of reconciliation,

integration, and cooperation in a world of largely determined by separatism.

From Thurman's perspective, if walls of separatism prevent one from loving another, the

ethical response is not to simply accept a transcendent understanding of love which maintains the

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[390] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 44.

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status quo behind walls of separation. Instead, the love-ethic of Jesus teaches that we should

figure out a way to love others in spite of the walls by either tearing them down, going around

them, building a bridge over them, or creating a new space without the walls (metaphorically

speaking). What makes Thurman not only extraordinary but radical and revolutionary is that he

actually did this! He believed with deep conviction that the world needs more love and less hate,

and the ethical response of love is to remove the barriers that promote hate and create spaces of

fellowship of mutual love and respect. To this end, Thurman was trying to live the love-ethic of

Jesus. From the teachings of Jesus found in the Gospels of the New Testament, Howard

Thurman used four different points of reference with which he developed the love-ethic of Jesus:

God, self, neighbor, and enemy. In examining these various aspects of the love-ethic of Jesus,

we will gain depth in our understanding of his theo-ethic of reconciliation.

Love of God

During a lecture titled "Good News for the Underprivileged" at Boston University in

1935, Howard Thurman shared one of his favorite quotes regarding the potential of love:

> [Love] means the exercise of a discriminatory understanding which is based upon the
> inherent worth of the other, unpredictable in terms of external achievement. It says, meet
> people where they are and treat them as if they were where they ought to be. . . . Love of
> this sort places a crown over the head of another who is always trying to grow tall enough
> to wear it. In religion's profoundest moments it ascribes to God this complete
> prerogative.[391]

As a professor at Morehouse and Spelman Colleges and at Howard University, Howard Thurman

frequently told his students this pithy saying to help instill in them a sense of worthfulness in a

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[391] Howard Thurman, "Good News for the Underprivileged," (Summer 1935, Boston University) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 269.

racialized world that did not always value them. One important lesson conveyed in this phrase is the verity that receiving this crown – a marker of identity and worth – is an unmerited act of love. A second valuable lesson accompanied it: Perpetual personal growth carries a sense of responsibility. Thurman believed that every person has a sense of worth regardless of social classification, but he also knew that for his students there was something empowering about "the fulfillment of their possibilities."[392] For Thurman as a professor, mentor, and pastor, to participate in this process was truly an act of love – both giving and receiving.

Thurman used this phrase about the "crown" not only in his classrooms but he also shared it numerous times in his various writings, sermons, and speeches, and even though he used different words in the phrase from time to time, the main point remained the same: To love someone is to meet them where they are simply because they are of worth, and then to believe that they are not stuck in the current state of being but that they are capable of maturing and fulfilling their potential. In this particular version of the quote, the initiator of the placing of the crown is God, and it is also worth noting that this act of God is not always universally understood, but only acknowledged in "religion's profoundest moments." This inspirational message is meant to instill self-worth and share the empowering imperative of love, but Thurman also makes a theological claim referencing God as the source of this action – even if religion does not always acknowledge it.

In Thurman's understanding of the religion of Jesus, no one is beyond the reach of God's love. "This love has a universal quality, not just because of the value of universalism but also because Christian love can only be what it is supposed to be if it is unconditional: it has to reach

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[392] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 146.

across boundaries of family, race, nation, and differences of education, interests, and income."[393] Unfortunately, history has demonstrated that this inclusive aspect of love has not always been embodied in the Church. In spite of theological claims which confirm this open availability to God's love (i.e., justification, reconciliation, salvation, etc.), Christianity has often abandoned these inclusive elements for a system of exclusion and division. These border lines have often become formidable barriers – walls of separation based on race, theology, language, class, and ecclesial structures that have been used to decide who gets to wear the crown and who does not, or to use the language of love, who is worthy to receive love (both God's and our own) and who is not. As the dualistic logic goes, only God's people are worthy to receive God's love, and thus, those who are not God's people "are God's enemies, and ours as well."[394] This tendency by Christians and Christian institutions could have been the reason why Thurman remarked that only in its profoundest moments does religion attribute the placing of the crown to God – and not the Church. Systems of separatism (both racial and denominational) often create the illusion that humanity gets to determine who gets to wear the crown and who does not, and many traditions within Christianity act as if they have the power and privilege to do just this.

Even though the language of "enemy" may seem hyperbolic in this context, the concept is not foreign to Christianity or to U.S. society. Both in our history and our modern time, the label of enemy has been utilized by Christians, the Church, the U.S. government, and its citizens to justify a wide variety of actions that probably would not be considered "loving" and may or may not be considered moral, ethical, or even legal without the enemy label. We will examine

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[393] Stephen Hart, *What Does the Lord Require?: How American Christians Think About Economic Justice.* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 52.

[394] Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), xix.

the relationship between love and enemies shortly, but for now, it is simply important to note that within Thurman's love-ethic of Jesus, no one is beyond the reach of the love of God.

Thurman did not believe God's love was singular in purpose (i.e., salvation), but his mysticism guided him into an understanding of love that was more relevant to the lives of people living here on earth than some eschatological interpretation of the word. In an essay titled "Love of God," he was so bold as to say, "I have only one basic statement to make about the love of God and that is that it is always concerned with breaking the sense of isolation that the individual human spirit feels as it lives its way into life."[395] For Thurman, his understanding of God's love was not strictly theological but also came out of his own religious experience informed by mysticism. Thurman's religious experiences of God were diverse in context and practice, but they did not always align with typical Sunday morning church services. Like many of Thurman's ideas and practices, the religious services he led often incorporated a "both—and" approach in which he included both traditional forms of Christian worship and non-traditional aspects as well. He understood that religious experience would often be grounded in common Christian practices familiar within churches but also that religious experience must not be limited or restricted by these traditions either. Religious experience was both personal and communal, both existential and couched within traditions, and God's love was available in a variety of religious experiences.

As mentioned before, Thurman was drawn towards silence, meditation, and prayer and believed these were essential aspects in experiencing God and the love of God. Like many traditional understandings of the word, Thurman believed that "prayer" was an act of communicating with God, and as such, an important aspect of the religious experience. Yet,

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[395] Howard Thurman, "The Love of God," in *Growing Edge*, 65.

what Thurman meant by prayer is probably different compared to many modern understandings. Thurman explains, ". . . prayer, in the sense in which I am using it, means the **method** by which the individual makes his way to the temple of quiet within his own spirit and the **activity** of his spirit within its walls. Prayer is not only the participation in communication with God in the encounter of religious experience, but it is also the 'readying' of the spirit for such communication." [396] In a world of busyness where the outer noise is just as loud as one's inner noise, Thurman found quiet to be a helpful, if not necessary, aspect of experiencing God.

In addition to these silent aspects and other traditional forms of worship, Thurman incorporated other elements in worship services to help guide religious experiences with God. Poetry and music (including choirs) were common in Thurman's services and he occasionally incorporated more daring aspects including dance and art.[397] Even though he understood religious experience to often be a private endeavor, Thurman did not believe it is necessarily solitary. As he shared during one of his meditations, "It is a wonderfully blessed thing to be privileged to share together the common mood of worship. Miraculous indeed is it to mingle the individual life with its intensely private quality in a transcendent moment of synthesis and fusion – here it is that the uniquely personal is lifted up and seen in a perspective as broad as life, and as profound!"[398] Thurman understood that religious experience was not simply about worship expressionism or preaching but also introspection and for this he saw "the necessary alliance between religious speech and religious silence."[399] For Thurman, the ultimate purpose of religious experience was not simply to experience the divine per se, but the purpose for

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[396] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 34.
[397] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 25.
[398] Howard Thurman, "The Littleness of Our Lives," in *Inward Journey*, 127.
[399] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 53.

experiencing the divine was to help change ourselves and our hearts which is not an easy or quick endeavor. As Thurman shares,

> We cannot be in a hurry in matters of the heart. The human spirit has to be explored gently and with unhurried tenderness. Very often this demands a reconditioning of our nervous responses to life, a profound alteration in the tempo of our behavior pattern. Whatever we learn of leisure in the discipline of silence, in meditation and prayer, bear rich, ripe fruit in preparing the way for love.[400]

As this quote highlights, within Thurman's theo-ethic, religious experience was not primarily about some euphoric encounter with the divine but an activity aimed at transformation of oneself. Even though there were undoubtedly rewarding aspects of these encounters including feelings of peace and tranquility, the meaning and purpose of them was directed toward the betterment of the person and her or his relationships, and Thurman understood these as not only related but interconnected. As guided by the teachings and love-ethic of Jesus (Matthew 22:39 and Mark 12:31), Thurman believed that before someone can love another, one must also love oneself, and this has a direct correlation to being loved by God.

Love Self

In *The Creative Encounter*, Howard Thurman examines what he believes to be the core aspects of religious experience, primarily the inward and outward natures of religion and love. He writes, "There is a direct continuity between the need to be loved, to be deeply cared for, and the heart, the very pulse beat of the individual's experience of God in the religious encounter. Here the individual is laid bare, stripped of all façade – what I am in and of myself is finally

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[400] Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, 126-127.

dealt with."[401] For many, this is often the most difficult aspect of religious experiences with the

divine – by exposing our true nature to the divine, we are also admitting our true nature to

ourselves; by admitting our true nature to ourselves, we are often exposed to the reality that in

many of our troubled relationships our true nature is just as culpable as the other in the formation

and maintenance of those relationships. For Thurman, the religious experience of the divine is

part of the corrective process – that in experiencing the love of God we will also learn to love

ourselves.

Thurman believes that in "order to have the deep need for love met in the religious

experience, the individual has to give up something. What? [One] must give up those things

which put him or her out of communication with God – those things which make it impossible

for [one] to meet God in the trysting place."[402] For Thurman, these "things" which made

communication with God difficult were primarily related to the internal aspects of a person

which deny the value of life and love of God, self, or others, and some of these things include

fear, deception, and hatred (hence, the "three hounds of hell"). Responding to the social

struggles of the Civil Rights Movement and the challenge of desegregation, Thurman ponders

the ramifications of not only considering racial prejudice a sin, but also as something that puts

one out of communication with God:

> The implications of such a position are far-reaching. The most searching one is that racial prejudice, and all that flows responsively from it, would come between a [person] and God. The prejudice would blur the holy vision, and give to the individual a sense of profound isolation from the living spirit of the living God. The harboring of such attitudes would jeopardize [one's] eternal salvation. The racial prejudice would be defined as a mortal sin.[403]

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[401] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 114-115.
[402] Ibid., 118.
[403] Howard Thurman, "The Christian Minister and the Desegregation Decision," (May 1957) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 172.

Indeed, the implications of considering racial prejudice a mortal sin are far-reaching in a country that not only has a high percentage of persons claiming to be Christian but also one where racial and ethnic prejudice is evident in cities and towns all across the country. If racism is America's original sin, it may not be too much of a stretch to also claim that racial prejudice is the American's sin.

Consistent with Thurman's attention to internal aspects prior to the socio-political, it may be worth considering attending to the various aspects of racial prejudice within the Church (individual, collective, and institutional) prior to or concurrently with addressing racism in society. As Thurman reminds us, "As a Christian I must see to it that what I condemn in society, I do not permit to grow and flower in me."[404] Healing and transformation – both individual and communal – often require significant discomfort along the road to recovery. Reconciling one's relationship with God includes the removal of those barriers that hinder one from God and many of these things are grounded in the depths of our human psyche with various forms of justifications protecting them. For Thurman, one of the most significant hindrances to communion with God was prejudice – the denial of the full humanity of another child of God.

For the privileged, many of these justifications are undergirded by ideologies and traditions supporting the supremacy, normativity, and unquestioned inevitability of whiteness. In order for the relationships between the privileged and God to be reconciled, the privileged will have to give up something, and in many cases these "somethings" will be directly related to – and most likely an outgrowth of – the socio-political realities of white privilege, white supremacy, and white normativity. In her book, *White Fragility*, DiAngelo examines many of

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[404] Howard Thurman, "The Sources of Power for Christian Action," (lecture, December 29, 1937, St. Louis) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol* 2, 95.

the issues and emotions privileged white people in the United States express regarding race

relations and racial dialogue including anger, fear, guilt, entitlement, and resentment. She also

addresses more comprehensive ideologies including white supremacy and white fragility which

not only affect one's thoughts and emotions but also one's relationships.[405] In particular, she

notes that in spite of the denial of "being racist" amongst the white persons she interviewed, their

"responses illustrate white fragility and how it holds racism in place."[406] As they relate to

Howard Thurman's understanding of religious experience, these internal issues of anger, fear,

guilt, superiority, and entitlement are precisely the type of things that put one out of

communication with God. In order to reconcile one's relationship with God – and with all of

God's children which are affected by such attitudes – the privileged will have to let go of these

debilitating ideologies and emotions related to malformed white racial identity with the hopes of

healing and growth towards more healthy forms of being. Loving one's self is not just an

acceptance of yourself as is, but also the difficult journey of well-being and betterment – both

with self and with others.

In a similar vein as DiAngelo, scholar of race, religion, and culture, Christopher Driscoll,

also examines various racial ideologies governing whiteness and their manifestation in "white

religion." In particular, he notes one of primary dysfunctions regarding whiteness is the refusal

to see and accept the lived-realities of marginalized and oppressed peoples. He labels these

denials "white lies" which "operate through and function as inevitable denials of reality."[407]

These denials include the real-lived physical, psychological, socio-political, cultural, educational,

and economic conditions of people of color and other underprivileged persons including both

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[405] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 2.
[406] Ibid., 4.
[407] Driscoll, *White Lies*, 10.

past and present realities. In addition to refusing to see and admit the difficult lived realities of

others, "white lies" also deny the privilege from which whites themselves benefit. These white

lies – as both denials and exaggerations of reality – are not simply cultural productions but are

intimately linked to religion and white religion in particular. According to Driscoll, this denial

system is so invasive that it elevates the status of whiteness beyond mere descriptive ontological

forms in that "something like 'whiteness'" functions as a central figure of white religion, takes

on the quality of a god, equal in social weight to more traditional expressions of god."[408] In

some ways, this malformation of white religion justified racially segregated churches in that

white churches guided by ideologies of white supremacy and white lies promoted the purity of

"whiteness" above and beyond that of belief that all persons are equally children of God and

every person is made in the image of God. Atypical for his time, Thurman believed religious

experience could and should be an opportunity to correct these types of racist ideologies and heal

these diseased racial pathologies.

The internalization of white fragility, white lies, and white privilege often creates

negative reactions to racial tension and conflict including "anger, withdrawal, emotional

incapacitation, guilt, argumentation, and cognitive dissonance," and, in some circumstances,

aggression, all of which put a strain on interpersonal relationships yet fail to address systemic

issues such as racism.[409] In other words, more than fifty years after the de-legislation of Jim and

Jane Crow Segregation, the emotions, attitudes, and ideological beliefs of many whites **still**

contribute to the upholding of the barriers that separate white persons from people of color, and

to use Thurman's language of religious experience, "those things which make it impossible for

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[408] Driscoll, *White Lies*, 12.
[409] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, 101.

[one] to meet God in the trysting place."[410] As a moral imperative aimed at the well-being and betterment of humanity, the love-ethic of Jesus becomes an essential component in the journey towards reconciliation for as long as the privileged continue to promote and secure ideologies of whiteness, the teleological visions of harmony and wholeness will forever remain unattainable. The love-ethic of Jesus remains an invaluable guide for the privileged because we have particular internal struggles and malformations which need to be addressed before the bonds of love can be both repaired and shared with God and with others.

As mentioned above, religious experience is an exercise in well-being and betterment, an activity of healing the wounds of the heart and the spirit in order that one may better engage the world of which one is a part. In this, the love-ethic of Jesus is relevant to the privileged and disinherited alike. Whereas the privileged have particular issues related to malformations associated with whiteness, the marginalized and the underprivileged often have different internal challenges due to the constant struggle of living in a culture and society governed by ideologies of white supremacy, white privilege, and white normativity. In the previous chapter, Howard Thurman argued in *Jesus and Disinherited* that the "three hounds of hell" – fear, deception/hypocrisy, and hatred – tracked the trail of the underprivileged and oppressed in society, but the good news of Jesus was that they had "no dominion over them."[411] According to Thurman, part of the difficult work for the disinherited is to release their fear, deception, and hatred, those things preventing them from fully experiencing the love of God, and religious experience is an integral part of this process.

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[410] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 118.
[411] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 29.

For Thurman, the significance of religious experience includes meeting the divine with all of our insecurities, denials, and faults; not that we may remain the same, but in order that we may be changed – that in the experience of God's love we will gradually lose those things that not only impede our relationship with God but also with ourselves and with others. This holds true for both the disinherited and the privileged because our lived realities are intertwined and interdependent. As Thurman shares, "It is that the experience of God in religious experience that creates in me the desire **to** desire to give up more and more that which impedes my growth and my development in the knowledge and the love of God."[412] This "more and more" hints to the developmental aspect of reconciliation. Reconciliation between a person and God or between a person and others is not a one-time event, but a process aimed at the betterment of the person and the repair of his or her relationships.

In the love-ethic of Jesus, religious experience is an encounter with the divine which has the capacity to change us into something better, something whole. In response to these changes, we "must give love to one another as a part of the giving of love to God."[413] As part of a theo-ethic, this process is manifested in thought and action, or as Thurman eloquently explains:

> We long for relationships in which it is no longer needful for us to pretend anything. The clue to the answer is in the awakening within us of the sense of living our lives consciously in God's presence. The habit of exposing the life, the motives, the dreams, the desires, the sins, all to God makes for **the integrity of the person**. Out of this flows **the integrity of the act**.[414]

This authenticity in relationship, similar to some of Thurman's other ideas and concepts, may seem a bit optimistic if not idealistic. Yet, his teleological vision helped him frame authenticity and integrity as part of the maturation process for those claiming to be part of the religion of

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[412] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 122.
[413] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 103.
[414] Thurman, "The Integrity of the Person," in *The Inward Journey*, 120.

Jesus, something that we are continually striving for, a crown we are trying to grow into. In this,

religious experience is more of a discipline to be mastered including all of the failures,

stagnations, and successes along the way.

Understood in this manner, religious experience is an exercise of love – experiencing the

love of the divine and also an experience of loving oneself, experiencing love regardless but also

experiencing love by actualizing our potentials. Religious experience is also about reconciling

relationships: one's relationship with God, with oneself, and with others. Thurman did not

believe the purpose of religious experience was only in the "vertical" aspect with God, but that

religious experience, correctly understood also moved along a "horizontal" trajectory to impact

the relationships with others – all others. By changing our hearts, religious experience creates

new possibilities in how we choose to interact with and react to others which is an exercise of

freedom, will, and hopefully reconciliation. The application of religious experience to the

overlapping nature of the individual and the communal implies, as Thurman shares, "the will to

share joyfully the common life and the will to love all – healingly and creatively. It springs out

of a sense of the unity, the basic interrelation and the vast sacredness of all life. It has its roots in

the primary **self-estimate**, a self-awareness from which it gets its key to the life around it."[415]

When reading and studying Thurman, his optimism and idealistic views can often seem

not only difficult but unattainable. For many whom struggle with quiet and silence, Thurman's

method of religious experience may feel overwhelming. For myself, the invitation to self-

introspection is something I fear and avoid because self-awareness is not just acknowledging the

good and admirable in myself but also admitting and exposing the dark sides of my person and

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[415] Howard Thurman, "'Relaxation' and Race Conflict," (1929) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol. 1*, 147.

personality not only to God but to myself. Yet, I know this is what is required in order for change to occur. I know that growth not only includes learning something new, healthy, and better, but it also includes **un**learning the unhelpful and sloughing off the unhealthy. In many ways, this process is likely to be more difficult for the privileged like myself because we not only have to overcome our own internal struggles but we will also have to challenge the systems which are designed for our benefit because until we change the socio-political, cultural, and religious systems of which we are apart, they will continue to reinforce the internal malformations which prevent our growth. As such, this maturation process implies that as I acknowledge the difficulty and slowness with my own growth, I also extend the same courtesy to others who are also struggling. Engaging this process responsibility is to participate in the love-ethic of Jesus.

Self-examination and unlearning those aspects of ourselves which impede encounters with the divine is a difficult process for any person, but Howard Thurman knew this would be an especially challenging and ongoing endeavor for the disinherited. One of the challenges Thurman addressed in *Jesus and the Disinherited* was the reality that the "three hounds of hell" were natural and often justified responses to the environment the disinherited were stuck in with very little option for retreat. Thurman empathized with their struggle because he knew many of those who suffered under the oppressive social climate had very few options available beyond the psychological internalization of their anger, fear, and hatred.[416] Yet, in the love-ethic of Jesus, Thurman found a response that did not feed into the vicious cycle of fear, anger, and hatred which rarely left any unscathed or unharmed. Though difficult, the acceptance of the love

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[416] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 34.

of God and self through religious experience promoted health and growth, which then prepared

one to extend that love to others. Thurman shares his own experience in this journey:

> I am confident that my own call to the religious vocation cannot be separated from the
> slowly emerging disclosure that my religious experience makes it possible for me to
> experience myself as a human being and thus keep a very real psychological distance
> between myself and the hostilities of my environment. Through the years it has driven
> me more and more to seek to make as a normal part of my relations with [others] the
> experiencing of them as human beings. When this happens love has essential materials
> with which to work. . . . a [person] comes into possession of him [or herself] more
> completely when he [or she] is **free** to love another.[417]

In addition to loving God and loving oneself, the love-ethic of Jesus also includes this extension

of loving "another."   As black theologian J. Deotis Roberts notes, "The love-ethic must have a

human dimension as well as a divine dimension. In its application, we as human beings must be

laborers together with God for a just social order."[418] Utilizing the teachings of Jesus from the

Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Thurman examines two forms of "loving another" – loving one's

neighbor and loving one's enemy.

Love Neighbor

Growing up in the Segregated South, Thurman was astutely aware of how Jesus'

instruction to love one another was not readily practiced and that it was not even expected within

some churches. Thurman explains,

> [N]o one expected the white Christian to love the black Christian or the black Christian to
> love the white Christian. Historically in this country, the church has given the sweep of
> its moral force to the practice of segregation within its own community of believers. To
> the extent to which this has been done, the church has violated one of the central

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[417] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 111.
[418] J. Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 69.

elements of its own commitment. It has dared to demonstrate that the commitment is not central, that it does not believe that Christians are bound to love one another.[419]

From Thurman's understanding of the religion of Jesus, loving one another was not optional, but an essential aspect of the faith and that Christians should commit to this practice. In order to better determine why many Christians were not "loving their neighbors as themselves" (specifically across racial lines), the initial task was determining what exactly Jesus meant by "neighbor" because once "the neighbor is defined, then one's moral obligation is clear."[420] Due to the laws of Segregation which inherently controlled where people of color could and could not live, how a person defined their "neighbor" often influenced his or her own social and moral obligation to them.

In studying Jesus' instruction in the Gospels, Howard Thurman came to the conclusion that Jesus' understanding of neighbor was not simply a person who lives in one's neighborhood or was a member of his or her community, but that, correctly interpreted, "Every [person] is potentially every other [person's] neighbor. Neighborliness is nonspatial; it is qualitative."[421] In other words, everyone is a potential neighbor and no one can be excluded from the possibility of neighborliness, or to use Thurman's previously mentioned phrase, no one is "outside the magnetic field of ethical concern."[422] More explicitly, white Christians and black Christians were not beyond the ethical concern of each other. This insight goes beyond setting the physical parameters of neighbor status, but in typical Thurman fashion, he also nuances the understanding by stating that neighbor is **qualitative** in nature which meant that just because every person is

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[419] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 103-104.
[420] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 89.
[421] Ibid., 89.
[422] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 6.

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potentially one's neighbor does not mean that every person **is** one's neighbor but that neighbor status is determined by the "quality" of the relationship.

Neighborliness as a qualitative claim hints that one should not necessarily assume that neighbor relationships are actually neighborly. From Thurman's observation, if people talked about loving their neighbor across interracial lines, it was more "on the glittering generalities of loving all [people]" but this rarely included any form of social relationship or moral obligation.[423] To be someone's neighbor assumes the relationship demonstrates neighborliness, and if it does not, then this person is not your neighbor – he or she is something else. This person may be an acquaintance, a stranger, or possibly an enemy, but a neighbor they are not. This qualitative understanding of neighbor projects some social and ethical responsibility beyond simple labels and social location, and Jesus' command to love our neighbors thus implies that we interact with our neighbors in a particular manner – with neighborliness.

In 1940, Howard Thurman made an interesting observation and critique of that time period when he claimed, "Our knowledge has made a neighborhood out of the earth, but it has not taught us how to create neighborliness on the earth."[424] A fascinating observation at the time, but it is probably exponentially more true in our current time with the technological advances of the internet, smart phones, social media, digital databases, and expansive international travel where a significant percentage of the earth's population has access (either physically or digitally) to persons and cultures all across the globe. One could reasonably argue that his critique remains true still today: In spite of our knowledge and access of information, we

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[423] Howard Thurman, "Let Ministers Be Christians," (January 1925) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 147.

[424] Howard Thurman, "The Light That Is Darkness," (June 1940) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, 254.

still have not learned how to create neighborliness in any significant manner.[425] Unfortunately,

Thurman provides very little specificity about the nature and characteristics of neighborliness,

but he does provide some insight into what is necessary to be able to love one's neighbor.

In 1941 at a conference in Chicago with mostly white attendees, Thurman made a similar

statement as mentioned above, "We have reduced the world to a neighborhood without being

able to achieve neighborliness. And yet, we continue to hope for a better world. **I think this**

fact continues to be true because of the nature of the spirit of [humanity] rather than

because of the ethical quality of the life of [humanity]."(emphasis his) [426] Consistent with his

understanding of religious experience, Thurman sees the core struggle of neighborliness (loving

one's neighbor) as a manifestation of an internal and spiritual problem (loving oneself). As the

biblical passages teach, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, and Thurman recognized that

the connectedness between these two aspects is often complex because our desires for a better

world are in often in conflict with the actual state of the world we live in, the state of our internal

well-being, and the state of our relationships with others. As Thurman reflects on this tension,

"Perhaps this is in the mind of the spiritual geniuses of the race who have felt that a [person]

ought to love [one's] neighbor as [one] **ought** to love [oneself]." [427]

In spite of this tenuous relationship between the love of self and the love of others

(particularly neighbors without neighborliness), Thurman nevertheless believed the insights of

religious experience were relevant and helpful to the issue at hand. The lessons available in

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[425] For further examination of the challenge of neighborliness in current contexts, see Rebecca Todd Peters, *Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), and Michael Ignatieff, *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in a Divided World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

[426] Thurman, "Our Underlying Spiritual Unities," (May 1941, Chicago) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, 287.

[427] Thurman, "'Relaxation' and Race Conflict," (1929) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 1*, 147.

religious experience are not solutions, per se, due to the limitations within the socio-political climate, but at least within the context of the Church and with Christians, Thurman believed religious experience – and shared religious experience, in particular – was a vital aspect of this corrective process.

As mentioned above, within the love-ethic of Jesus, the love of God and love of self are not strictly vertical in nature, but they are meant to be shared with others. Thus, as Thurman explains, "I do not love until I succeed in extending myself so as to include the object of my devotion, so that the same things that work in me on behalf of my own preservation become operative now in me with regard to the other-than-myself that has been included in this extension of myself."[428] Of course, we cannot apply this "other-than-myself" directive to every person we encounter, but for those who have a claim of neighbor or friend or Christian sister or brother, the love-ethic of Jesus is not just relevant, but needed, and needed more now than ever. Thurman shares his own observation about the urgency of neighborliness:

> And there ought to be people scattered all over the world who will have had some exposure to developing the fine art of neighborliness under great pressure and difficulty, and if they learn this fine art, if they are able to commit it to memory through their social processes and their collective behavior patterns and their private wills, then when [humanity] suddenly realizes that the world is a neighborhood, as [one] looks around on the horizon to see if there is anybody in the world anywhere who knows anything about how to be a neighbor, please come to the rescue because time is running out.[429]

Both in Thurman's time and our own, neighborliness appears to be a lost art. As a friend once shared with me about how his own neighborhood had changed over the years, "We used to be a front porch neighborhood but now we are a back patio neighborhood with tall privacy

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[428] Thurman, "The Significance of Jesus III: Love," (lecture, September 14, 1937) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, 63.

[429] Thurman, "The American Dream," (lecture, July 6, 1958, Boston) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 217-218.

fences and nobody talks to each other anymore." As U.S. cities have suburbanized, the Church

seems to have lost its "theology of neighbor" as "part of the Christian dialogue." According to

Christian community developer Robert Lupton, "Neighbor became a word so broadly used to

describe any and every human relationship that it lost its meaning. And when neighbor was

neutralized, it no longer specifically included the people who lived next door. Thus, loving one's

neighbor lost its practical impact in everyday living."[430]

Beyond the fragmentation of our actual neighborhoods, our society and our churches

continue to remain separated by both visible and invisible barriers which make extending this

love and devotion beyond the walls determined by segregation and separatism more difficult yet

urgent. Again, it appears that an ideology of racial and ethnic separatism continues to be more

influential than theologies of religious kinship and neighborliness. Lupton argues this is due in

part because the Church has also lost "a theology of place" which raises "the issue of deployment

of God's people. Without such a theology, the people of faith begin to drift toward places of

personal convenience and comfort with little reflection on the strategic kingdom importance of

where godly neighbors are located."[431] Thus, loving one's neighbor of different racial and ethnic

backgrounds becomes nigh impossible when there are no places of sympathetic interaction with

which the expression of love can occur. Separatism in neighborhoods and churches makes the

moral imperative of loving one's neighbor a generalized and transcendent concept instead of the

praxis of religious life. Finding or creating spaces where one can love one's neighbor becomes

an opportunity for transformation and new understanding of self and others. Willie James

Jennings writes, "If Jesus constitutes a new space for Jew and Gentile existence, then in that new

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[430] Robert Lupton, "Relocation – A Growing Trend," in *Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing It Together & Doing it Right*, edited by John M. Perkins (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 77.
    [431] Ibid., 77.

space a common life must ensue that allows the formation of a new identity."[432] Thus, as

Thurman shares, "We must declare that the truth that God requires of men [and women] that they

make again and again an act of faith toward their fellowmen, toward all their fellowmen – black,

white, brown, yellow – **all** their fellowmen. If this is not done, any discussion even of love is an

empty echo among the barren hills of a desolate experience."[433]

Love Enemy

In the previous section we briefly addressed the issue of loving one's neighbor as seen

within the context of Howard Thurman's love-ethic. In spite of the challenges in defining,

interpreting, and applying such an ethic (particularly when the relationship with another does not

demonstrate neighborliness), the challenges of loving one's neighbor serve as stepping stones

into Jesus' arguably most difficult commandment: To love one's enemy. In *Jesus and the*

Disinherited, Thurman engages this aspect of loving one's enemy more thoroughly and with

more examination due to the difficulties and frequency of encounters with "enemies" in the lives

of the disinherited.

According to Thurman, "'The enemy' can very easily be divided into three groups.

There is first the personal enemy, one who is in some sense a part of one's primary-group life.

The relationship with such a person is grounded in more or less intimate, personal associations

into which have entered conflict. . . . To love such an enemy requires reconciliation, the will to

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[432] Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, 272.
[433] Thurman, "Mysticism and Social Change," in *Strange Freedom*, 128. I decided not to change the gender exclusive language in this quote due to the awkwardness and frequency of trying to modify "fellowmen."

re-establish a relationship."[434] This type of enemy usually occurs within one's primary social context and the relationship is typically interpersonal and personal in nature. According to Thurman, another group of enemies are "persons who, by their activities, make it difficult for the group to live without shame and humiliation."[435] Thurman identified the tax collectors in Jesus' time as this second kind of enemy: Even though tax collectors were Israelites, they were often understood to have betrayed their own people in order to benefit from the authority, security, and wealth of Rome. Both in biblical times and our own, these persons are often considered "traitors" and are usually greatly despised amongst their own group because they "are given position, often prominence, and above all a guarantee of economic security and status."[436] According to Thurman, the only way to love these types of enemies is to have "deep respect and reverence for their persons," while concurrently not condoning their actions or their way of life.[437] Reconciliation with this type of enemy is more difficult, and according to Thurman, can probably only happen after an internal challenge to their identity and actions after which he or she has become re-aware of their identity as a child of God.[438]

The third type of enemy was most the most relevant for Thurman and for the underprivileged of his time, and arguably is still the most relevant in our current socio-political situation. Using an analogy from Jesus' historical context, this "third type of enemy was exemplified by Rome. The elements at work here were both personal and impersonal; they were religious and political."[439] Rome was the systemic imperial power which exercised its authority over the people of Israel with dominance and brutality, and for the underprivileged in the United

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[434] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 91-92.
[435] Ibid., 93.
[436] Ibid., 94.
[437] Ibid., 94-95.
[438] Ibid., 95.
[439] Ibid.

States, the analogy aligns reasonably well with the authority and power with the dominant group: "Whiteness" in the forms of white supremacy, white normativity, white privilege, and typically embodied in white persons.[440] Even though the United States' demographic diversity has changed since Thurman's time, the demographic group of dominance has not. As DiAngelo notes, "The identities of those sitting at the tables of power in this country have remained remarkably similar: white, male, middle- and upper-class, able-bodied."[441] "Whiteness" remains the dominant social, political, cultural, and economic force, continuing to provide "concrete material rewards through a system of affirmative action for whites in the economic, political, cultural, and ecological spheres."[442] For the underprivileged in the United States, whiteness is still "Rome" and often considered the most socio-politically relevant antagonist.

For the Israelites during Jesus' time, for the disinherited of Thurman's time, and for the marginalized minorities of today, one of the challenges facing this third type of enemy is that it is often difficult pinpoint exactly who that enemy is. Is the enemy the entire socio-political, cultural, and economic system (The Roman Empire or the U.S. Government)? Is the enemy the culture itself (of which one is a part even if on the periphery)? Is the enemy all Romans or white persons? Are only particular groups of white persons (government leaders, racist groups, etc.) considered one's enemy? Is the individual Roman or individual white person the enemy, even if one has never had a negative encounter with him or her? Can someone be one's socio-political enemy but not necessarily be her or his personal enemy? As a white person living in the United States, am I the enemy simply because of the color of my skin? The scope and complexity of these questions makes discourse about "loving one's enemy" not only challenging but

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[440] Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 73-96. Chapter 5 in Wallis book, "Dying to Whiteness" addresses how the ideology of whiteness functions in the U.S.

[441] DiAngelo, *White Fragility*, xiii.

[442] Mary Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 42.

convoluted. For these reasons as well as his own theo-ethical grounding in religious experience,

Howard Thurman addressed the "love of enemy" primarily from an interpersonal and individual

perspective but applying it to all three "groups" of enemies.

As mentioned above, some have faulted Thurman for his spiritual personalism approach,

but Thurman did not ignore the group or socio-political levels of engagement, he just believed

addressing interpersonal relationships was the necessary initial step in implementing the love-

ethic of Jesus. The interpersonal level is arguably the most attainable because every person,

every follower of the religion of Jesus, has the capacity to engage the love-ethic of Jesus to some

capacity on this level. In Jesus' time, the command to love the Roman represents this aspect of

loving one's enemy on an interpersonal level. As Thurman interprets the love-ethic of Jesus, to

"love the Roman meant first to lift him out of the general classification of enemy. The Roman

had to emerge as a person," and not simply as an extension of his or her group.[443] If the enemy

could emerge as a person, as a personality, as a child of God, then it would be possible to begin

to meet her or him in that space, but as long as the individual remains a representation of the

larger group or system, loving him or her would be nigh impossible. Determining what it would

mean to "love one's enemy" on group or systemic levels is much more difficult because the

definition of "enemy" and application of the ethic becomes almost theoretical or even

hypothetical, which in turn, justifies bypassing the essential aspect of self-introspection through

the religious experience of loving God and loving oneself.

For Thurman, the primary goal of loving one's enemy is removing the enemy status of

the individual for as long as the status of "enemy" remain, so too will the justification of immoral

actions and attitudes. Having lived through both World Wars and the Cold War (with the

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[443] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 95.

possibilities of a nuclear world war), Thurman was fully aware of the multitude of actions that are tolerated, justified, and even celebrated when another is deemed an "enemy." While living in San Francisco, Thurman saw the "concentration centers for the Japanese" where U.S. citizens of Japanese descent were forced to live during the second World War.[444] Typically, the U.S. government forcing its own citizens to live in concentration camps would not be deemed moral or ethical, but because the Japanese were considered the enemy of the United States, such actions were tolerated. These actions were not just tolerated by persons as U.S. citizens, but they were also tolerated by those claiming to be Christians. As Thurman reminds us, "It is part of the wisdom of the Judaeo-Christian ethic that all [people] are enjoined to love God and to love one another. However ardently [one] may hold to this attitude, [one's] commitment is nevertheless threatened by the reality that he [or she] still will admit categories of exception and extenuating circumstances which amend and sometimes nullify [one's] respect for human life."[445] The challenge becomes to hold to this commitment of loving one another even amidst all the pressures and desires to abandon the respect of human life.

As a black man raised in the South, Thurman was absolutely aware of the reality that others did not respect his life and that he was deemed expendable by many white men and woman – including many people claiming to be Christians – simply due to the color of his skin. Beyond the atrocities of lynching, raping, and other violent and torturous acts against black men, women, and children, Thurman was also aware of the countless other unethical actions that were not just tolerated but celebrated by white Christians and non-Christians alike. This oppressive reality continues in modern day United States with the unethical and immoral treatment of

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[444] Howard Thurman, "To Raymond F. Harvey," (letter, July 29, 1942, Washington, D.C.) in *The Papers of Howard Washing Thurman, Vol 2*, 307.
[445] Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*, 1-2.

African Americans, Muslims, immigrants, LGBTQ persons, and numerous others, all under the guise of some form of "enemy" status whether in regards to national safety, religious purity, or racist ideology. The devastating reality of the enemy status, as Thurman reminds us, is that "When I say that a [person] is my enemy, I mean at once that he [or she] is ethically out of bounds – out of bounds to any moral demand that he can make upon me, or to any demands that I might otherwise make upon him."[446] Yet, when the enemy emerges as a person, in Thurman's words, "I can love only when I meet you where you are, as you are, and treat you there as if you were where you ought to be. I see you where you are, striving and struggling, and in the light of the highest possibility of personality, I deal with you there."[447]

As optimistic – or possibly asinine for some – as this vision sounds, Thurman believed this act of meeting the enemy as he or she is was made possible by and is an extension of experiencing the love of God and love of self in religious experience. Experiencing the holistic love of self – all of one's self including one's faults, successes, shortcomings, aspirations, sins, abilities, loves, fears, desires, and potentials – opens one up to the possibility of experiencing the enemy as more than simply an enemy but as another human with faults, successes, loves, fears, desires, and potentials as well. Within the framework of religious experience, one understands that the enemy has the potential to change just as one acknowledges with one's own self. With the love-ethic of Jesus, this is a necessary step in the process toward reconciliation, harmony, and wholeness. For the privileged, the marginalized, and the disinherited, as Thurman reminds us, "Yet you must find a way to love your enemy if you want to be whole; not if you want to redeem your enemy, but because **you** want to be whole."[448]

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[446] Thurman, "Confronting the Enemy," in *The Growing Edge*, 8.
[447] Thurman, "The Greatest of These," in *The Growing Edge*, 27.
[448] Thurman, "Confronting the Enemy," in *The Growing Edge*, 10.

As mentioned with the love of neighbor, one of the initial challenges of loving one's enemy is simply bridging the physical distance between persons due to separation and finding a space of mutuality and safety. Though not a perfect solution, Thurman believed religious experience and the Church could be such a space but by no means guaranteed. Howard Thurman's insights into the potentials of the love-ethic of Jesus as it applies to interpersonal troubled relationships are as profound as they are challenging. His unique approach of connecting the inward aspects of a person with her and his outward relationships via spirituality and the love-ethic of Jesus is an important insight both within the Church and in society at large. Even though Thurman was not the first nor last to make these connections, the manner in which he engaged this process has helped others along the journey of spiritual formation. Especially within religious contexts, Thurman's theo-ethic based on religious personalism, religious experience, and Jesus' love-ethic has potential to make significant contributions to the transformation of human relationships through reconciliation. Thurman's insights into loving God, self, neighbor, and enemy, if applied, would speak volumes into making this world we live in a little more neighborly. Within the Church, these theo-ethical imperatives apply to more than simply divisions of race, ethnicity, and social location but also to religious creed in the form of denominationalism.

Separatism in Denominationalism

In Howard Thurman's various endeavors of trying to create inclusive and interracial religious spaces, he encountered many obstacles and challenges of which racial separatism being

only one. Interestingly, from his perspective, race was not the most difficult barrier to overcome

regarding division within the Church.   As he writes,

> As difficult as it is for experiences of unity to transcend differences of race, it is infinitely
> more difficult to create experiences of unity that can unite beyond the fundamental creeds
> that divide. There is an amazing incongruity in the fact that in peripheral matters there is
> fellowship, there is community, but in the central act of celebration of the human spirit in
> the worship of God, the lines are tightly drawn and [one] goes before God with those
> only who believe as he [or she] does. The experience that should unite [everyone] as
> children of one Father becomes the great divider that separates [one] from his [or her
> siblings].[449]

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Howard Thurman believed denominationalism was just as

significant a factor as race in the perpetuation of separatism and discrimination in the Church,

and like segregation, it betrayed the central teachings of Jesus and was an "instrument of

violence to the religious experience."[450] Thurman "felt that dividing humanity into those inside

and outside the boundaries of particular creeds and denominations was the source and inspiration

of all later attempts to divide humanity that included and excluded classes."[451] In other words,

within the Christian tradition, the will to separate over creed, theology, or tradition helped set the

precedent (both acceptance and prediction) for the will to separate in regards to race, class,

ethnicity, language, political affiliation, or any other issue deemed necessary.

In a similar manner in which racially separated churches often seem to represent the

separatist ideologies of society more than that of the unifying ideals of the Christian faith,

denominationalism also seems to demonstrate the social and cultural tendency to separate in

regards to difference instead of coming together over those aspects which can unite. As H.

Richard Niebuhr shares his analysis from researching denominationalism in the 1920s,

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[449] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 137.
[450] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 141-142.
[451] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 4.

"Denominationalism in the Christian church is such an unacknowledged hypocrisy. It is a compromise, made far too lightly, between Christianity and the world. Yet it often regards itself as a Christian achievement and glorifies its martyrs as bearers of the Cross. It represents the accommodation of Christianity to the caste-system of human society."[452] The fragmentation and divisiveness within the Church due to denominationalism makes the inclusive ideal of Thurman's Khyber Pass vision seem just as challenging compared to the various forms of separatism due to race and ethnicity. Even though the socio-political disparities and injustices associated with creed and denomination are often far less compared to race and ethnicity, the broad acceptance of denominationalism makes it just as difficult of a challenge to overcome. Whereas racism is regarded negatively by a significant percentage of U.S. citizens regardless of race or ethnicity, denominationalism and its inherent separatism and divisiveness is not only accepted but celebrated, or as Niebuhr states, "regards itself as a Christian achievement and glorifies its martyrs as bearers of the Cross." In other words, systematic discrimination and injustice based on race and ethnicity is considered by many to be a sin, but systematic separatism and antagonism based on creed and denomination in not only **not** considered "wrong" or unhealthy or unChristian, it is something many Christians from various denominations consider valid and important. If racism is America's original sin, maybe denominationalism should be considered Protestantism's original sin – and the Church in the U.S. has often been guilty of both.

Similar to race, there have been many justifiable reasons cited for dividing and separating the Church along creedal and denominational lines. Throughout the history of the Church many of these reasons have been theological and can be traced back the Church's formation in

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[452] Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 6.

centuries following Jesus' death. The development of the early Church through the Patristic

period can be mapped by the formation of various orthodoxies and heresies which became some

of the earliest forms of division within the Church. Patristic leaders tried to establish a standard

of theology and ritual which helped determined what was acceptable and "right" and what was

not – or more accurately, who was acceptable and who was not. As religious scholar Daniel

Boyarin explains, "Ancient heresiologists tried to police the boundaries so as to identify and

interdict those who respected no borders, those smugglers of ideas and practices newly declared

to be contraband, nomads who would not recognize the efforts to institute limits, to posit a

separation between 'two opposed places,' and thus clearly establish who was and who was not a

'Christian.'"[453]

As such, heresiologists and other religious leaders attempted to maintain the purity and

accuracy of the Church and its teachings by defining and ordering correct belief and ritual. In

her seminal work *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas claims that, "Defilement is never an isolated

event. It cannot occur except in view of a systematic ordering of ideas. . . .For the only way in

which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a total structure of thought whose keystone,

boundaries, margins and internal lines are held in relation by rituals of separation."[454] In other

words, heresiologists tried to protect the Church from any errant or deceptive teachings and/or

practices that might corrupt the "authentic" message and order of the Church. The Church

leaders were in the process of creating a "systematic order of ideas" for the Church and the

orthodoxy/heresy dualism helped define and maintain the borders around these ideas and rituals,

and the "purity" of the Church was to be maintained from various forms of deviance both in

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[453] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 2.
     [454] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Routledge Press, 2006)51.

theoretical realm of theology and the embodied aspects of social, national, racial, or ethnic classification.

As the Church continued to expand and become more structured, the primacy of the orthodoxy/heresy distinction grew in intensity and importance. These theological, philosophical, and ritual differences were not just disputes of varying opinions between colleagues, but these differences had much more drastic consequence including imprisonment and death. These disagreements and divisions were not simply theological but had socio-political implications as well. According to church historian John Henderson, "to Christians of late antiquity, orthodoxy and heresy were more like matters of life and death, even eternal life and death. With respect to this world, religious differences, particularly the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy, were the most significant divisions in human society, even (or especially) in the multicultural, multiethnic, and multilinguistic Byzantine empire."[455]

This "in/out," "us/them" separatist trend of the Patristic Period continued for centuries and became even more convoluted with the formation of Protestantism resulting from challenging the selling of indulgences and other theological issues and abuses by the Roman Catholic Church. After the Protestant Reformation in the 16th Century, more divisions and splits continued to occur within the Church with the formation of hundreds of different denominations. Over the centuries, the list of theological disagreements which have led to splits and divisions within the Church is extensive including doctrines such as baptism, grace, original sin, predestination, the divinity of Jesus, and the Trinity, just to name of few. The variances in doctrine are rarely simply theoretical disagreements but manifest themselves in the in

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[455] John Henderson, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 8.

relationships and interactions between differing denominations, churches, and even churches within denominations. As Niebuhr states, "As for the many sub-groups to be found among Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, Methodists, these also vary from each other on one or another point of doctrine, which, it is said, explains their division and accounts for their antagonism."[456] As such, this separatism (i.e., sectarianism) has been implemented not only in regards to orthodoxy and heresy, but also towards various forms of heterodoxy.

This propensity to separate and divide has become one of the most enduring inheritances of Protestantism, and for Thurman, it became one of the matters of separatism to which he felt called to address and challenge. When Fellowship Church was in its inchoate stages, Howard Thurman and Alfred Fisk (the initial co-pastors of Fellowship Church) had to decide what "kind" of church it was going to be in regards to Christian tradition and/or denomination. As stated in the church's official handout in 1945, "We think it important that an experiment of this kind should take place within the framework of historical Protestantism rather than as a movement outside the stream of the church. In this sense it may be regarded as a direct challenge to the policy of separatism and segregation in which all the historical Protestant denominations are involved."[457] For Thurman and Fisk, Fellowship Church was intended to provide an alternative to existing forms of denominationalism without separating from the Protestant tradition itself which would inherently contradict the church's vision and purpose of unity.

Also in the summer of 1945, Fellowship Church had to decide whether to become a Presbyterian church in order to gain financial stability or if it were to remain "independent" as a congregation without denominational economic support. The church voted against it. As

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[456] Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 13.
[457] Howard Thurman, "The Fellowship Church of All Peoples," (Spring 1945) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 3*, 125.

Thurman reflects upon this difficult decision, "I shall never forget the night this fateful decision was made. Suddenly we were on our own without a roof over our heads, with no organized backing, but still with that dream in our hearts. There was a moment of panic – quite, muted, glowing panic."[458] These decisions for Fellowship Church to remain within Protestantism but not Presbyterianism seemed to be the best option for the purpose and vision of the church to challenge the policies of separatism rampant in Christianity. Though not without its inconsistencies, these decisions were the beginnings of the fulfillment of Thurman's vision at Khyber Pass. Fellowship Church was to become the story of how "a group of people in the Protestant tradition but of various backgrounds and cultures learned the meaning and strength of an authentic religious fellowship by creating it and living within it."[459]

Fellowship Church's mere existence was direct challenge to the assumption of the absoluteness of separatism both within the Church and also within society. As with race, denominationalism was based upon an ideology which privileged division over the theo-ethical ideals of harmony and wholeness. As H. Richard Niebuhr states,

> The evil of denominationalism lies in the conditions which makes the rise of sects desirable and necessary: in the failure of the churches to transcend the social conditions which fashion them into caste-organizations, to sublimate their loyalties to standards and institutions only remotely relevant if not contrary to the Christian ideal, to resist the temptation of making their own self-preservation and extension the primary object of their endeavor.[460]

Similar to racial segregation, denominationalism is just another example of the Church submitting to the will of human-made social-political conditions instead of attempting to

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[458] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 50.

[459] Ibid., 7. After Thurman's departure from Fellowship Church, the congregation struggled to maintain the vision and purpose (and numbers) compared to the ten years under Thurman's leadership. Over the last several decades, Fellowship Church has made minimal impact in challenging the structures of and cultural commitment to denominationalism in the United States. Even though it is still an independent, interracial, multicultural, and inclusive congregation, Fellowship Church's legacy seems a distant reality from Thurman and Fisk's original vision.

[460] Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 21.

transform them based upon the ideals of God's creative intent. Instead of becoming inclusive

spaces aimed at assisting all persons in the experience of God regardless of social classification,

churches have absorbed society's ideologies and become tools of discrimination and division.

This was unacceptable to Thurman because "[d]iscrimination or any other artificial distinction

between classes of people is, above all, a rupture in the unity of God."[461] Again, from

Thurman's perspective based upon spiritual personalism and mysticism, the religious experience

of God is the primary object of a church's endeavor – not denominational self-preservation.

This distinction between Howard Thurman's system of religious thought compared to

those which dominate institutional and ecclesial forms of Christianity needs further explication.

Via his understanding of mysticism, every person has access to God. As an extension of God's

oneness and universality, no one is outside the reach of God's embrace regardless of race,

ethnicity, nationality, religion (or no religion), gender, sexual orientation, or hardness of heart.[462]

In the worship of God, God is the most important factor in the religious equation. God is central

and God is primary. On the other hand, within many denominationalism paradigms with their

particular ecclesial structures and theological positioning, direct access to God through religious

experience is altered in some capacity in that it is often understood as having to go through the

particular denominational interpretations of worship. As Thurman explains in an extended quote

from *The Creative Encounter*:

> In our moments of profoundest sobriety, there is clear recognition of the contradiction
> that is inherent in the concept of denominationalism as it is examined in the light of what
> for Christianity is the Jesus idea. Inasmuch as the individual brings to his religious
> experience his context, it is perfectly natural and mandatory that he will enter his
> religious experience with his particular denominational frame of reference. That is the
> door through which he enters. In the encounter with God in the religious experience,

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[461] Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 46.
[462] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 45.

however, the denominational frame of reference receives its true status, which is a **frame of reference**, without standing, as such, in the ultimate meaning of the experience itself. To make the frame of reference which is merely symbolic take on the life-giving character of the experience itself and thereby become binding as a principle of discrimination in the wider context of living and experiencing is to blaspheme against the experience itself. This, in my judgment, tends to undermine the integrity of the church as the promoter and inspirer of religious experience.[463]

In other words, denominationalism tends to elevate its symbolic nature from being a "frame of reference" to God to being equivalent to the experience of God itself. In so doing, in Thurman's perspective, it blasphemes against one's potential experience of God. Again, God is primary in religious experience and the Church is to assist in that process as a frame of reference but should not be equated with the experience itself. As Thurman explains, "Once again let us be reminded that the individual brings into his [or her] religious experience his [or her] frame of reference, with all that that implies. It is the door through which [she] enters into the experience of contact, fellowship, communion, with God. What he experiences **there** must have a quality of intrinsic significance that transcends the frame of reference or his [or her] context."[464]

For Thurman, religious experience as informed by mysticism can function as the space and opportunity by which persons of various racial, ethnic, cultural, theological, religious, and social backgrounds and perspectives can come together and find those aspects of their humanity which bind them one to another. Even though everyone has their own frame of reference – whether it be in regards to race, denomination, religion, culture, or language – by which he or she enters the encounter with the divine, the religious experience itself is meant to transcend those differences. Theoretically speaking, there is something quite profound in this belief. Unfortunately, this approach may not actually function as well as Thurman had believed.

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[463] Thurman, *The Creative Encounter*, 140-141.
[464] Ibid., 146.

One of the significant problems/assumptions with this approach is that for some, even if their frames of reference do not replace the experience with God, the frames of reference may limit one's capacity to experience God with others. In many ways, these frames of reference – the doors though which one enters religious experience – are also the contexts which give one's life meaning and identity, and many of these contexts are informed by one's lifeworld.[465] For many persons, these socio-political contexts – including race, ethnicity, language, gender, class, nationality, etc. – cannot be ignored, bypassed, or transcended in religious experience. For persons with deep racial wounds, a religious experience with others who represent the source of those wounds, an encounter with God is limited at best. For LGTBQ persons who have been wounded by Christians and congregations who do not acknowledge their full humanity including their sexual orientation, the possibility of encountering God alongside these individuals and groups may not be possible. The socio-political and cultural realities of our world simply cannot be overlooked or underestimated in the pursuit of the religious experience.

Thus, it is important to acknowledge that in addition to the challenges of separatism due to race, theology, and denominationalism, it is also important to note that divisions within the Church have also occurred due to important socio-political issues and positions. The Church and churches have also divided and split and formed new denominations over issues including slavery, racial segregation, the ordination of women, the acceptance, inclusion, and ordination of LGTBQ members and ministers, and many others, and these various positions are often supported by particular theologies. As such, the justifications behind the decisions to separate from others are deemed necessary based upon specific moral, ethical, and theological principles including racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, etc.

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[465] Anderson, *Creative Exchange*, 117.

I often struggle with what it means to maintain fellowship with others who also claim to be Christian yet demonstrate blatant prejudice whether it be in regards to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, theology, denomination, nationalism, or political affiliation. From my perspective, the reasoning behind my desire to distance myself from them is grounded in a form moral righteousness and theological conviction. Yet, I often have to remind myself that from their perspective based upon their functioning ideology, others are doing the exact same thing, and when it comes to matters of theological integrity or personal well-being, "agreeing to disagree" is not always considered a valid option. This conundrum is commonly interpreted as a crossroads with one path becoming an impasse which leads to separation and division and the other path leading toward engaging the other through positions of compromise; the one path rebelling against the systems of normativity and the other favoring the reformation of the current system; the one path leading towards separation from the sources of hurt and harm and the other leaning toward the hopes of reconciling troubled forms of human relatedness. Due to the ideologies of separatism inherited through Christianity and promoted in American culture, the options of separation, divisiveness, and antagonism often appear to be the preferred routes. "The legacies of racism, contemporary attitudes of political correctness, and the race-based identity has trumped baptismal identity among Christians have prevented too many Christians from being able to speak the truth in love when it comes to matters of racial reconciliation, leaving them mired in the politics of resignation and the church still enslaved."[466] In the end, reconciliation often becomes an impossible task on the path not taken because, in the end, the reconciling of troubled relationships requires the participation of more than one person or group.

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[466] Campolo and Battle, *The Church Enslaved*, 36.

Yet, I am not convinced this dualistic interpretation of this relational conundrum is an accurate portrayal of the available options and I do not think "either this path or that path" correctly frames the possibilities of human relations. Like many of Thurman's ideas, a "both—and" approach may provide the most viable option toward the achievement of the teleological goals of harmony and wholeness. The way toward healing and healthy forms of human relatedness may not be found in choosing only one path but in recognizing that both paths are simply different branches on the same road toward harmony and wholeness. Maybe one of the problems of our current state of human relatedness is assuming these different paths are completely independent and never reconnect instead of believing that they may come back together at some point in the future or even come back and forth multiple times. Instead of assuming ideas of unity in the form of sameness (i.e., conformity to normativity), what if we envisioned interdependence as an in-and-out weaving of different branches or threads which form a unified whole? Instead of thinking of reconciliation as a state of being, it may be more helpful and constructive to view reconciliation as a dynamic process in the same manner as which relationships are not static but change over time. Howard Thurman's ideas of religious experience can serve as a model for this dynamic process of healing and growth together while recognizing the need for periods of time apart as well. Instead of interpreting reconciliation as a singular event or state, it can be a process of cooperative interaction which gradually – but eventually – leads towards more harmonious forms of relatedness and existence. In this, religious experience and religious fellowship become acts of reconciliation, opportunities to find ways to bring people together that are more compelling than those which separate and divide.

Separatism and "Out of Solitude"

Unfortunately, due the perpetual pain and suffering caused by the discrimination, manipulation, and oppression by those in power, many of the disinherited and marginalized find that separation from others (i.e., the source of their marginalization and oppression) is not only healthy but necessary. "In the face of this denigrating deference, however, the leaders of the Black Separatist movement made it clear that, at least in the short run, black people needed to separate themselves from the white community until they had developed the security and self-assurance necessary to engage whites as equals."[467] Seeing that racial and ethnic equality has yet to be attained in this country, it is not surprising that many minorities still hold this position. Yet, some of the ideologies of the marginalized contain elements of this short-term separatist position. For example, in the second part of her definition of womanist, Alice Walker claims that womanism is: "Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male **and** female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health."[468] Walker recognized that for individuals and groups to be healthy and whole, they sometimes have to separate from those who keep injuring them. Yet, she also understood this separatism should not be the primary form of relatedness, but only done periodically. In our current socio-political and cultural reality, this balance between separation and coming together may be one of the more promising options available.

In 1974, priest, professor, and author Henri Nouwen published a small book on spiritual mediations titled "Out of Solitude."[469] In this book, he reflects upon Jesus' life and the tension between his desire for solitude with God and the social demands of his ministry to his disciples and the people of Israel. There are several similarities between Nouwen's understanding of

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[467] Campolo and Battle, *The Church Enslaved*, 59.
[468] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), xi-xii.
[469] See Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Mediations on the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1974).

Jesus' "solitude" and Thurman's "religious experience" considering both are private encounters with the divine which are aimed at healing, rejuvenation, and transformation of the individual to be manifested in the social world of which one was a part. As such, "out of solitude" may be more than just a metaphor for religious experience, but it may also serve as a methodological strategy of socio-political engagement. In Christian religious contexts, "solitude" does not necessarily have the same negative connotations as "separatism" though they both imply an act of removal of oneself from others. Yet, to use Aristotelian terminology, solitude becomes more of a vice when done in excess and the same could be true for separatism. Even though the tendency towards separatism has its merits in regards to health and safety, extended separatism also tends toward negative effects including the narrowing of one's vision and understanding.

In *Beyond Liberation Theology*, Ivan Petrella argues that one of the consequences of this reluctance to come out of isolated spaces is the tendency to become myopic in one's vision. Amongst liberation theologians, he calls this tendency to focus on a single-group mindset and to neglect others "monochromatism," and describes it as follows:

> Theologians with monochromatism suffer from a limited range of vision. Depending on the strain they see only black and white, or brown and white, or theological and non-theological. Monochromatism is thus evident when theologians of a particular ethnic group or racial group refuse to look beyond the parameters of that group, as well as the parameters of their discipline, for tools and resources useful to the cause of liberation.[470]

The expansion of one's worldview beyond that of the "us/them," "in/out" dualism should create an influx of variety and options in the struggle for liberation, equality, harmony, and wholeness. The inclusion of the perspectives of various other ethnic minority groups such as Latinx, Asian, indigenous American, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. will break the black/white binary that has dominated social justice and religious discourse since the Civil Rights movements and move

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[470] Ivan Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 84.

toward more inclusive paradigms based on an ideology of diversity. With an expanded

worldview, "alliances that existed in the past, yet were rendered invisible by the black/white

binary, can resurface."[471] The often ignored contributions of the multitude of ethnic peoples can

be remembered so both our memory and our future trajectory can be more holistic and diverse.

As J. Deotis Roberts states, "For Jesus, love is an affair of willing and doing. . . . Jesus sets the

love-ethic free from its limitations to fellow nationals and brings it to bear upon all humanity."[472]

I think the same applies to religious creeds and traditions as well: Jesus sets the love-ethic free

from the limitations of denominationalism and brings it to bear upon all claiming to be a part of

the religion of Jesus.

Separatism appears to be a normal and natural response in a variety of racial, ethnic, and

religious contexts in that there is something affirming and empowering about being with "one's

people." Yet, I think the argument can be made that separatism – like solitude – can become

problematic when done is excess in either quantity or duration. This may be part of the problem

at hand. As mentioned above, like other social realities, racial and religious separatism is often

just the product of particular social ideologies and accompanying systems and processes.[473] Yet,

the excessive separatism within churches is statistically **un**natural. "The segregation levels of

congregations approach the theoretical limits, and are amazingly high given the absence of a

central body requiring racial separation."[474] Thus, the problem may not be strictly separatism,

per se, but the excessive application of it to the point of it being unnatural. If separatism is just

the product of social programming, it could be possible to re-envision separatism in a manner

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[471] Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology*, 145.
[472] Roberts, *Black Theology in Dialogue*, 67.
[473] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 37.
[474] Michael O. Emerson, *People of the Dream: Multiracial Congregations in the United States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 160.

that falls more within the theoretical limits of modern pluralistic and multicultural society because separatism has both its benefits and its limitations.

Again, "out of solitude" may be a helpful metaphor and strategy for addressing the need for separatism without letting it move into the realm of being a deterrent to the betterment of humanity as a whole because as long as various groups remain separated, divisive, and antagonistic, neither the Church nor society will move into spaces of harmony and wholeness. Like solitude, separatism becomes a vice in excess, and similar to how Jesus came "out of solitude," so, too, the separated may need to develop strategies to come "out of their separation."

For Howard Thurman, the inclusive vision he received at Khyber Pass was not restricted by the ideologies of separatism considered normative in the United States, but he was looking past the current state of being towards something that did not exist yet, toward the "best" that our creative intent has to offer. Thurman envisioned humanity embracing its actualizing potential in the form of fellowship and harmony, finding those things powerful enough to bring humanity together instead of being torn apart because of our differences. He was not content with the current state of divisiveness and antagonism prevalent in the Church and society but believed the love-ethic of Jesus could guide Christians into transforming the Church and the world. By learning to love God, love ourselves, love our neighbors, and even to love our enemies, the troubled state of human relatedness largely defined by separatism could be reconciled and transformed. By learning how to come out of our various solitudes whether in regards to race, ethnicity, politics, and denomination, the Church can become a witness and a beacon of hope to the potentials of human cooperation and community. In so doing, we begin the process of healing our troubled relationships and move toward the spaces of harmony and wholeness which lie beyond reconciliation.

CHAPTER 5: RECONCILIATION AND BEYOND

"At Church Next Sunday"

If I knew you and you knew me,
And each of us could clearly see
By the inner light divine,
The meaning of your life and mine,
I am sure that we would differ less
And clasp our hands in friendliness –
If I knew you and you knew me.[475]

– author unknown

In a world largely determined by and interpreted though the lenses of difference and

separatism, Howard Thurman's vision from the Khyber Pass was not just provocative but

profound. After centuries of contentiousness due to colonialism, racism, nationalism, and

religious sectarianism, Thurman was able to see beyond the states of fragmented human

existence towards something more harmonious and whole. He believed that if humanity could

find ways in which differing peoples could overcome the various obstacles which divided them,

in the words of the poet above, we would differ less and be able to clasp our hands in

friendliness. As a person of faith and conviction, he spent the majority of his life working

toward this teleological vision: "It became imperative how to find out if experiences of spiritual

unity among people could be more compelling than the experiences which divide them."[476] He

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[475] Author unknown, "At Church Next Sunday," in *The Best Loved Religious Poems*, edited by James Gilchrist Lawson, (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1933).
[476] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 24.

searched for spaces of common ground, and when he could not find them, he created them. In so doing, he was more than a just a visionary or prophet, but a moral exemplar in the pursuit of making this world a better place. Though not neglecting the lived-realities of the marginalized and the disinherited, Thurman often transcended the human-made distinctions and divisions deemed normative and made his inclusive vision available to both underprivileged and privileged alike. His vision was largely directed towards the activity of bringing people together who had been separated; to reconcile the troubled relationships amongst God's children. At the core of his theology was an ethic of reconciliation.

Contextual Reconciliation

In spite of its position as an essential theological tenet within Christianity, both during and after Thurman's time (and undoubtedly before, as well), reconciliation has struggled to gain a firm grounding or following in theological and ethical discourses in the academy and it has also failed to make much of an impact on the practices within the Church. In addition to the difficulties of challenging normative ideologies of separatism in regards to both race and religion, conceptions of reconciliation have often been narrowly conceived by predominately white Christians with an evangelical bend. As such, reconciliation often comes across as "cheap" and ineffective in addressing the discriminations and injustices prevalent in the Church and society. Again, I argue this shortcoming has more to do with its narrow conception and application than with a weakness in the term itself. In order to establish reconciliation not only as an essential theological tenet but also as a theo-ethical practice of the Church, it needs to be re-conceptualized in a more robust and holistic manner and no longer understood as an extension

of the pathology of normative whiteness. In order to accomplish this, a theo-ethic of

reconciliation needs to be re-contextualized and reconceived with diverse perspectives. Howard

Thurman is one vital source, but others are needed as well.

One of the more important aspects of liberationist approaches to theology and ethics is

that they "are contextual, tied to the experiences and needs of concrete communities."[477] In fact,

James Cone argues that not only is liberation theology contextual, but all theology is inherently

context-bound. He writes, "Theology is **contextual** language – that is, defined by the human

situation that gives birth to it. No one can write theology for all times, places, and persons."[478]

This contextuality is important to note because it acknowledges that the theologies deemed

"normative" and "orthodox" by the powerful and dominant are also contextual – and not

objective – in that they also come from a particular human experience.[479] At its core,

liberationist approaches to theology challenge the assumption of normative and universal ways

of knowing which have proven oppressive and even death-dealing for the poor, for women, for

racialized "others," and for many others who fall outside the demarcations of the status quo.

Similar to theology and liberation, framing reconciliation as contextual opens the door for critical

examination of multiple conceptions of reconciliation for none are outside the realm of context

or situation. In so doing, reconciliation can be more attentive to and representative of the

experiences and needs of various communities.

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[477] Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., "Introduction," in *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 1.

[478] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, xi. For further explication of James Cone's perspective on the relationship between white theology and race/racism, see James Cone, "Theology's Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 2:2 (2004), 139-152, DOI: 10.1558/blth.2.2.139.36027

[479] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 12.

Framing reconciliation as contextual is also important in that is allows for greater diversity of perspective and approach because no singular context is considered universal or normative, yet each perspective adds to the richness of the conceptualization and discourse. Normative ways of thinking and telling the religious story are not the only option available. As womanist ethicist Emilie Townes writes, ". . .the story **can** be told another way. It can be told in such a way that the voices and lives of those who, traditionally and historically, have been left out are now heard with clarity and precision. Even more, these voices can then be included into the discourse – not as additive or appendage – but as resource and codeterminer of actions and strategies."[480] As it has been conceived in the past, reconciliation predominately has not included these voices in any significant manner, thus limiting its acceptance and effectiveness. Thus, it becomes imperative to include these voices not only as resource in conception but also as a codeterminer of reconciliatory actions and strategies. Yet, in order for this to occur, these various voices and perspectives will actually need to come together and share common spaces for creative exchange. As is, the problems of **physical** isolation become preventative factors in the construction of **theoretical** efforts to overcome separatism and divisiveness. For this reason, Thurman not only searched for common ground for God's diverse children to come together, when he could not find it, he created such a space. In this, Thurman believed that integration was an essential component in the journey towards reconciliation, harmony, and wholeness.

Integration and Reconciliation

Before I proceed, I must acknowledge that the word "integration" comes with much baggage. To demonstrate such a reality, I quote Steve Biko, South African Apartheid

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[480] Emilie M. Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 7.

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liberationist, "If by integration you understand a breakthrough into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance into white society by blacks, an assimilation and acceptance of blacks into an already established set of norms and codes of behavior set and maintained by whites, then YES I am against it."[481] If integration means how Biko defined it, I am adamantly against it, too. Due the failures of desegregation following the Civil Rights movements as well as after the dismantling of Apartheid in South Africa, I believe the concept of integration has been misconstrued. "Integration became synonymous with forced assimilation, with the loss of culture, heritage, and respect, and was abandoned in favor of group self-determination and separation."[482] Biko is not describing integration but assimilation, which Volf claims is just another form of exclusion. He states, "The more benign side of exclusion by elimination is exclusivism by **assimilation**. You can survive, even thrive, among us, if you become like us; you can keep your life, if you give up your identity."[483] Integration is not assimilation and it is conceptually more than formal de-segregation.

Assimilation is an antagonist to diversity for it tries to remove the distinctions of "the Other" – which most often implies minorities, the disinherited, the underprivileged, and the less-privileged. Integration, on the other hand, assumes the various groups involved will maintain their particularity and their distinctiveness. No one group has to assimilate to the expectations of any other group – even the dominant group. Integration also does not assume some "melting pot" approach which blends all diversity into a homogenous solution – this is just another form of assimilation based upon the methodology of the pathology of ontological whiteness. In fact, this form of assimilation also occurred within whiteness itself in the United States as a strategy

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[481] Steven Biko, *I Write What I Like* (London: Heinemann Press, 1987), 24.
[482] Emerson, *People of a Dream*, 188.
[483] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 75.

for creating unity and uniformity amongst European diversity. To counteract the tensions and conflicts between immigrants of different Europeans countries and cultures, white racial assimilation aimed to minimize the **ethnic differences** of white immigrants and maximize their white **racial similarities**.

During the mass immigration of the 19th Century, many people of European descent were expected to lose their ethnic particularities in order to "fit in" with the white American status quo and "it seemed a good idea at times for migrants to trade their Jewish names, their Italian cuisine, and their Irish brogue for white privilege."[484] Jim Wallis concurs, "English, Italians, Swedes, Irish, Dutch, Germans, and the rest were never a common ethnic group in Europe. There is really no such thing as a white race is Europe, which is very much a mixture of cultures and shades of skin colors. But all became **white** when they arrived in America, taking on not only a new national identity but also a new white cultural identity."[485] Assimilation to whiteness, whether applied to persons of European descent or to persons of color from various races and ethnicities, is not integration and is prohibitive to efforts of reconciliation. Instead, it becomes helpful to have an integrated perspective on what it means to be "American." "The culture associated with white Americans often is mistakenly viewed as American culture. It certainly has been the most dominant U.S. culture, because there have been more white Americans that other Americans, and because white Americans have held the main centers of power throughout U.S. history. But white U.S. culture is no more American than black U.S. culture."[486]

Howard Thurman supported integration in regards to a variety of systems including government, education, culture, and religion because he thought the claim to "separate-but-

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[484] David Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (London: Verso, 2008), 140.
[485] Wallis, *America's Original Sin*, 74.
[486] Emerson, *People of the Dream*, 137.

equal" was never really true – separate inherently implied unequal. He "always felt uncomfortable about [all-black institutions] role in American and African American society and believed that separate black institutions, despite the best efforts of those within them, would always carry the badge of inferiority."[487] For Thurman, integration was one possible solution to this conundrum of the lack of equality within systems promoting racial separatism. Beyond this cultural reasoning, Thurman also promoted integration on spiritual grounds, and considering his primary context as being religious in nature, he believed the integration of the Church was a moral imperative.

For Thurman, integration was a logical response to the problems associated with fragmentation and separatism in the Church because from his perspective, separatism – whether due to racism, classism, denominationalism, or self-determined – contributed to the denial of the humanity of others, which in turn, was a denial of God. As Thurman writes in an extended quote from *Jesus and the Disinherited*, [488]

> The first step toward love is a common sharing of a sense of mutual worth and value. This cannot be discovered in a vacuum or in a series of artificial or hypothetical relationships. It has to be in a real situation, natural, free. The experience of the common worship of God is such a moment. It is in this connection that American Christianity has betrayed the religion of Jesus almost beyond redemption. Churches have been established for the underprivileged, for the weak, for the poor, on the theory that they prefer to be among themselves. Churches have been established for the Chinese, the Japanese, the Korean, the Mexican, the Filipino, the Italian, and the Negro, with the same theory in mind. The result is that in the one place in which normal, free contacts might be most naturally established – in which relations of the individual to his [or her] God should take priority over conditions of class, race, power, status, wealth, or the like – this place is one of the chief instruments for guaranteeing barriers.[489]

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[487] Fluker, et al., "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, xl.
[488] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 98.
[489] Ibid., 98.

For this reason, Thurman dedicated the majority of his adult life to breaking down the barriers

which separate one from another through the creation and growth of interracial and multicultural

spaces within the Church. He took his vision from Khyber Pass and made it a visible reality at

Fellowship Church,

> But nowhere in my experience had I ever seen a Christian church that was a living
> confirmation of my conviction. Deep within me I wondered whether or not my
> conviction was groundless. Years later my work in organizing The Church for the
> Fellowship of All Peoples was in its essence an attempt to establish empirical validation
> for what to me is a profound religious and ethical insight concerning the genius of the
> church as a religious fellowship.[490]

Again, Thurman believed the religious experience of God was more powerful than the human-

made conditions of race, class, gender, sexuality, politics, power, etc., and that the fellowship of

humanity was more important than social classifications. Integrating churches was a direct and

revolutionary way in which the followers of the religion of Jesus demonstrate their faith in the

former rather than the latter. Through reconciling with others across racial, ethnic, and

denominational lines, Christians embody the love of God.

Following the leadership of Howard Thurman and Alfred Fisk, Fellowship Church was

more than just an **interracial** church, but it was an attempt at a truly **integrated** multiracial

church, and the distinction is important. There are a number of interracial churches across the

United States and some are undoubtedly more integrated than others in that some of the churches

represent the diversity of the congregation in various aspects including leadership and worship

style. Some of these churches are more representative of assimilation than integration in that

minimal expression of diversity is allowed and expressions of multiracial intimacy are essentially

nonexistent. In these types of interracial churches, "Although this physical integration is notable,

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[490] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 21.

members do not move beyond coexistence to real integration of social networks."[491] Within these congregations, tokenism often takes the form of including minorities in the church, but not altering the worship style, service, or structure to accommodate their alternative styles and practices of worship. These churches often think it is important to have multiple races represented in their church, yet they have not prepared to accommodate them. "This process of doing what's right without preparation is often called tokenism."[492] Needless to say, tokenism is not representative of integration.

Integrated multiracial churches such as Fellowship Church function differently in that all races, ethnicities, and cultures are equally accepted and included not only in worship style and structure, but also in relationships. Even if one race represents the majority of members, great intentionality is taken to ensure that all minority voices have equal merit and representation. As Thurman shares regarding racial intentionality at Fellowship Church,

> The Negro has a rich and redemptive heritage which must not be lost in this effort to become an integrated religious fellowship. How to conserve the essential idiom that has kept alive in the spirit of Negroes a courage and a vitality that has sustained that spirit in all of its vicissitudes, and at the same time to bring into its fellowship more and more of those who are not Negroes, until at last from both sides there is a common meeting place in which there will be no Negro church and no white church, but the church of God – that is the task we all must work to finish.[493]

The idea and creation of racially integrated churches and religious spaces was not just an interest of Thurman, but it was an essential component to his faith and his theo-ethic. For Thurman, interracial and multicultural congregations were a necessary response to the betrayals of American Christianity to the religion of Jesus. To understate this importance would be a misrepresentation of Thurman's vision and theology. Even though Thurman had hoped that

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[491] DeYoung, et al., *United by Faith*, 167.
[492] Campolo and Battle, *The Church Enslaved*, 5.
[493] Thurman, *Footprints of a Dream*, 156-157.

Fellowship Church and Marsh Chapel would spark an interracial church movement, it is also important to note that he did not believe every congregation should become interracial and nondenominational.[494] As Luther Smith reflects, "Fellowship Church may be less relevant as a model for 'how to' transform churches into inter-racial and inter-faith communities, and more relevant in providing the witness that such communities are possible and rewarding."[495] In a similar manner, Fellowship Church and other integrated multiracial churches provide a witness to the possibility of reconciliation in a culture over-determined by separatism.

Even though Howard Thurman was able to bridge these various racial and religious divides, even with "the most optimistic of integrated visions, the barriers to bridging are persistent."[496] In spite of Thurman's belief not just in the possibility but necessity of interracial and multicultural Christian congregations, due to the fact that the interracial church movement never really substantiated into anything significant, it becomes important question if such a vision is practical today in our pluralistic and polarized world. Are integrated multiracial churches and religious spaces reasonable and realistic today? In regards to the topic of this dissertation, the more probing question may be, "Is it possible to have reconciliation without integration?" Is reconciliation between races, ethnicities, classes, denominations, etc. possible within a fragmented Church inside a divided culture with countless forms of separatism isolating Christians from each other? In spite of Thurman's hopeful teleological visions, cursory empirical analysis indicates a negative answer. The reasoning (both for separatism and against integration including self-determination, health, preference, and safety) and traditions of division and divisiveness simply may be too influential and substantial to overcome. Realistically

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494 Dixie and Eisenstadt, *Visions of a Better World*, 176.
495 Smith, *Mystic as Prophet*, 164.
496 Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 230.

speaking, reconciliation simply may not be a feasible possibility in today's world. In spite the acknowledgment of this possibility, the logic of Thurman's theo-ethic and the hopefulness of his Khyber Pass vision still ring true. Surely, there must be another way.

In the encouraging words of Howard Thurman, "I must be persistent in my search for a technique and for methods by which the insights of my commitment can be implemented in practical terms of social transformation."[497] To find another strategy of social transformation, we may have to use a "creative synthesis" approach which was a common technique utilized by Thurman. Even though it diverts from Thurman's conviction regarding the problematic nature of separatism, it might be helpful to re-frame the discourse in a manner in which separatism and reconciliation are not contradictory and incompatible, but a paradox with each holding the other in tension. In typical Thurman fashion, maybe separatism and reconciliation are a "both—and" scenario and not an "either/or."

To frame this "both—and" possibility, I want to return to Henri Nouwen's metaphor of "out of solitude" and Aristotle's ethical frame of virtue and vice. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between virtue and vice in the following manner: "We may thus conclude that virtue or excellence is a characteristic involving choice, and that it consists in observing the mean relative to us, a mean which is defined by a rational principle, such as a [person] of practical wisdom would use to determine it. It is the mean by reference to two vices: the one of excess and the other of deficiency."[498] Alongside this concept of vice as either excess or deficiency, the metaphor of "out of solitude" gains a framework of accountability. Instead of conceptualizing reconciliation simply as a state of integration and togetherness, what if we

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[497] Howard Thurman, "A Vision of God and Human Nature," (Lecture, March 6-10, 1939, Toronto) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 2*, 230.

[498] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Martin Oswald (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 43.

conceived of reconciliation as a process of coming in and out of solitude, a process of the back-and-forth from separation to togetherness. In other words, reconciliation is more of a dynamic process than a fixed state; "reconciling acts" inherently precede "being reconciled." Governed by the ethical principles of excess and deficiency, a virtuous balance can be achieved between the dynamic process between separation and togetherness. In this framework, separatism only becomes a vice in excess or in deficiency and the same applies to togetherness.

To nuance this analogy a bit further, it may be important to determine which aspect is to be considered the "solitude" – the separation or the togetherness. Again, comparing Nouwen's understanding of "solitude" with Thurman's religious experience, one could assume that the "togetherness" would be associated with the solitude aspect. Yet, as mentioned above, it is helpul to remember that reconciliation is contextual, and one's context and/or personality may determine the assignment of the "solitude." Like religious experience, if "solitude" is the space for encounters with the divine aimed at healing, rejuvenation, and transformation, this "solitude" may be separation (space amongst "one's people") whereas reconciliation represents the "out of solitude" spaces. For some, the spaces of reconciliation may initially not be very healing or transforming but filled with trepidation and discomfort.

Again, reconciliation may not need be considered a state of relatedness but a process of becoming; similar to Bonhoeffer's "cheap grace," cheap reconciliation is spurious, but matters of the heart and will take time to transform. With the development of spaces of shared mutual worth and respect and the time it takes to create such spaces, the hope is that eventually the spaces of reconciliation would become the places of solitude where one is healed, rejuvenated, and transformed in order to better engage the world of which one is a part. It is also important to remember that reconciliation is also about repairing troubled relationships and about fellowship,

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and in this sense, "out of solitude" can also become a strategy of reconciled fellowship. Collaborative fellowship events including interracial, multicultural, and interdenominational "put-luck dinners" between differing congregations can become effective methods to building spaces of shared mutual worth and neighborliness. The "breaking of bread" seems to be an effective method of bringing people together. Routine occasional collaborative worship services can also become effective strategies in the process of integration through the creation of common spaces for the worship of God, a process of breaking down the walls between the children of God. Instead of assuming reconciliation to be a constant state of relatedness, creative strategies of "out of solitude" may be more realistic as a gradual process of creating friendships, healing relationships, and engaging in fellowship with those with whom one has previously been separated. The hopes are that in the process of integration, efforts of collaboration will become more common and natural, creating spaces for the synthesis of ideas, theories, strategies, and actions in order that various groups can move beyond their monochromatic tendencies and become co-determiners in theo-ethical praxis.

Social Justice Collaborative Efforts

As mentioned in previous chapters, one of the challenges facing the implementation of a theo-ethic of reconciliation within the Church is the incongruence between the theological and ethical conceptions of reconciliation. As Thurman reminds us, "Christianity in America has tended in its more practical bearing to be more theological than ethical. . . . It may be a very strengthening exercise to be concerned about the Trinity and the Apostle's Creed but a precise theological statement of what is involved in these may make no ethical demands upon [the one]

who states it."[499] For many Christians, reconciliation is only an ahistorical idea, political theory, and/or theological doctrine (or possibly all three). Understood as such, the concept rarely escapes the realm of the abstract. "But reconciliation is properly understood as a process in which we become engaged at the heart of the struggle for justice and peace in the world."[500] In other words, understood with the insights of womanist pedagogy of thinking, being, and doing, reconciliation includes being a person of reconciliation who thinks within an ideology of reconciliation and works to achieve reconciliation through the struggle for justice and peace.

According to Putnam and Campbell, "The failure of American religion (and especially evangelicals) today to mount a more vigorous campaign against class disparities could thus be seen as a sin of omission, especially compared to the struggles for social justice that people of faith mounted in comparable periods of American history."[501] Beyond being a sin of omission, this failure to pursue justice for the marginalized and disinherited of the world becomes a barrier preventing reconciliation, harmony, and wholeness. It is difficult to reconcile with someone who fails to demonstrate an interest or care in one's own well-being, but on the flip side, "There is a quality in the spirit of reconciliation that heals the inner breaches by confirming the need to be cared for, to be held, honored in one's own life and the lives of others. And this is the work of reconciliation."[502] As such, collaborative work towards justice can become a motivator for the possibilities of reconciliation whereas to continue in the sin of omission usually becomes a deterrent. In *Justice in the Making*, feminist ethicist Beverly Harrison articulates both the need for and benefits of working for justice. She states as follows,

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[499] Thurman, "The Task of the Negro Ministry," in *Strange Freedom*,197.
[500] de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 21.
[501] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 258.
[502] Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, 117-118.

> We are called of God to **life abundant**, and in the struggle for justice we discover that genuine abundance of life comes from embodying a solidarity with one another that is deeply mutual, which is to say, reciprocal. We need desperately to dance together, celebrating in anticipation the cohumanity into which we are called. In solidarity born of the struggle for justice, we can joyfully live, empowered, toward those right relationships in which all may know that abundant life is the birthright of those God brings to life.[503]

Even though she does not explicitly mention reconciliation, Harrison articulates the important connection between reconciliation and justice: "In solidarity born of the struggle for justice, we can joyfully live, empowered, toward those right relationships."

Collaborative efforts in justice-making can also fit within the framework of "out of solitude." In a similar manner in which religious experience can provide opportunities for the process of reconciliation, so, too, can collaborative efforts in social justice. Considering the prevalence of discrimination and injustice in society and the Church, instead of continuing in the sins of omission, the physical and psychological distance between the privileged and the marginalized and disinherited can be minimized if the privileged were to **join** the underprivileged in the pursuits of social justice. I highlight "join" because the marginalized and oppressed are already pursuing social justice in a multitude of ways, thus, for the privileged, one aspect of their moral imperative becomes to use their resources, influence, and privilege to support the marginalized in their already occurring pursuits. In addition to these collaborative efforts, the privileged must also begin the process of dismantling injustice within their own spheres of influence. Again, if justice is necessary in the repairing of troubled relationships (individual and collective), activities of social justice can become spaces of togetherness in the process of reconciliation. Alongside common experiences of worship, collaborations in social justice and pursuits of liberation could become powerful witnesses and motivators of

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[503] Beverly Harrison, *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 65.

reconciliation. As Thurman explicates, "Experiences of meaning which people share are more compelling than the barriers that separate them. If such experiences can be multiplied over a time interval of sufficient duration, then any barrier between [people], of whatever kind, can be undermined. Thus the way of reconciliation is opened."[504]

Reconciliation and Beyond

H. Richard Niebuhr had some scathing critiques of the Christianity in the early 20th Century. His harshest indictment was in regards to how the Church mirrored society in its divisions, calling this tendency hypocritical. He writes,

> The division of the churches closely follows the divisions of [humanity] into the castes of national, racial, and economic groups. It draws the color line in the church of God; it fosters the misunderstandings, the self-exaltations, the hatreds of jingoistic nationalism by continuing in the body of Christ the spurious difference of provincial loyalties; it seats the rich and poor apart at the table of the Lord.[505]

Howard Thurman noticed a similar tendency and his indictment was just as critical in that he claimed the Church's demonstration of segregation as inherited from society was a betrayal of the religion of Jesus almost to the point of being beyond redemption.[506] For both men, this reality challenged two fundamental beliefs. First, they believed that the Church – the body of Christ – should not be fragmented and divided due to race, class, nationality, or denomination. Stated succinctly, a divided Church was contradictory to the teachings of Jesus. Second, both men believed the trajectory of influence **should** go in the opposite direction – the Church should influence society in regards to harmony and unity and not society influencing the Church in separatism. As stated by Niebuhr, denominations, churches, and sects, "are emblems, therefore,

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[504] Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, 120.
[505] Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 6.
[506] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 98.

of the victory of the world over the church, of the secularization of Christianity, of the church's

sanction of that divisiveness which the church's gospel condemns."[507]

For Thurman, this tragic reality is directly related to his searching question mentioned in

the Introduction:

> Why is it that Christianity seems impotent to deal radically, and therefore effectively, with the issues of discrimination and injustice on the basis of race, religion and national origin? Is this impotency due to a betrayal of the genius of the religion, or is it due to a basic weakness in the religion itself? The question is searching, for the dramatic demonstration of the impotency of Christianity in dealing with the issue is underscored by its apparent inability to cope with it within its fellowship.[508]

This question delves to one of the core issues in discourse on reconciliation: What is the

correlation / relationship between the injustices and discriminations in society and the potential

of reconciliation in the Church? Again, for Thurman within the parameters of this dissertation,

the primary context is religious in nature specifically addressing Christianity within the United

States. To restate the question differently: **Should injustice and discrimination in society**

prevent reconciliation in the Church? The distinction is not a question of sacred versus

secular, but a question regarding a micro-context (the Church, denominations, traditions,

congregations, and individual Christians) imbedded in a macro-context (U. S. society and

culture).[509] There is and always will be overlap between a smaller entity within a larger entity,

but this question is based on a theological belief that the Church is both a part of society and

concurrently distinct from it.[510]

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[507] Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*, 25.

[508] Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, 7-8.

[509] In chapters 2 and 3 in *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, Reinhold Niebuhr investigates the trajectories of influence between individuals and groups as they relate to greater society.

[510] A common phrase demonstrating this theological belief is "In the world, but not of the world," an interpreted paraphrase of Bible verses including John 15:19, John 17:14-16, Romans 12:2, and others.

Within Howard Thurman's theo-ethic, the Church's *ethos*, *logos*, *pathos*, and *theos* should not be overdetermined by society, but should be held in accordance with the religion of Jesus. Utilizing the love-ethic of Jesus, the Church should be attentive to and respond to the world of which they are a part, but the Church's primary determination should come from God and not society. In the religious experience of the divine, one's spirit is healed, rejuvenated, and matured for both personal and societal transformation. For this reason Thurman believed the Church had betrayed its own moral imperatives. Thus, to restate a previous quote,

> Implicit in the Christian message is a profoundly revolutionary ethic. This ethic appears as the binding relationship between [persons], conceived as children of a common . . . God. The ethic is revolutionary because the norms it establishes are in direct conflict with the relationship that obtains between [persons] in the modern world. It is a patent fact that attitudes of fellowship and sympathetic understanding across lines of separateness such as race, class, and creed are not characteristic of our age.[511]

Within Thurman's theo-ethic, the norms of human relationship should be contradictory compared to those within society. Whereas society promotes lines of separation regarding, race, class, and creed, a theo-ethic of reconciliation initiates fellowship and harmony. Where human relatedness in society is often determined by discrimination and injustice, the love-ethic of Jesus teaches neighborliness and justice. For Thurman, the reason the Church has been impotent to deal radically and effectively with injustice and discrimination in society is because it has failed to address injustice and discrimination within its own fellowship, demonstrating the victory of the world over the Church. Thus, the ethical response of the church is to reinstate its norms of human relatedness based upon the love-ethic of Jesus instead of absorbing the norms of the

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[511] Howard Thurman, "Judgment and Hope in the Christian Message," (1948) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 3*, 243.

world. In this, the theo-ethical response to separatism includes reconciliation because, according to Thurman, "the way of reconciliation and the way of love finally are one way."[512]

Unfortunately, the Church has a long way to go to demonstrate this reality. We have much to learn in how to engage, respect, and cooperate with each other, and it is pertinent that we figure out how to live in fellowship with one another in spite of our differences in culture, race, ethnicity, theology, and ritual. As followers of the religion of Jesus, it becomes an ethical imperative to learn to live in *koinonia* with each other – not just some "inner disposition of goodwill . . . toward other members of the group," but active partnership and collaboration in which all involved have something at stake with each other.[513] If the Church can begin to do these things, we will become more and more the embodiment of reconciliation, a more authentic representation of the Body of Christ with all its uniqueness and particularity within an interdependent whole.

Reconciliation was not the *telos* for Thurman but only a necessary step or process on the way to more integrated and cooperative forms of human relatedness which in turn help shift humanity's trajectory toward harmony and wholeness. Reconciliation, in conjunction with liberation and justice, aims toward a more peaceful end. This may sound hopeful or even optimistic, but reconciliation is a hopeful idea; it hopes that our relationships can be better tomorrow than they are today. In many ways, Thurman's hopes were not simply for a better world, but for the best possible world for all humanity – even perfect. As he shares in a lecture,

> [There is] a belief which has to do with the perfection, how to say this, the perfectibility
> of the human spirit in time and space. And it is out of this belief that all of the dreams of
> utopias arise. Over and over again there are these little experimental units within the very
> womb of our society, which try in themselves to anticipate a time when the disorder,

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[512] Thurman, *Disciplines of the Spirit*, 122.
[513] Justo Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 83.

when the disorientation, will be resolved and [people] are living – seek to live – in these little experiments, as in accordance with their dream all [people] will be able to live tomorrow or tomorrow or tomorrow. And this sort of thing is rooted deep in the whole stream not only of our life, but in the common life of [humanity].[514]

Thurman's teleological goals were not some neutral state of relatedness but a vision of a better world for all of humanity. Thurman's vision went **beyond reconciliation**. Instead of maintaining contentious forms or relatedness due to our differences, reconciliation hopes that we can learn to come together in the hopes of harmony. "For Thurman, this was the church's greatest accomplishment, making real, in some small part and in one small place, the 'common desire for a better world.'"[515] Instead of focusing on our differences which divide, in the words of John Dewey, "The emphasis must be put upon whatever binds people together in cooperative human pursuits … and the fuller, freer, intercourse of all human beings with one another."[516]

There is something truly beautiful in the belief that friendship, that connection, that intimacy is not just available but necessary as part of our human condition. There is something profound in the belief that this friendship, this connection, this intimacy is more fundamental to our created beingness than the classifications created by human society. There is something hopeful in the belief that our potential friendships, our potential connections, our potential intimacies are more powerful than the differences which divide us. There is something secure in the belief that God is at the center of all of this. Now, the challenge is to not just believe this but to do it and to be it – with one's head, with one's heart, with one's will – in a world that tells us it is impossible. This is the theo-ethic of reconciliation, and we will forever be indebted to Howard Thurman as a moral witness not only in the pursuit of reconciliation, but as a guide along the

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[514] Howard Thurman, "An Imperative to Understanding," (lecture, Oct 23, 1960, Boston) in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 4*, 291-292.

[515] Fluker, et al., "Biographical Essay," in *The Papers of Howard Washington Thurman, Vol 3*, xliii.

[516] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 98.

journey towards making this world a better place with the hopes of harmony and wholeness for

all who call it home.

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