Religion and Reconciliation: Religious Racial Reconciliation After Events of Black/White Tension

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ABSTRACT

Race and religion have been significant determinants of the life options for Black and white people in America for hundreds of years, yet claims of a post-racial society may not be readily justified. For example, high-profile police-involved shootings of Black men, such as in the case of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge in the summer of 2016, George Floyd in 2020, and other racially generated events, may serve to resurrect the seemingly lingering prominence of this matter. Racial reconciliation is defined as the creation of the beloved community to which Dr. King and others referred, which embraces and values racial differences that seem to divide humanity by engaging in robust interracial togetherness toward the realization of a racially transformed church and community. While there is a great deal of literature about racial reconciliation, many writings are limited conceptually and empirically. To that end, we collected data from individuals involved in religious racial reconciliation efforts in 2020 to address the following research questions: To what extent do religious racial reconciliation efforts increase in the wake of high-profile racialized events? What are the experiences like for African American Christians who take part in religious racial reconciliation? What factors create opportunities for success? Are there barriers that may never be overcome?

KEYWORDS: Religious reconciliation, Racial reconciliation

Race and religion have been significant determinants of the life options and possibilities for Black and white people in America for hundreds of years, yet claims of a post-racial society may not be readily justified. For example, high-profile police-involved shootings of Black men, such as in the case of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge in the summer of 2016, George Floyd in 2020, and other racially generated events, may serve to resurrect the seemingly lingering prominence of this matter. The several recent high-profile police-involved shootings of Black men have propelled Americans to look not only to the government for solutions but also to the faith-based community.

Religious racial reconciliation is defined as the creation of the beloved community to which Dr. King and others referred, which embraces and values racial differences that seem to divide humanity by engaging in robust interracial togetherness towards the realization of a racially transformed church and community. While there is a great deal of literature about racial reconciliation, such writings can be limited. To that end, we examine the following research questions using data collected between 2016 and 2020: To what extent do religious racial reconciliation efforts increase in the wake of high-profile racialized events? What are the experiences that African American Christians who take part in religious racial reconciliation report? What factors create opportunities for success? Are there barriers that may never be overcome?

RACE AND RELIGION

The criminal justice system is not the only area of American society where there is evidence that Black people are unjustly treated (Alexander, 2010). It extends to other areas, including disaster management, as was evidenced during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and more recently the great flood of Baton Rouge (Buras, 2015). These periods demonstrated discriminating resource allocation for housing, education, infrastructure, and business (Kutner, 2007). This was, again, demonstrated by the

recent splitting of Baton Rouge to create the City of St. George. For many years Baton Rouge was led by white politicians who facilitated the control of resources to different areas. The changing population demographic of recent years allowed the Black population to be able to elect leaders from their community. Unable to maintain control of the central budgets and that of the school system, several white-dominated areas began a series of incorporations in the city suburbs. Finally, the city itself was divided into two cities by another white- and wealth-dominated area who gerrymandered their boundaries to exclude minority populations and absorb and consolidate the most viable economic sectors. For some scholars and laypersons, these societal challenges reek of America's long history of attitudes concerning race; for others, race is not considered a factor (Schools, 2021).

Religion has also been shown to be the source of some of these attitudes towards racial segregation. White churches have led the way in leaving their communities to avoid changing populations (Christerson, Edwards, & Emerson, 2005). According to Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith (2000), religion still plays a role in white people's attitudes toward Black people (Emerson & Smith, 2000). For Charles H. Long and other Black scholars, religious influence is not limited to organized religion, nor for that matter does it require gods, creeds, or social institutions. Long defines religion as a means of organizing, making sense of, and finding one's place in the world (Long, 1999). By Long's definition, the ritualistic consistency in the shooting of young Black men and women in the modern era appears to build on the ritual nature of lynching in the sense that lynchings maintained the status of white people as subjects of history, who were dominant, and of Black people as objects (Pinn, 2003).

Consequently, the meaning white people gleaned from lynching and the ritualistic and generational communion it involved made it a deeply religious and spiritual experience for the white people who engaged in it. Indeed, James Cone argues for the reading of the meaning of Christianity in America through black

people on the lynching tree as a metaphor for Jesus on the cross (Cone, 2011). Although reference to religion in the United States most often refers to Christianity, the doctrines of white supremacy that led to rituals like lynching were practiced by members and leaders of the white Christian church, or with their knowledge, silence, and consent (Harlow 1990, 2007).

So deeply has racial identity been associated with the Christian religion that most people still attend a church of predominantly one race today (Chaves, 2017). Seventy-five percent of the more than 300,000 congregations 75% were constituted of 90% one race (Mohamed et al., 2021). Chaves (2017) notes decreases in these sorts of churches and increases in multiracial congregations by 2012 (Chaves, 2017). It should be noted that a so-called increase in diversity in any given congregation is not the same as inclusion, particularly in the case of Black congregants in congregations where Black people do not constitute the majority of the membership or the leadership.

Research has also shown that 63% of Black Christians want to be in a church where people share their race messaging and relate to Black Lives Matter (Mohamed et al. 2021)! Less than half of Black Republicans (43%) attend majority Black congregations (Mohamed et al., 2021). Black Republicans are more likely to attend a majority white congregation than Black Democrats by 22% to 11% (Mohamed et al., 2021).

Many see the trend towards multicultural churches as a good model for racial reconciliation (DeYoung et al., 2003; Emerson & Yancey 2011). Predominantly white churches are more likely to become multiracial than predominantly African American congregations (Chaves, 2017). While whites are very reluctant to serve under Black leadership, Black people are far more open to white leadership. However, the majority of Black Christians believe opposition to racism is an essential part of being a Christian and hold the black Church in high regard for their stance in this area (Mohamed et al., 2021).

Not everyone agrees, however, that multiracial congregations are the answer to the race issue. Scholars like Michelle Oya-

kawa see multiracial congregations as a possible suppressive force against Black voices for social justice (Oyakawa, 2019). Oyakawa's work shows that emphasis on unity and evangelism causes pastors to silence minority concerns about social ills, explaining the lack of attention it commands from many multiracial churches (Oyakawa, 2019), an idea that William R. Jones calls "quietism," a focus on the hereafter that circumvents work to make this world more just and equitable (Jones, 1997).

Racial inequities and injustices are the residual effects of ideas and attitudes like the narrative of racial difference and white supremacy, which originated in part from the historical and contemporary doctrines and religious practices of white churches in America (Harlow, 1990, 2007; Tisby, 2019). Emerson and Smith (2000) write that they are still a part of some religious groups' current attitude (Emerson & Smith, 2000). Therefore, until these ideas no longer have resonance among many within the white community, hopes of a just and equitable nation may not be possible.

RELIGIOUS RACIAL RECONCILIATION: CENTERING THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

There are arguably two key issues which increase the likelihood of fostering better race relations between self-proclaimed Black and white Christians in the wake of high-profile racial events, including the role of social capital in building and doing business in American society and the impossibility of building social capital without meaningful social interaction (Emerson & Yancey, 2011). This is not possible if Black people and white people live and worship in isolation (Emerson & Yancey, 2011). Hence, religious and political reconciliation can play a major part in bridging that gap. Emerson and Yancey are arguing that while the removal of race as a disproportionate predictor of so much ill will and so many obstacles to American progress would benefit both Black and white people, being trapped in their individual perspectives on racial categories robs Black and white people of

the potential benefits of mutual accommodations and resolutions (Emerson & Yancey, 2011). In other words, white people no longer gain unearned benefits, such as wealth, status, and power, while Black people are forced into a perpetual generational feedback of inequality, misery, and despair.

Much focus has been placed on the manifested consequences of racial inequities for Black people, for example, by sociologists; however, not as much focus has been placed on the religious roots of the racialized society or on those who are using reconciliation as one of the toolkits for addressing these inequities (Ellison & Powers, 1994). Additionally, while a lot has been written on race and religion, not much is documented about efforts at undoing the damage, the multi-layered complexity of multigenerational racial, religious, and socioeconomic intersection, or the theories and methodologies used in modern reconciliation efforts (McNeil, 2015; Hill, 2017).

For example, studies of racial reconciliation have not centered African Americans and their experiences and anticipated outcomes but have often assumed that African Americans would be uncritically welcoming of such efforts. The present study supports the argument that African American Christians may have more nuanced views of their Christian identity, which in turn affects their views and involvement with racial reconciliation. Further, while many white Christians may see reconciliation as the sole Christian response to issues of race, Black Christians see reconciliation as only one of many options. Black Christians are more likely to look to institutions beyond the Church to include social institutions, such as the government and the law.

The process of religious racial reconciliation centers around the beloved community of the universal church as an imperative for the transformation of society (Wilson-Hargrave, 2008; Harper, 2008). Reconciliation as the responsibility for the Church began in the middle to late twentieth century, primarily by African American preachers (Emerson & Smith, 2000). Even then it was not widely practiced among Black churches and was mainly

ignored among white churches. It appeared to have reached its peak in the 1990s (Emerson & Smith, 2000). As a result of being confronted by the high-profile race-dominated events like police shootings and disaster responses, many Christians and churches felt pressured into action to help solve the race problem in America as evidenced in the creation of new organizations that were intentional about reaching out to participants from diverse backgrounds (Roach, 2020; Nagar-Rothe, 2015). The extent to which such organizations could serve as a catalyst for transformational racial change is not inevitable.

SOCIAL CAPITAL, CONTACT, AND RELIGIOUS RECONCILIATION

To further examine the possibility or potential for religious racial reconciliation, an understanding of social capital theory and contact theory are important because both may help explain opportunities as well as challenges for racial religious reconciliation, in this case, between Black and white people in this study and beyond.

Social capital that leads to action is a necessary tool or outcome in any discussion or process of race relations, racial conciliation, or reconciliation (Ellison & Powers, 1994; Powers & Ellison, 1995; Emerson et al., 2002). The term *social capital* is not easily defined, largely because of the difficulty in fully understanding the history of the term (Farr, 2004). Indeed, the concept of social capital has been around for a long time, going back as far as Adam Smith and Tocqueville, and is later linked to Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, but is not necessarily defined as a concept (Watson & Papamarcos, 2002; Farr, 2004). In modern times the concept has come to be associated with three primary scholars: Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam (Claridge, 2004).

For many white reconciliation participants and scholars, social capital is merely the existence of associations and relationships, but for Bourdieu and others, social capital is an institutional concept endowed with many benefits for those fortunate

enough be well capitalized (Farr, 2004). Reconciliation's relevance for many black people focuses on the reality that "tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of a people—namely goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families, who make up a social unit, the rural community, whose logical center is the school" (Farr, 2004). For communities and organizations to grow, there had to be an accumulation of capital.

The early understanding of social capital centered on a more formal connectivity to community action. Contrast that with the modern understanding of the concept above, or as articulated by Putnam, "Social capital is built on a foundation of trust, neighborliness and familial bonds" (Watson & Papamarcos, 2002). This is a view not necessarily held by all, but not dissimilar to most. Nonetheless, we are interested in how social capital translates into actions which benefit the in-group. In-group actions have been a part of how America works from the very beginning (Emerson & Yancey, 2011). Accordingly, African Americans have been the historically marginalized group for so long that it is impossible for many not to think in those terms (Cornell & Hatman, 1998; Emerson & Yancey, 2011; Morten, 2018).

Emerson and Yancey point out, "European Americans are still at a privileged position in our society. Modern forms of racism ensure that they will remain there" (Emerson & Yancey, 2011, p. 26). By this, Emerson and Yancey are validating what critical race theorists regard as the second tenet of critical race theory (CRT), "interest convergence" or "material determinism." (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017, p. 20). Delgado and Stefancic in their book, *Critical Race Theory*, explain that "because racism advances the interest of both White elites (materially) and the working-class Whites (physically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it" (Delgado & Stefanic, 2017, p. 9). Contrary to the individualistic frame that many white people may prefer, America has become so racialized that the structures of racism do not require individual action to generate harm (Emerson & Smith, 2000).

Emerson and Yancey use the multicultural church as an example of the mutual-obligation concept they advance. As we will discuss, research into these congregations has shown some of their approaches to be a problem. Nonetheless, as an illustration of an environment which fosters social capital building, this example may be far less convincing or reassuring for Black people. According to a *New York Times* report, the election of Donald Trump in 2016 caused an exodus of African Americans from multiracial churches, especially so-called multiracial churches that were predominately white (Robertson, 2018). Their report quoted Michael O. Emerson as saying, "the election itself was the single most harmful event of the whole movement of reconciliation in the last 30 years" and predicted the dismantling of the process (Robertson, 2018). The near universal consensus on the George Floyd tragedy, and the early condemnation of systemic racism and police brutality in response, by major Evangelicals like Rod Parsley, Andy Stanley, and Robert Morris, whose Gateway church Robertson's *New York Times* article singled out for criticism, may open the door for renewed hope in holistic reconciliation and social capital generation.

The outcome of attitudinal changes, racial harmony, social capital, and prosocial actions, which people who are engaged in religious racial reconciliation hope for, is a deliberate attempt to bring about results, which the contact hypothesis asserts as casual contact or informal and formal opportunities for engagement between diverse groups. Participant scholars see contact theory and to a lesser extent the "love thy neighbor" hypothesis, as the best means of theorizing about religious racial reconciliation (McNeil, 2015).

DATA AND METHODS

The current study is part of a larger qualitative inquiry into the effectiveness of after-tragedy religious reconciliation efforts, from the 2016 Alton Sterling police shooting to the killing of George Floyd. It is a grounded study, using traditional and video eth-

nography, involving participant observation, field notes, video interviews, field surveys, audio recorded interviews, social media posting, radio commentary and official organizational statements. Interviews were planned for the spring and summer of 2020, with reconciliation participants in Prairieview, Texas and Ferguson, Missouri, because religious reconciliation efforts were introduced there in the wake of police shootings. Dozens of Black and white church leaders from traditionally Christian denominations participated in the meetings. We focus here on some of the responses that are helpful in exploring our research questions.

Field notes are an important tool for beginning the capture of local knowledge and indigenous understanding (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, 2011). Field notes were captured and translated into memos and codes. The notes were added to the general data collection to generate into code. Data was also collected using video ethnography at a series of meetings.

For example, a member of the research team attended a Unity Breakfast. The monthly breakfast consisted of four parts. The meal was presented by a different host each month. This was followed by a discussion ritual in which the participants were separated into small groups and given the topics or questions for the day's discussions. Beginning as a sort of ad hoc gathering, these small-group discussions became more organized over time as leaders began to emerge from the groups, which started being moderated by participants, who had shared before and showed some signs of having progressed in their own journey of racial reconciliation.

These discussions became more difficult to capture with field notes, as the participants opened up more and the conversations became livelier and freer flowing. Also, each meeting and each small group developed its own dynamic, which was not always forward-moving but always unique. Progress interviews were conducted with the religious leaders of the Unity Breakfast movement to compare their assessment of the effectiveness and progress of their efforts with leaders of other reconciliation efforts around the city, comparing their methodologies and results against that of the Unity Breakfast.

Other data was generated from 47 comprehensive responses to an online survey, around which active interviews were conducted with other reconciliation principals. Consistent with Kathy Charmaz's findings, the nature of grounded theory did require repeated returns to participants for clarification and meaning (Charmaz, 2014).

Our research approach also included the use of interviews. The use of interviews is a staple of qualitative research and represents the most important measure of people's opinions and attitudes about the issue and practice of reconciliation. For safety and privacy reasons, participants were promised the destruction or encryption of the audio files after the transcripts were made. They were also assured that before its destruction or encryption, access to it would be limited to very few people. Given that video ethnography involves using recordings generated to be used in documentary or clip fashion, participants were always asked about the use of the video camera, gave on-camera authorization to be filmed, and were told how the videos may be used. Very few participants expressed concern or refused to do on-camera interviews. We used two different interview styles, the interactive-relational approach and the interactive oral history. The active interview works very well in situations where the collaboration surrounds the interview itself. In a long-term ethnographic environment, as a participant observer however, interaction is a little more difficult to maintain. Conversations important to data collection occur over longer periods of time and often not in a traditional interview dynamic. The data presented here should lead to additional research about the challenges and opportunities for reconciliation at the intersections of race and religion.

Specifically, we examine how much racial religious reconciliation efforts increase in the wake of high-profile racialized events? What are the experiences like for African American Christians who take part in religious racial reconciliation? What factors create opportunities for success? Are there barriers that may never be overcome? In the next section we analyze selected comments

from prominent group members engaged in the racial religious reconciliation efforts.

FINDINGS

Most participants interviewed, or recorded in small group discussions, said they became involved with racial religious reconciliation because of the events this research examined, particularly the shooting of Alton Sterling. As a result, long-term and substantive relationships have been formed, but not for many participants. I also asked whether employing the "Love thy Neighbor" and contact theory's sustained "intergroup contact" in the wake of racialized events increase the opportunities for success?

Consistent with the literature and the theory, sustained intergroup contact increased opportunities for success but could not overcome the persistent racial divide. In other words, the core identities of the church presented a challenge to reconciliation, because engaging in reconciliation which does not include acknowledgment of the structural nature of race in America represents a betrayal of its community for the Black church, while its inclusion represents the same for large segments of the white church, of which white evangelicals are a prime example.

While Evangelicals may be broadly defined as an example of the evangelical tradition in the Christian church, or according to the teaching of the Gospel, this term has been associated politically to describe many white conservative Christians who are often supportive of members of the Republican party who claim to share similar values reflected in their often overlapping political agendas.

While Evangelicals are not the only Christian group that has embraced what is termed "biblical reconciliation," this group is the main proponent of the concept. The largest Evangelical group in the United States is the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), whose beliefs and practices around engaging in issues of race directly oppose those of the Black church and Black Evangelicals. In fact, the Southern Baptist Convention is well known for its unwillingness to engage with others across denominational

lines, for what might be considered the public or general well-being of the community. Famous for their apology for slavery and Jim Crow practices in the nineties, this group is not only one of the most influential Evangelical groups in the U.S.; it is also the fastest growing segment in the African American community. This has caused some to speculate about whether this is the chief motivation for the apology.

Rev. William Lane is uniquely placed to comment on where the Southern Baptist Convention stands on issues of racial reconciliation. He holds the distinction of being the pastor of both an African American SBC and another church in the National Baptist Convention (NBC). Commenting on the absence of SBC leaders and churches in the post-Alton Sterling efforts at racial reconciliation, he answered:

> Here's what I've discovered about SBC. We are disconnected from the community. We are a church community unto ourselves and we are not engaged in the community at all. That's both at the local level, as well as the state level. We aren't! We're very paternalistic. We keep to ourselves. You can't name one Southern Baptist Church in this area that is a member of any community group. Not one. As a federation of churches and synagogues, they're not there. Regarding Together Baton Rouge, they're not there, okay! The other coalitions around town, you won't find one SBC church. Maybe a Black one but not a White one, no. They just disengage with the community altogether.

His statement, "Maybe a Black one but not a white one," indicates that like his African American Southern Baptist Church, other Black churches, despite their SBC identity, behave as typical Evangelical Black Baptist churches do, but universally not the white ones. The model of reconciliation Evangelicals and other churches espouse works better in the controlled environment of the church.

When asked about how the racial dynamic works within the Southern Baptist Convention, Lane is far more optimistic, because according to him, the apology is genuine as far as racial integration within the Convention and, to a lesser extent, the congregation, but not much farther.

> That's right. The integrated fellowship stops at the church door, okay? I hate to say it, but it's true. Stops at the church door. And, look and they're wonderful inside the church, but beyond that, no, no. It doesn't… And it's not just true here, it's true across the board with SBC. It's true across the board, you know.
>
> One of the things that SBC recognizes, particularly in Louisiana, is that the growth of SBC is with the minority community, not the white community. So, all of their… all the tools are not from the heart. It's from the understanding of where the growth is. Makes sense?
>
> So, as in integrated churches, multi-racial church conventions very seldom adopt or even acknowledge the traditions, histories, unique needs of their minority populations. For them, growth and evangelism trumps every other consideration, which can be painful for minorities within the ranks. . . . Now, what pains me, one of the things that pains me, is that the denomination that I'm a part of, won't join those discussions [Faith led Community uplift]. It pains me.

As Lane and others observe, this approach is becoming more and more counterproductive, as the recent mainstream shift in youth response to George Floyd's death in May 2020 has shown. But at the time of this interview Rev. Lane did not yet know about the Floyd event when he gave this answer to one of my questions about the possible negative long-term effect of this for the convention.

> Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Especially among the young people, okay? Especially among young people. And if we don't change the way we do business and say, "We have done wrong at the national level," if we don't change the way we do business, that decline is not only going to continue, it's going to accelerate.

So, while Rev. Lane accepts the effort of the SBC on race as genuine, he sees it as far from adequate going forward, and this inadequacy, to him, presents a danger for this group he loves. Yet as consequential as Lane sees the entrenched practices as a danger for the convention going forward, he sees the new alliance between major parts of his fellowship, as a major sell-out and compromise for the Evangelical church, as evident in this comment.

> And what has happened on the political scene has not helped that at all. These Evangelicals who have sold out to Trump, man, they're not helping us. Man, I couldn't believe what Jeffress said, pastor of the First Baptist Dallas and Trump repeated his tweet that if Trump is impeached, there may be a civil war. This is a pastor of a mega church. Can you believe that?

For Rev. Lane and others who are involved in the work of racial religious reconciliation, the Evangelical alliance with President Trump seems to offer a major setback that appears surprisingly crippling. But it has, in turn, caused many Black Evangelicals to question the basic assumptions they have made about the nature of race and racism within the church. White respondents, on the other hand, have a far greater fear of other unfolding events and movements occurring in the country, many of which are ultimately linked to secularization and even survival.

The twenty-first century Christian Church in America sees itself as facing existential threats, if not to its existence, then certainly to its fundamental beliefs and doctrines. Black and white Christians are as divided on this as they are on race. But this

explains why it's easy for white churches to encourage evangelism and growth among minorities without feeling any obligations to their temporal state, as Michelle Oyakawa found. Because of this, they view African American Christians' discourse on social justice or issues of race as a form of betrayal in the face of what they consider the real threats, or worse, another example of their superiority to Black men when it comes to Christian devotion. Even in the face of critical race-laced occurrences, white Christians most often see such events as disruptive to unity, or opportunities for the priority of evangelism or spiritual outreach. Luke Liston is a member of the Baton Rouge clergy but is best known for his work with men and is co-founder of the Unity Breakfast. He sees reconciliation as being of mutual benefit in amending the racial divide.

> I would like to see one of the outcomes for the church again, to band together to reach out and offer these young men some proper mentoring-appropriate engagements, that bring them to a better place in their life, whatever that might be. It might be to give them a foundation for what I would call Christ-esteem, Christ in them, who they really are; but also, to give them opportunities that are close to them right now. That could be education, could be training, could be a variety of things. I think the church has all the resources necessary to do that. Now the reason I raise that in the context of this conversation [is], I believe that as we start doing that, that we will see some of the social ills shift. But I think they're going to shift, and I think they're going to shift in a way that will ameliorate some of the tensions that create the racial divide.

Liston is an example of how the white majority is positively benefiting from reconciliation efforts, and at first glance his appears to be a constructive thought, with which few can disagree. Liston's underling argument here is that there is an equal responsibility on both sides, for the existence of the issue of race which led to the slayings like that of Alton Sterling, which is reminis-

cent of Donald Trump's comments after the horrific racial event in Charlottesville (Finley et al., 2020). Secondly, while improving some of the tensions of race is noble, these tensions exist as symptoms of deeper structural problems which cannot be solved by these heretofore unused resources of the church. In other words, it is not possible for the church to treat the symptoms, as a way for it to avoid dealing with its history and current practice of race. It is not simply an opportunity to engage in outreach.

CONCLUSION

In the wake of the killing of George Floyd it appeared to some that racial reconciliation might be possible given the collective outrage from many Black and white people in America and around the globe. Cashing in on the social capital of many white people in America who had historically been on the sidelines during ongoing racial injustices was something that long-term social justice advocates thought might finally become a reality. Some thought this would even be possible among various faith-based communities, including between Black and white self-identified Christians. While the number of racial religious reconciliation efforts and contact between Black and white participants in the present study increased, increasing the quantity of interactions did not necessarily increase the quality.

Moreover, our findings suggested that the experiences of Black Christians, and for many white Christians, is far more complex than much of the literature in the sociology of religion would imply. Further research is required in this area and should include discussion involving groups beyond selected Christian denominations and consideration of other social characteristics, including gender, region, and socioeconomic status.

Nevertheless, because race and religion are such important factors in contemporary America, as they have been in the past, racial religious reconciliation may be more aspirational than attainable. While the current study is not generalizable, it does ask important questions, which contribute to the ongoing debate

about whether or not the subordinate status of Black people in America is indeed permanent, as Derrick Bell (Martin, 2022) and others have argued, or whether an age-old racialized social system can be dismantled through racial religious reconciliation.

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