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African American Church Planters  
in the Presbyterian Church in America

By

Michael Higgins

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE  
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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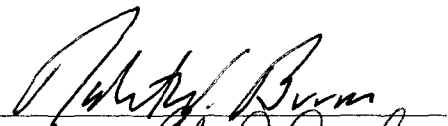
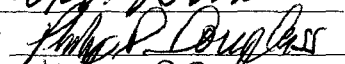
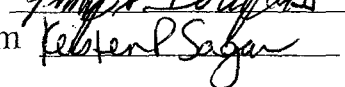
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## ABSTRACT

African American church planters in the Presbyterian Church in America have proven their courage, patience, and willingness to take risks in entering into the leadership and ownership of a predominantly Southern, conservative, and Anglo denomination. The focus of this dissertation was to discover why these men enter the PCA. The findings of this study reveal that these pastors are drawn to the denomination as a result of their love of reformed theology, the divine call to racial reconciliation, and the desire to plant churches as a strategy to build the kingdom of God. They have undertaken a task of which many of the members of the denomination have underestimated the importance and the difficulty. They demonstrate the extreme importance of cultural intelligence, humility, and perseverance.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has fewer than fifty African American pastors.<sup>1</sup> Most of these men came to the PCA from other denominations which were predominantly African American. These pastors attended reformed seminaries or were exposed to reformed theology through either church-based or online training. They were drawn to the PCA for various reasons, which will be brought out in the research questions. Some of these men have attempted or accomplished the task of planting PCA churches. Several of those churches were “particularized” as a result of becoming self-supporting and self-governing. Particularization is synonymous with moving past the “plant” or “mission” status.

However, some African American pastors have failed in their attempts to plant churches. The PCA has an agency called Mission to North America (MNA) that assesses potential church planters in an attempt to determine whether a pastor has the basic spiritual gifts, as well as the necessary emotional and cultural intelligence, to plant a church in a certain location. Even though MNA does perform this important function, there is very little published information available on the experiences of these African American pastors who have gone into the field to plant PCA churches. The MNA website defines the necessary characteristics for church planters. The website states:

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<sup>1</sup> Note: in this dissertation, the word “black” is used interchangeably with the phrase “African American,” and the word “white” is used interchangeably with the words “Caucasian” and “Anglo.”

Planting a new church is a ministry requiring special gifts, abilities, and experiences and calling distinct from typical pastoral ministry. The MNA Assessment Center is a three-day event used to help evaluate interested pastors in the specific competencies for church planting. Some of the competencies include: vital spiritual life, strong prayer life, personal integrity, family life, evangelism, visionary leadership, and preaching.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to be more diverse, the PCA has encouraged minorities to attend seminaries such as Covenant Theological Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary, so that they may become familiar with the doctrines of the Reformed faith. Many of these minority students came to these seminaries with the intention of planting churches. However, most African American seminarians are not members of the PCA, and their church planting “sights” are not focused on the PCA. Therefore, there is a deficit of knowledge on the experiences of African Americans planting churches in this denomination. The researcher in this study wanted to understand whether there are unique challenges that African Americans faced, and if so, how they handled those difficulties. The researcher also wanted to explore whether there is need for the PCA to understand that it may have to make adjustments in how it directs church planting when the lead pastor/planter is an African American.

Wy Plummer, the African American Ministries Coordinator for MNA, explains why the PCA is seeking more African Americans to plant churches. He states,

Through the evangelistic efforts of our churches, the PCA is committed to reaching the multitudes for Jesus Christ and enfolding people of every ethnic group in a desire to more clearly reflect the passage in Revelation, “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”<sup>3</sup>

African Americans are a key segment of this great multitude, yet they are not well

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pca-mna.org/churchplanting/assessmentcenter.php>

<sup>3</sup> <http://pcamna.org/africanamerican/index.php>

represented in the PCA. Of the more than three thousand five hundred PCA pastors, only about one percent is African American. MNA African American Ministries intends to bring in many more and to “facilitate their work in planting a steadily increasing number of PCA churches with the ultimate goal of changing lives, reviving communities, and transforming the culture.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The Problem and Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American pastors have experienced planting churches in the PCA. The following research questions were developed in order to examine this issue:

1. Why do African American pastors join the PCA?
2. How are African American pastors assessed to plant churches in the PCA?
3. What are the cultural challenges within and without the denomination that African American PCA church planters faced?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides information on the experiences and challenges in church planting in the PCA from the perspective of African American church planters. The study will hopefully further educate and sensitize this denomination on key issues from the African American church planter’s perspective. Because there is a lack of information on this topic, it will be a helpful resource for potential African American PCA church planters, for Mission to North America, and for other denominations. The goal of this study was to expose the challenges to starting ethnic churches in denominations like the PCA. It could also help Mission to North America to re-think how it assesses African

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pca-mna.org/africanamerican/index.php>

Americans before hiring them to plant churches. If this study can help increase the success rate of African American church planters, then more African Americans may be drawn into the denomination. This study will hopefully provide information from the heart of the those who have been courageous enough to work outside the denominations that most black Christians have been loyal to for decades and centuries. This study could also be used by other predominantly Anglo denominations that are struggling with the same issues.

### **Definitions of Terms**

1. **Church Planter Assessment** – an evaluation of a person’s call to ministry, vision, skill set and emotional and cultural quotients in order to determine if church planting is the right mission for the person being assessed.
2. **Successful Church Plant** – a mission church that is particularized.
3. **Particular Church** – a church that a presbytery determines has become financially self- supporting and self-governing, with a session of ruling elders elected by the congregation.
4. **Cultural Intelligence (CQ)** – The capacity to understand how one’s cultural background influences your behavior.
5. **Emotional Intelligence (EQ)** – understanding how emotions affect behavior, both personally and interpersonally.
6. **The African American/Anglo “Dance”** – the phenomena that can take place when African Americans and Anglos try to work together in pre-dominantly Anglo organizations where the partners understand the same gospel, but have different cultural perspectives, making the dance feel awkward and challenging.

7. **Reformed Theology** – theology that is based on the Reformation, and is usually described using the TULIP acrostic: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.
8. **Technical Challenges** – challenges that can be resolved by using understandable methods easily available through one's past experiences.
9. **Adaptive Challenges** – challenges that are not resolved through the use of current experiential knowledge. They usually occur slowly over time and involve major changes in behavior, habits, status quo, and values.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American pastors have experienced planting churches in the PCA. This topic has not been explored by the denomination, but it needs to be understood in order for the PCA to successfully answer the biblical mandate of Christian peace and unity found in Ephesians 2:14, which states, “For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”<sup>5</sup> Very little literature exists that directly addresses this topic, so the researcher will cover literature in the following related areas: 1) a biblical/theological framework for the topic, 2) literature that focuses on church planting, 3) literature that focuses on blacks “crossing over” into reformed denominations, 4) literature that focuses on emotional intelligence and literature that focuses on leadership. After reviewing these publications, the researcher will then focus more extensively on literature that provides insight into the path followed by black men who have planted churches in the Presbyterian Church in America.

#### **Biblical Theological Framework**

Psalm 137:1-4 says,

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?

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<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 2:14.

This is thought to be a psalm of lamentations written by Jeremiah during the captivity in Babylon. The distraught captives cannot humor their captors by singing the songs of their God and homeland. For this study, the researcher determined that African Americans have had to adjust to four “strange lands” since their ancestors arrived in the United States. The first “strange land” was the venture from Africa across the Atlantic in the cargo holds of slave ships, where Africans were chained together with eighteen inches of space overhead and no room for movement between their bodies. So many of them died during this sojourn that the living often spent days chained to the dead before separation. In his book, *Before the Mayflower*, Lerone Bennett Jr., a noted black social historian, states in reference to the amount of people dying on these slave ships, “So many people were thrown overboard on slavers that it is said that sharks picked up ships off the coast of Africa and followed them to America.”<sup>6</sup>

The second “strange land” was America itself. Africans did not understand the white man’s language, culture, or customs, and they had probably never been exposed to the crudeness of the type of slavery to which they were being subjected. Families that were intact and survived the Middle Passage were sold piecemeal, and there was nothing to equate their present lives to their former lives in Africa. They were very much like the Jewish captives in Babylon – they had no songs to sing.<sup>7</sup>

The third “strange land” had to do with their white owners’ religion. This religion called Christianity was preached to the slaves to cleanse their souls from the bondage of sin, but not from the bondage of slavery. In *Before the Mayflower*, Bennett explains that

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<sup>6</sup> Lerone Bennett Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America* (New York: Penguin Group, 1962), 49.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on this topic, see Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade: 1440 – 1870* (New York: Simon & Schuster).



laws passed by southern colonies stated, “‘The conferring of baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom.’ After that it was easy. A series of laws stripped black slaves of all rights of personality and made color a badge of servitude.”<sup>8</sup> It is painful, but necessary, to return to the times of slavery to explain this problem. Dr. Carl F. Ellis, an African American pastor in the PCA who has extensively studied the area of black history as it affects church culture, speaks of the difference between what the gospel declares and what slaveholding Christians actually taught in order to keep the Negro in servitude. He calls this perversion of the gospel “Christianity-ism.”<sup>9</sup> In their book *What Color Is Your God?* Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm further explain, “Those who were influenced were taught doctrine designed to support slavery, almost to the exclusion of the historic dogmas of the Christian faith. So, very early in colonial life an intimate and inseparable union between ‘Christianity’ and the institution of slavery was effected.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, for Negro slaves, the church itself was a “strange land” to be navigated and understood, albeit in harsh conditions. But over the passing years and decades, the light of the true gospel become clear and many understood how to sing and preach (sometimes in code) in America under the bondage of slavery. They had navigated the “strange land” of the “white man’s religion,” and it offered the hope of eventual freedom. One can only imagine that scripture, which gave assurance of God’s covenant presence with the Israelites during their captivity under foreign powers, gave hope to the slave. There must have been many discussions of scripture that told how Daniel and the three Hebrew

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>9</sup> Carl F. Ellis Jr., *Free At Last?: The Gospel in the African American Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Columbus Salley and Ronald Behm, *What Color Is Your God?* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press), 20-21.

youth, although living in slavery, conducted themselves as excellent representatives of their holy God before King Nebuchadnezzar, or even how the Apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 9 that “he makes himself a slave to everyone to win them to Christ.” It is this text that leads the researcher to the fourth “strange land” of this study—African Americans who have to learn the “strange” Anglo church culture to be effective church planters in these denominations.

The Apostle Paul states: Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.<sup>11</sup>

### **Church Planting**

Dr. L. Roy Taylor, the present Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church in America, wrote a doctoral dissertation in 1987 entitled, *Flagship Church Planting Strategy for the PCA*. The term “flagship” is defined as “a church in a metropolitan area that is seeking successfully to reach people for Christ, is growing spiritually, numerically, and organizationally, serves as a boot camp of sorts for ministry interns, has an inspirational, motivating influence on other churches and their ministries.”<sup>12</sup> In the dissertation, Dr. Taylor describes what he believes are the important personal traits that a church planter must possess. He defines these traits as “a good self-image, a winsome personality, a balance between sensitivity and forcefulness in dealing with people, be

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-22 (NIV).

<sup>12</sup> Lee Roy Taylor Jr., “A Flagship Church Planting Strategy for the Presbyterian Church in America” (DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1987), 32.

teachable, and a self-starter.”<sup>13</sup> The dissertation looks at the strategies of seven church planting models, with a particular focus on Perimeter PCA Church in Atlanta, which at the dissertation’s writing was a younger multi-site church which experienced diversity in worship, albeit not cultural diversity. Taylor also speaks to the fact that white flight from urban areas impacted where PCA congregations chose to plant churches, usually away from inner city areas. The dissertation is very informative, however there is no mention of African Americans planting churches in the PCA in urban or suburban areas. From what this researcher has come to understand, the reason for this omission may be that at the time of Taylor’s writing, there were only two or three black teaching elders (pastors) in the entire denomination. This literature helps the researcher to understand the “evolution” of the changes in reference to church planting, no matter how slight, that the African American church planters have brought into the PCA.

The next book that speaks to church planting presents a polar opposite to Taylor’s position. This work, which focuses solely on planting black churches, is entitled *Church Planting in the African American Context*, by Hozell C. Francis. Francis, who is a Baptist pastor, attended Talbot School of Theology and employed noted black evangelical Tony Evans to critique his text before submitting it for publication. This book is a primer for any African American pastor who is interested in planting black churches in the black community, where worship is informed by the traditional black church’s past. This book was not written for black church planters who want to plant Reformed churches or for those who want to plant churches that represent Anglo denominations. Certain portions of the book speak to the importance of contextual relevance during the process of planting

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 65-67.

black churches. This is an issue that African American church planters have to face if they want their PCA church plants to reach their own race. Francis states,

Unfortunately, if the African American church planter fails to understand the importance of contextual relevancy, considerable frustration will result from his attempt to establish a church. Simply because a person lives within a geographical area does not necessarily insure a proficient working knowledge of the social imperatives of the people in that area. This applies even if the church planter is of the same ethnic group as they are.<sup>14</sup>

This text, which was written in 1999, is valuable because it addresses why the masses of blacks continue to see the black church as an institution that should not be destroyed, or for some, even integrated. This dynamic may not have been a cause of tension when the African American PCA church planters started planting. However, it may become a sign of failure if they cannot reach their own people with the doctrines of the Reformation.

A myriad of books have been written on church planting, but hardly any of them focus on African Americans—especially in predominantly Anglo denominations. For example, books on cross cultural church planting tend to focus on whites planting churches with blacks, other minority people groups, or people in other countries. David J. Hesselgrave's *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally* is a helpful text that explains how the Apostle Paul went about planting churches. However, the book's central focus is on planting churches amongst unreached people groups who are not familiar with the gospel, both in America and/or in other countries. There is no mention of African Americans doing anything in this book. Another book that sounded promising was *How to Plant Churches*, edited by Monica Hill. However, this text focuses on planting churches in Great Britain.

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<sup>14</sup> Hozell C. Francis, *Church Planting in the African American Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 21.

It appears that African Americans need to enter into this conversation and let their voices be heard, since the texts that address this topic are not race-specific, which may be a problem in itself. The few church planting texts that address black pastors all focus on planting black churches in urban areas. However, the majority of texts that emerged focused on race relations, racial and cultural reconciliation, and black/white struggles within the church. Very little material was found on black pastors planting churches in predominantly Anglo denominations. Key sources include Michael J. Cox and Joe Samuel Ratliff's book, *Church Planting in the African American Community*. This a helpful resource, but it does not speak directly to the topic of this study. Cox and Ratliff address key considerations that sponsoring churches must address before attempting to plant churches in the black community. However, their text does not speak directly to the experiences of African American church planters, who operate within the "footprint" of a predominantly Anglo conservative reformed denomination. In fact, this text reinforces the need for information on the subject. A bibliography of resources related to religion in black America is included at the end of this book. These resources are commendable and insightful. However, even a cursory scan of these resources indicates a dearth of information on church planting and growth in the black community.<sup>15</sup> This statement reinforces the problem and the need for the focus of this particular study, which looked at African American pastor experiences in the PCA.

In their book, *Divided by Faith*, Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith address the racial divisions that exist in the church. They highlight the need for "ingroups" to define themselves by using the characteristics of "outgroups." In their chapter entitled

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<sup>15</sup> Michael J. Cox and Joe Samuel Ratliff, *Church Planting in the African American Community* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2002), 15.

“The Organization of Religion,” they state, “In many respects, we know who we are by knowing who we are not. Thus, an ingroup always has at least one outgroup by which it creates identity. Blacks are not whites, Lutherans are not Presbyterians, evangelicals are not mainline Christians, and Carolina Tar Heels are not Duke Blue Devils.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, one can understand the increased difficulty for African Americans who have left their so-called black cultural “ingroup” to plant churches that represent the doctrines of the white evangelical “outgroup.” So how did the few African Americans who have embraced Reformed theology hear about it? And why have they chosen to become “counter-cultural” in the black community by operating in and planting churches in denominations like the PCA?

### **Blacks “Crossing Over” into Reformed Denominations**

Anthony Carter, an African American pastor who graduated from Reformed Theological Seminary, has written a book entitled *Experiencing the Truth: Bringing the Reformation to the African American Church*. Carter, who was influenced and encouraged by the teaching of R.C. Sproul, is not a part of the PCA. However, he is planting a cross-cultural reformed church in a suburb of Atlanta. His book criticizes some of the theology and worship of black churches in America and explains why reformed theology is needed in these churches. He states:

The predominantly black church in America has been a great assessor of preaching ability. Very few men with any promise at public oration have escaped the church’s attempts of getting them to the pulpit. Subsequently, very few black churches have lacked for men with speaking ability. No, the predominantly black church has not lacked men with style; what is lacking, however, is substance.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford Press, 2000), 143.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Carter, *Experiencing Truth: Bringing the Reformation to the African-American Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 56.

Carter's book serves as a strong testimony regarding the need for orthodoxy in the African American church. But some of his assertions are too general in nature, since not every non-reformed black church is in error, or merely concerned about style. Carter is an example of why some black men come to the reformed faith – they are fed up with the lack of sound teaching in their church experience. Although he is not in the PCA, Carter fits the profile of many African American church planters who desire to bring reformed faith to the urban and suburban areas where they are called to start churches. These men are especially eager to bring the reformed faith to the blacks who live in those communities.

Another book, entitled *Glory Road*, which was edited by Anthony Carter, shares the story of ten African American pastors who discovered, grasped, and preached reformed doctrines in their churches. The book is dedicated to R.C. Sproul. These ten pastors tell their story, which to them is a journey of God's sovereignty in bringing them into the reformed faith. Carter's reason for compiling these accounts is to show the reader that African Americans are making their way into the PCA according to God's sovereign plan. Carter makes the case for the reformed faith and for the need to see the reformers as the spiritual ancestors of African American reformed believers. In the "Afterword" of the book, Carter explains how a reformed black person should understand their new heritage. He states, "It means our heroes are not only men like Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington, but they are also, and to some degree even more so, Martin Luther and John Calvin... We understand that we have as much in common with Martin Luther as we do

with Martin Luther King.”<sup>18</sup> This book is good news for the racial reconciliation of the church, and the in-depth autobiographical data in each story provided a lot of material as the researcher looked at the motivations of the participants in this study for coming into the PCA. However, only three of the men mentioned in this book minister in the PCA, and only one has planted a PCA church.

Other books examined for this study do not focus on Christianity, but nonetheless serve the purpose of helping the reader understand race and cultural issues, leadership dynamics, emotional and cultural intelligence, and what some of the researcher’s colleagues call the African American/Anglo “dance.” It is a dance because both partners have to learn how to move in harmony with one another, and although both partners are listening to the song (the gospel) culturally and racially, they may be hearing a different tune.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the ability to control one’s emotions. The term emotional intelligence was first used in the 1980’s in a doctoral dissertation by Wayne Leon Payne called *A Study of Emotion: Developing Emotional Intelligence*.<sup>19</sup> In 1995, Daniel Goleman wrote a book entitled *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, which this study employed to help the researcher understand how EQ affected African American church planters as they dealt with the internal struggles they faced during their work to establish these churches. In the chapter entitled “Know Thyself,” Goleman discusses the importance of self-awareness. He states,

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<sup>18</sup> Anthony Carter, *Glory Road: The Journeys of 10 African Americans into Reformed Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), 176.

<sup>19</sup> W.L. Payne, (1983/1986). A study of emotion: developing emotional intelligence; self integration; relating to fear, pain and desire. Dissertation Abstracts International, 47, p.203A (University microfilms No. AAC 8605928).



Aware of their moods as they are having them, these people understandably have some sophistication about their emotional lives. Their clarity about emotions may undergird their personality traits: they are autonomous and sure of their own boundaries, are in good psychological health, and tend to have a positive outlook on life. When they get into a bad mood, they don't ruminate and obsess about it, and are able to get out of it sooner. In short, their mindfulness helps them manage their emotions.<sup>20</sup>

During the interviews, the researcher focused on how these church planters handled their emotions, and whether prior to starting this endeavor, both they and MNA affirmed that they were emotionally equipped to enter the field as church planters. This study also focused on how the emotional intelligence of the African American church planters affected their leadership styles when challenges arose during their church planting phase.

As a result of the study's inclusion of the dynamics of emotional intelligence, this researcher believed that it was important to ask how some "black" theologies have emerged from emotions, including feelings of anger and oppression from past experiences. But what is "black theology?" The term was first defined in a statement at the National Committee of Black Churchmen in 1969. The statement was as follows:

Black theology is a theology of liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black theology is a theology of "blackness." It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says "No" to the encroachment of white oppression.<sup>21</sup>

Of special consideration is what is known as Black Liberation Theology. Dr.

Anthony Bradley, an African American scholar who holds a PhD from Westminster

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence; Why it can matter more than IQ* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 48.

<sup>21</sup> James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume I: 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 101.

Theological Seminary, has written a book entitled *Liberating Black Theology*, in which he discusses how the term “liberation theology” applies to black theology. He explains, “Black theology begins with the life experience of oppression and formulates theology respectively. The overall emphasis of liberation theology is the black struggle for liberation from various forms of white racism and oppression, and it views the imperatives of the Christian gospel to that end.”<sup>22</sup> James Cone, who is arguably the most well-known black liberation theologian, states in his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, that “White theology is not Christian theology at all.”<sup>23</sup>

The researcher believes that there are aspects of emotional intelligence at work in the development of these types of theologies. Therefore, it is important to know whether John McWhorter’s “Cult of Victimology” is at work in the emotions of the black church planter. As stated by Bradley in his book, victimology is “a subconscious, culturally inherited affirmation that life for blacks in America has been in the past and will be in the future a life victimized by the oppression of whites.”<sup>24</sup> As the American military would say, “It’s just SSDD—same ‘stuff’ different day.” If African American church planters are influenced by the teachings of theologians like James Cone, they may have unknowingly set themselves up for emotional challenges simply because they felt that one of their church plants’ main goals was to set the black man free from racism and oppression, but the PCA didn’t understand or consider that an important issue.

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<sup>22</sup> Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 19.

<sup>23</sup> James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 19.

## Leadership

Other resources address leadership from a secular point of view, but many of their principles transcend the divide between the sacred and the secular. Therefore, they may provide insight into how the effective church planters worked their way through the challenges they encountered. One such book is *Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, written by Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, all of whom are Harvard University instructors and experts in the art of negotiation. The heart of the book deals with how to do principled negotiation, which is defined as “looking for mutual gains whenever possible, and that where your interests conflict, you should insist that the result be based on some fair standards independent of the will of either side.”<sup>25</sup> This book further informs the study that no matter what the context of the discussion, the negotiator (church planter) must recognize that people bring their emotions and positions with them, and that they want to get these needs addressed in a way that they don’t feel cheated when the deal is done. Therefore, the negotiator must “invent options for mutual gain.”<sup>26</sup>

*Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*, by Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, who both serve on the faculty of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, is helpful to this study because it offers insight into the need for leaders who are experiencing a crisis to step back, separate themselves, and get a better view of what is actually taking place. The authors describe this action as “getting on the balcony,” comparing the leadership crisis to a dance that is best understood from a higher vantage point. They state,

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<sup>25</sup> Bruce Patton, Roger Fisher, and William Ury, *Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), xviii.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment. The only way to gain a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray. Otherwise, you are likely to misperceive the situation and make the wrong diagnosis, leading you to misguided decisions about whether and how to intervene. If you want to affect what is happening, you must return to the dance floor.<sup>27</sup>

The value of this text is that it affirms the fact that new endeavors (in our case black church planters operating in a predominantly Anglo denomination) will probably stir some to discomfort and possibly lead to a leadership crisis (within the heart of the planter, his family, or those from his race/culture). Unfortunately, there may be times when the church planting team will itself be the source of the crisis. Although not a Christian text, this book does contain principles that should benefit this study's attempt to understand the leadership challenges and dynamics inherent to the given problem statement. The book also offers a variety of actions that can be taken by leaders to get a clearer view of what the real issues are within the group.

*Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, was written by Dean Williams, who, like Heifetz and Linsky, serves on the faculty of Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. This book gives advice on how to lead people through six demanding leadership scenarios. Williams identifies the six challenges, all of which require "real leadership," as "activist," "developmental," "transition," "maintenance," "creative," and "crisis" leadership challenges. Williams believes the model for real leadership must shift from the dynamic of "leader-follower and goal to the dynamic of leadership-group and reality."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 53.

<sup>28</sup> Dean Williams, *Real Leadership: Helping People and Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2005), 5.

This study examined whether the church planters employed the help of a core group/leadership team or whether they worked alone. Church planters ultimately have to lead people through a transitional challenge, since they will be forming a new congregation. However, whether these new congregants are non-believers, new believers, or seasoned church goers, there will be a need to make adjustments to the vision of the church pastor. Whether the church planter has a leadership core group or not, he has the responsibility of being the vision-caster, and the group will look to him to make key decisions.

Speaking of authority figures in transitional leadership challenges, Williams states,

At times it is a burden for the chief authority figure and his or her team to be the symbolic representation of the transition promise, particularly when every aspect of the leader's behavior is scrutinized and assigned meaning by the group, but it is essential for the transitional challenge—one from which the leader cannot and should not flee—nor is it a role that can be completely delegated.<sup>29</sup>

Some of these decisions will involve what Williams calls adaptive challenges. He explains, “An adaptive challenge is a problem that does not subside even when management applies the best-known methods and procedures to solve the problem. Generally, the resolution of an adaptive challenge requires a shift in values and mindsets.”<sup>30</sup> The researcher in this study sought to learn how church planters took the necessary steps to help people shift their thinking when unforeseen events dictated an adaptive change to the church planting strategy.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>30</sup> Dean Williams, *Real Leadership*, 7.

## Why Would a Black Man Plant A Church in the Presbyterian Church in America?

In September 2011, Wy Plummer, Coordinator of African American Church Planting for Mission to North America (MNA), the agency of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) that assesses church planters, released a report assessing the success of black church planters in the denomination. The report stated:

Surprisingly, our track record in planting so-called traditional African American churches has not been great. One example was our attempt to plant such a church in a suburban community outside of Washington DC. Prince George's County in Maryland seemed like the ideal place to plant a black church. It was one of the fastest growing, upwardly mobile, middle class African American communities in the country. Our assumption was that we could use our usual church planting strategy to plant a church there: gather a small group of interested families, start an outreach Bible study, and let the work grow. Once the core group grew to 50 people, the church would begin worshiping in rented space at a neighborhood school. Unfortunately, after seven years of worshiping in a local elementary school cafeteria the core group never grew much beyond 60-70, and today the church no longer exists.

What happened? We are not quite sure. Some of our other attempts at planting African American churches have not fared much better. We have successfully planted some black churches (there are five such churches in the PCA) and we have been better at planting multiethnic churches. In fact, our biggest church planting "successes" have come through African American church planters developing multiethnic churches. But these churches tend to be predominately white with slowly growing numbers of black congregants. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it fails to address the question of whether we can or should start churches that specifically target African Americans. And it leaves major segments of black population unreached because they will never attend a multiethnic church.<sup>31</sup>

In the *New York Times Book Review*, dated October 23, 2011, Garrison Keillor wrote a review of Harry Belafonte's autobiography, *My Song*. As Keillor addressed Belafonte's religious upbringing, he quoted Belafonte as saying, "His mother found refuge in the Catholic Church. The Holy Roller preachers of her native Jamaica were too

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<sup>31</sup> Wy Plummer, "PCA African American Church Planting," <https://mail.google.com/mail/?shva=1#inbox/132709fbf927c0d5> (accessed September 20, 2011).

‘niggerish’ for her. She loved the marble majesty of Catholicism and sent the boy off to parochial school to suffer at the hands of the nuns...<sup>32</sup>

As previously discussed, one of the challenges of addressing this topic as a dissertation is the limited body of literature addressing the issue of black pastors starting churches in predominantly white denominations. Due to this lack of material specific to the topic, this section of the literature review will discuss texts and articles that speak to church planting in black contexts, planting churches in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America texts on being black and Presbyterian, music and worship in the black church as opposed to that of the white church, racial reconciliation, the historical, racial, and cultural struggles in America’s past, and church and secular leadership. These materials should help the reader understand the experiences of the church planters who are the focus of this dissertation.

The reader will notice that some subsections of this topic are significantly larger than others. The main reason for this occurrence is that some issues, such as racial reconciliation, warrant more attention because they are at the heart of the issue of black pastors overcoming the difficulty of grasping the doctrine of the Reformation and identifying with Presbyterianism. To those who know African-American history, Presbyterianism has been a “bedfellow” with slavery and racism. To a black person, the process of being trained at a predominantly white seminary, passing a presbytery exam, and ultimately leaving the safest and strongest black institution in America, the black church, involves strong racial implications. When the notion of planting a PCA church is added to the equation, those involved have no option except to address the church’s race

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Shnayerson, “My Song By Harry Belafonte.” *New York Times Book Review*, October 23, 2011, 14.

problems. The lack of racial diversity in PCA congregations may be hiding under the disguise of cultural preference to worship style or something to that nature, but whatever it may be called, it is still a source of segregation, especially between blacks and whites. Therefore, this section contains a large body of materials on this topic as an effort to explore the problem at its core.

There is also a large subsection on black theology. This section is so large because there is a dearth of knowledge as to what is meant by the term “black theology,” why blacks need or embrace it, how past racism brought about this way of interpreting the scriptures, and how might it impact the thinking of the black church planter and his congregation. Many believe that black theology, which many would call liberation theology, is a reaction to the racism of the white church.

This section will interact with texts, articles, publications, and letters to explore how and why black men undertake the difficult task of planting evangelical and Presbyterian churches. The literature will be reviewed in an “evolutionary” order, and the texts will be allowed to “speak” to each other. The following eleven subsections will mark the path of these church planters:

1. The African Slave and White Christianity
2. The Beginnings of the Black Church
3. Black Music and Worship
4. Black Theologies
5. The “Moderate White” Church and the Civil Rights Struggles in America
6. Racial Reconciliation and Cultural Intelligence
7. Black Preaching and Reformed Theology



8. Reformed Theology and the Expository Sermon
9. Church Government, Leadership, and Conflict Management
10. Black Presbyterians
11. Church Planting

How and why would the descendants of negro slaves plant churches under the “tent” of a denomination that is predominantly controlled and populated by the descendants of their enslaved ancestors’ masters? The black church developed out of a specific cultural and theological context. The black church planter has to deal with a plethora of past, present, and future concerns and emotions of black people. These texts were selected to help the reader understand the complexities of this important task.

### **The African Slave and White Christianity**

In his essay entitled, “Make Good Use of Your Servitude: Some Observations on Biblical Interpretation and Slavery,” Michael Marlowe states,

If there is anything in the Bible that makes modern people nervous, it is its treatment of slavery. Slavery is humanely regulated in the legal portions of the Old Testament, and in the epistles of the New Testament slaveholders are exhorted to show kindness to slaves, but nowhere in the Bible is there anything which can be interpreted as a disapproval of the institution as such.<sup>33</sup>

Leviticus 25 refers to “slaves” or “servants,” which modern readers know to be Hebrews who agreed to give up their normal rights as a result of poverty, and were to be treated well as hired servants and released in the Year of Jubilee. There were also cases where families bought foreigners to serve as slaves. In all such cases, there is no indication that God ever approved any harsh or inhumane treatment of these individuals.

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Marlowe, “Make Good Use of Your Servitude: Some Observations on Biblical Interpretation and Slavery,” (October 2003), <http://www.bible-researcher.com/slavery.html> (accessed September 11, 2011).

The New Testament also addresses slavery. For example, Colossians 3:22

4:1 states,

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.<sup>34</sup>

Paul's ultimate call to the black Christian – during times of slavery as well as now -- is to see God as master of all. This implies that God is in control of history and justice.

Hundreds of years of forced servitude based on color are not easy to forget or forgive, even for a Christian; it is still a struggle for many blacks. The abolition of slavery and the Civil War left a bad taste in the mouths of many who lost loved ones, especially in the South. This eventually led to a failed Reconstruction, Jim Crowism, and overwhelming racism on the part of both blacks and whites.

There is much evidence that the scriptural command that slaves obey their masters was used by white Christian slave masters to keep the slaves from seeking freedom.

Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass expressed the difference between the Christianity of Christ and the Christianity of America, stating,

Between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference—so wide, that to receive the one as good, pure, and holy, is of necessity to reject the other as bad, corrupt, and wicked. To be the friend of one, is of necessity to be the enemy of the other. I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land. Indeed, I can see no reason, but the most deceitful one, for calling the religion of this land Christianity. I look upon it as the climax of all misnomers, the boldest of all frauds, and the grossest of all libels.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Colossians 3:22-41.

<sup>35</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (New York: New American Library, 1968), p. 120.

In *The Decline of African American Theology: from Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity*, Thabiti M. Anyabwile makes a comment that sums up the Negro's struggle to recover his humanity. He states,

Nearly all the controversies from the early church fathers through the Reformation concentrated on the spiritual nature of man and rarely focused on the kind of ethical applications of anthropology relevant to the experience of Africans in America. That theological contribution remained for African Americans to make in defense of their humanity. The two hundred year war between African Americans and white Americans over the humanity of African descent peoples represented the most prolonged and significant theological encounter between the two groups.<sup>36</sup>

Slaves in antiquity were usually acquired during war. The victor took the spoils, which almost always included people. Romans inherited the institution of slavery from the Greeks and the Phoenicians. As the Roman republic expanded outward, entire populations were enslaved, thus creating an ample supply of human labor to work in the nation's farms and households.<sup>37</sup> Slavery also existed in Africa. The New York Public Library's African American Desk Reference states,

Slavery in Africa began in ancient times, as it did in every other part of the inhabited world. Throughout African history, there were three main ways in which an individual could become enslaved: (1) capture during warfare or raids; (2) punishment for specific crimes, principally murder, adultery, sorcery, and treason; and (3) voluntary slavery, a rare and less severe form of servitude that usually occurred in times of famine, when those on the verge of starvation might sell themselves or their children to wealthier individuals, ensuring their survival...On the whole, there was no slave class in African societies.<sup>38</sup>

Generally, slaves were not considered inferior beings, but rather individuals who had suffered misfortune and were thus confined to a lower social role.

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<sup>36</sup> Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *The Decline of African American Theology: from Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007), 101.

<sup>37</sup> Philip Koslow, ed., *African American Desk Reference* (New York: The Stonesong Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

The New Testament indicates that Paul accepts slavery as a necessary component of the Roman culture, and he assumes the property right of the slave-owner.<sup>39</sup> However, in the book of Philemon, he recognizes the slave as a brother in Christ, who should receive both forgiveness and Christian friendship.<sup>40</sup> In Christ, Paul suggests that neither bondage nor freedom has any real significance. In Galatians 3:28, he states, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>41</sup> It is unclear whether Paul wants all slaves to be free, even though he seems to suggest that they try to change their status in I Corinthians 7:20-21, where he states, “Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him. Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.”<sup>42</sup>

Indentured servitude was another common form of slavery throughout history. In his sermon entitled, “*Servants and Masters*,” Tim Black discusses this type of bondage, explaining,

There are several ways people can become slaves, each leading to a somewhat different kind of slavery...First, a person may be unwilling or unable to work. Inability is not a sin but unwillingness is. The poor are often victims of both problems, and regardless, are unable to pay their bills. The man may voluntarily sell himself completely, or until his debt is paid off. The man may become an indentured servant, meaning he contracts to serve for a temporary time, usually in return for travel, food, and housing expenses.<sup>43</sup>

Slavery is more than a physical condition that is experienced by an unfortunate few. Rather, it is a spiritual condition that afflicts the entire human race with the sins of

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<sup>39</sup> Philemon 14.

<sup>40</sup> Philemon 16.

<sup>41</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>42</sup> I Corinthians 7:20-21.

<sup>43</sup> Tim Black, “*Servants and Masters*,” *Always Reformed* (July 2007),

<http://www.alwaysreformed.com/home/sermons/73-col322-41.html> (accessed June 10, 2010).

rebellion and idolatry—every human being is born a slave to sin, and all worship false gods.<sup>44</sup> Timothy Keller, in his book, *Counterfeit Gods*, states, “To practice idolatry is to be a slave.”<sup>45</sup> Slaves need redemption, and God has given Jesus as the payment for humanity’s freedom from the sin and power of rebellion and idolatry. In *The Cross of Christ*, John Stott references the gospel of Mark when discussing redemption from slavery. He states, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (NIV, Mark 10:45).”<sup>46</sup> The imagery implies that we are in a captivity from which only the payment of a ransom can set us free, and that the ransom is nothing less than the Messiah’s own life. Our lives are forfeit; his life will be sacrificed instead.”<sup>47</sup>

Black church planters must maintain a theocentric focus when dealing with issues like Negro slavery. This will help them to avoid the temptation to focus only on the condition of the slaves and their earthly owners, thereby missing the point that God is in control.

### **The Beginnings of the Black Church**

The black church is not an establishment or creation of the Negro slave. No institution so powerful could be started by such a powerless group of people. It had to be started by whites as a result of the segregation and dehumanization of the Negro. Thabiti M. Anyabwile’s book *The Decline of African American Theology: from Biblical Faith to Cultural Captivity* traces the evolution of the black church. Anyabwile begins with the

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<sup>44</sup> Romans 6.

<sup>45</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 24.

<sup>46</sup> *New International Version of the Bible*. The Committee on Bible Translation. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.

<sup>47</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1986) 177.

point at which the Negro slaves first heard the gospel, which Carl Ellis, a black pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America would call “Christianityism.”<sup>48</sup> Anyabwile then discusses how this exposure to the gospel, coupled with the institution of slavery, served to enhance the development of the black church. This book is important because it explains the historical “evolution” of the black church, identifies the black theologians who positively and negatively impacted the black church, affirms those things in the black church context that glorify God, and points out the backsliding of the black church into an institution that, in his opinion, is becoming more focused on social and political issues than the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup>

Anyabwile discusses men such as Jupiter Hammon, Lemuel Haynes, Daniel Alexander Payne, James Cone, Howard Thurman, and other important black theologians. It is of special note that Hammon, Haynes, and Payne, although ministering in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, were all Calvinists that were greatly influenced by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. In speaking of Haynes, Anyabwile states, “Owing largely to his Puritan-like experiences with the Rose family and his admiration of Whitefield and Edwards, Haynes adopted a decidedly Calvinistic theology. Calvinism was typical of African American writers during Haynes’ lifetime.”<sup>50</sup>

In reference to his own attempt to explain the beginnings of the black church, Anyabwile states,

The present work attempts to trace the development of American theology from its earliest manifestations in the slave narratives, slave songs, sermons and popular writings from the 1700s to current reflections and contributions. The white evangelical church of the 1700s is largely credited with giving birth to the

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<sup>48</sup> Carl F. Ellis Jr., *Free At Last? The Gospel in the African American Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 20.

<sup>49</sup> Thabiti M. Anyabwile, 18.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

African American church in the plantation south. Missionaries and evangelists associated with Baptist and Methodist churches were the first to make successful inroads into the religious lives of African Americans. Contrary to what might be supposed, given the prohibition of education, reading and writing among slaves, early black Christians evidenced a rather sophisticated and clear theological corpus of thought. This clarity of early theological insight produced perhaps the most authentic expression of Christianity in American history, forming the basis for the African American church's engagement in both the propagation of the gospel and social activism.<sup>51</sup>

However, just as Anyabwile acknowledges the hand of God in the genesis of the black church, which seems to rise up out of the ashes of slavery, the author also addresses the beginning of the church's "slide" into secularization. He says that secularization has caused people to view the black church as more of a social and political solution to the race's problems than as a spiritual institution. He argues, "As secularization took root, the predominant framework for understanding the African American church shifted from theology to sociology and was influenced by the work of W.E.B. DuBois, E. Franklin Frazier, and others."<sup>52</sup> According to Anyabwile, this started a theological shift in the church and degraded her attempt to remain God-centered.<sup>53</sup> He further laments,

As a result of the theological drift and erosion, the black church now stands in danger of losing its relevance and power to effectively address both the spiritual needs of its communicants and the social and political aspirations of its community. In effect, cultural concerns captured the church and supplanted the biblical faithfulness that once characterized it.<sup>54</sup>

In his book *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. Dubois wrote a chapter entitled, "The Faith of Our Fathers," in which he explains the importance of the black church to many of its members. He elaborates,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>53</sup> This statement echoes Anthony Bradley's opposition to Black Liberation Theology—that it exalts the condition of the race over the words of the God of the race—blackness becomes greater than the scriptures.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 18.

The Negro church today is the social center of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character. Take a typical church in a small Virginian town: it is the "First Baptist"—a roomy brick edifice seating hundred or more persons, tastefully finished in Georgia pine, with a carpet, a small organ, and stained-glass windows. Underneath is a large assembly room with benches. This building is the central club-house of a community of a thousand or more Negroes. Various organizations meet here—the church proper, the Sunday-school, two or three insurance societies, women's societies, secret societies, and mass meetings of various kinds.<sup>55</sup>

DuBois saw that the church was used for more than just preaching the gospel. Indeed, it was the key space for generation of social change among black folks.

Anyabwile placed E. Franklin Frazier together with W.E.B. DuBois, as those who celebrated the fact the black church was becoming just as much as a social-political conduit as it was a religious refuge for the Negro. Frazier was an African American sociologist mentored by DuBois who ultimately wrote nine books and over one hundred articles on black sociological issues. In *The Negro Church in America*, published in 1964, Frazier seemingly contradicts Anyabwile's insinuation that he and DuBois were proponents of the black church's slide from a religious to a social-political organization. He claims that he is not pushing for a secular agenda, but rather reporting the social conditions that he has observed.

In the book's chapter entitled, "Negro Religion in the City," Frazier explains what happened to black churches in cities when, during World War One, blacks left the South to work in northern industries hungry for workers. He says that a result of this migration was that blacks began to experience more economic and political power. Frazier reports,

A more important indication of the growing secularization of Negro churches has been their interest in the affairs of the community. The interest in the affairs of the community included recreational work and contributions to the work of a social welfare agency like the National Urban League or organizations fighting for civil

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<sup>55</sup> W.E.B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1904), 117.



rights like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. This new direction of interest in worldly affairs was more strongly indicated by the nature of the sermons of the ministers and their leadership in political affairs in which their church members actively participated.<sup>56</sup>

Although he understood the changing dynamics of the black church as black folks made “progress,” Frazier also saw that the growing black middle class was caught between their rejection of the Negro slave past that they wanted to leave behind and their own rejection by a dominant white society. Frazier makes his lament known in the conclusion of the book, where he states,

In its efforts to escape from its frustrations and dilemmas the new Negro middle class sometimes abandons religion altogether but more often shifts its affiliation from church to church or from one religious fad to another. Sometimes they became interested in “spiritual” and psychic phenomena and other forms of superstition including depending upon luck or chance. However, to the extent that they are truly assimilated in the culture of the white middle class, they experience the same religious doubts and dilemmas as whites of the same class.<sup>57</sup>

Here, the author is explaining that although the church was once the place where the Negro could find refuge, it had lost its importance for many who were assimilating white middle-class values. This presents a question for black church planters, who may find themselves ministering to congregations of black middle class congregants that want to be accepted on the same status as a white middle class congregation. This raises an important question: “Why do some black folks want to be Presbyterians? Are they trying to culturally assimilate, or do they believe that being Presbyterian is better than being Baptist or Pentecostal?”

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<sup>56</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (Liverpool: Schocken Books, 1963), 56.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

## Black Music and Worship

Some black church planters may not want to worship in the traditions of their “fathers.” However, it may be advantageous for them to be familiar with the black church’s worship culture, since many potential congregants may assume that they celebrate this culture. People may even choose a black man in the PCA for their pastor because they wish to have a black church experience that is coupled with reformed doctrine.

In his 1903 book, *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois argues,

Those who have not thus witnessed the frenzy of a Negro revival in the untouched backwoods of the South can but dimly realize the religious feeling of the slave; as described, such scenes appear grotesque and funny, but as seen they are awful. Three things characterized this religion of the slave: the Preacher, the Music, and the Frenzy. The Preacher is the most unique personality developed by the Negro on American soil.<sup>58</sup>

It is important to understand these deeply rooted characteristics of Black worship. These characteristics are common in many of the former denominations of most of the black churchmen who enter into the PCA and the reformed movement. While these churchmen have come to love reformed doctrine, they often miss the music and the frenzy that is not represented in most churches of the reformed tradition.

*Readings in African American Church Music and Worship*, compiled and edited by James Abbingtion, is a wonderful source for black church planters and anyone else interested in understanding black church music and worship. In the chapter entitled, “The Performed Word: Music and the Black Church,” C. Eric Lincoln, who served as the Chairman of the Department of Religious and Philosophical Studies at Fisk University, writes the following,

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<sup>58</sup> W.E.B. Dubois, 116.

In the Black Church, good preaching and good singing are almost invariably the minimum conditions of a successful ministry. Both activities trace their roots back to Africa where music and religion and life itself were all one holistic enterprise. There was no disjunction between the sacred and the secular, and music, whether vocal or instrumental, was an integral aspect of the celebration of life, as indeed was the dance which the music inspired in consequence of its evocation of the human spirit. So it was that music initially assumed a major role in the Black experience in religion as the West African Diaspora sought to adapt to the new forms of spiritual intercourse to which they were eventually introduced in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

Regarding congregational singing in the black church, Lincoln continues,

“Congregational singing is a well-known device for the temporary reduction of social alienation and for the ad interim sense of community.”<sup>60</sup>

However, this same book laments contemporary black gospel music as not performing the same soul-stirring resistance to injustice, oppression, and community among blacks as did their ancestors’ Negro spirituals or gospel music from the early twentieth century. In the book’s chapter entitled, “I Am the Holy Dope Dealer: The Problem with Gospel Music Today,” Obery M. Hendricks, an African American Professor of Biblical Interpretation at the New York Theological Seminary, and an African American Episcopal elder, writes, “However, despite the empowering nature of the Black sacred music of the past, in the dominant mode of Black religious music today—contemporary Gospel music—this prophetic voice, this resistant voice, this biblical logic of justice, is all but stilled.”<sup>61</sup> The book goes on to further define black worship by explaining that the key instrument in worship is the piano, that congregants

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<sup>59</sup> James Abbington, ed., *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2001), 40.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 554.

clap hands on beats two and four, and that the improvisation of the choir director, and even of body rhythm, are of great importance.<sup>62</sup>

### **Black Theologies**

African American pastors who plant churches in dominant Anglo denominations have to navigate the racial and justice issues that Black Liberation Theology brings to the surface. Depending upon these planters' backgrounds, as well as the core issues of the black denominations that they left, they may find that Black Liberation Theology offers a tempting analysis of why they may not be successful in the context of a white denomination. The authors and books cited in this section define, challenge and analyze Black Liberation Theology. For the sake of discussion in this section, the phrases "Black Theology" and "Black Liberation Theology" will be treated as synonymous, although most black churches would not affirm many of the tenets of liberation theology. For example, in his book *A Black Theology of Liberation*, James Cone, who is probably the biggest proponent of Liberation Theology, does not believe that "black suffering is a part of God's divine purpose."<sup>63</sup> However, black churches in general, while lamenting the phenomena of the black race's suffering in America's past and present, are not willing to dictate what is and is not God's will.

What is Black Theology?

According to Bruce L. Fields in his book, *Introducing Black Theology; 3 Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church*,

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 241-245.

<sup>63</sup> James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986), 76.

humanity. Black Theology is a theology of “blackness.” It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people. It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says “No” to the encroachment of white oppression.<sup>64</sup>

James Cone, who could be considered the “father” of Black Liberation Theology, says in his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, that “Liberation is a struggle for political, social, and economic justice.”<sup>65</sup> Fields goes on to say that “Black theology seeks to make sense of the socio-historical experience of African Americans in light of their confession that God has given revelation in Jesus Christ. This revelatory act makes possible the conviction that the struggle for justice is consistent with the gospel.”<sup>66</sup> Many proponents of black theology point out that if theology does not liberate or improve the conditions of the oppressed, especially of blacks in America, it is not representative of Jesus Christ’s actions and statements concerning the poor and oppressed (those who the upper-classes of Jesus’ day considered unprofitable and unimportant). In his book, *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology*, James H. Evans Jr. argues that “An authentic hermeneutic, or the act of interpretation of scripture, must advance the primary theme of liberation.”<sup>67</sup>

The issue of racism as seen by black liberation theologians is very much alive in the evangelical church. Evangelicals believe that it is not politically correct to be outwardly racist. However, they also believe that those who would claim that racism has disappeared are attempting to lull the church into a false sense of security, convincing them to depend upon civil laws to achieve social justice. Evans argues the following

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<sup>64</sup> Bruce L. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology: 3 Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 13.

<sup>65</sup> James H. Cone, 11.

<sup>66</sup> Bruce L. Fields, 13.

<sup>67</sup> James H. Evans Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 23.

regarding the segregation that is yet prevalent in the American church: “Racism, so some may think, is countered by laws against discrimination in our society. It may still exist, but they believe it is being overcome, and thus is not much of a problem in the church. If Sunday mornings are still the most segregated time of the week, then that is just because of ‘preference.’”<sup>68</sup> According to Evans and other proponents of black liberation theology, theologians are proposing that the segregation does not exist because of worship preference, but because of racism in the hearts of those sitting in the pews.

At this point, one may ask, “What is the solution offered to the white evangelical church?” The answer, according to Evans and others, is that conversation and reconciliation must take place between both “sides.” African Americans must be allowed to talk about the horror of America's past, which includes slavery, the dehumanization of blacks, and the treatment of blacks even after they accepted Christianity. Evans states,

Members of the black theological community must be willing to talk to those who represent a historical, traditional orthodoxy that to a certain degree still encompasses deeply prejudiced people. Reconciliation is not an easy, painless endeavor. I am not advocating that blacks or whites should forget the past and wear rose-colored glasses when looking at the present. Rather, I am advancing a particular way of exercising the memory... African American Christians should be allowed to express painful experiences among their white brothers and sisters, even in the context of theological and philosophical dialogue.<sup>69</sup>

This quote sounds similar to the first principle of the book *Breaking Down Walls*, written by Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, which is focused on racial reconciliation. The book's first principle is “commitment to relationship.”<sup>70</sup> This particular book will be reviewed in the section on racial reconciliation.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>70</sup> Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls: A Model for Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 113.

The next book in this section, written by Anthony Bradley, Professor of Theology at King's College in New York City, is entitled, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America*. The definition of black theology from Bradley's book is the exact same one that appeared in Bruce L. Field's book, *Introducing Black Theology; 3 Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church*.<sup>71</sup> This definition was formulated in 1969 by the National Committee of Black Church Men and first applied in James Cone's book, *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume 1*.<sup>72</sup> Bradley writes,

While black theology affirms blackness, that theology should not be considered as anti-white reactionary theology. The notion of blackness is not merely a reference to skin color but rather is a symbol of oppression that can be applied to all persons of color who have a history of oppression, as well as marginalized groups such as homosexuals.<sup>73</sup>

Bradley believes that the problem with black theology is that it employs victimology as its main tenet. To reinforce his point, he uses the definition of "victimology" penned by the African American linguist John McWhorter, who wrote the books, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* and *Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America*. The use of McWhorter's view of victimology, according to Bradley, perpetuates a separatist and elitist platform that provides no opportunity for racial reconciliation.<sup>74</sup> According to McWhorter, "Victimology is the adoption of victimhood as the core of one's identity."<sup>75</sup> It is obviously extremely difficult for black

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<sup>71</sup> Bruce L. Fields, 13.

<sup>72</sup> James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume I: 1966-1979* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 101.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 18.

<sup>74</sup> John W. McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 6.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

church planters in the PCA to approach their task with a core value and identity of being a victim. Victimhood is a state of mind that perpetuates the myth that things in America will never really change for blacks and other people of color as long as whites are the dominant culture. As stated by Bradley, “It is the belief that after more than forty years after the Civil Rights Act, the conditions for blacks have not substantially changed.”<sup>76</sup>

Another problem with Black Liberation Theology is that it appears to exalt the experiences of humans over the dictates of the scriptures. James Cone makes the following statement, agreeing with a sentiment that is also expressed by Karl Marx: “What people think about God, Jesus Christ and the Church cannot be separated from their own social and political status in a society.”<sup>77</sup> Bradley contends that victimology drives the paradigm for the black experience, using past oppression to brand identity and foster an unfocused resentment and sense of alienation from the mainstream.<sup>78</sup>

According to Bradley, Cone is not the only prominent black theologian impacting the thinking of many rising and established preachers. He states that “theological giants” such as Cornel West of Harvard have offered a critical integration between Marxism and black theology in an essay entitled, “*Black Theology and Marxist Thought*.”<sup>79</sup> Bradley explains that neither West nor Cone see Christianity as a sufficient source of absolute truth.<sup>80</sup> He cites an excerpt from West's book, *Prophet of Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity*, which states,

To believe that truth is an attribute attached exclusively to religious descriptions which promote certain insights and capacities for living is to give way to an expedient existentialism... To believe that there is a transcendent standard—a

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<sup>76</sup> Bradley, 19.

<sup>77</sup> Cone and Wilmore, 41.

<sup>78</sup> Bradley, 92.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.



theory-neutral, portrayal independent, description-free criterion—which enables us to choose true theory portrayal and description is to resign to an Archimedean objectivism.<sup>81</sup>

Much of liberation or black theology would be ignored but for the imperialistic Christianization of slaves who were denied their freedom even after being converted. There are many texts that address the fact that while “the heathen” finally were “given” souls that needed conversion, their acceptance of Christ did not change their state of oppression and servitude on the earth.<sup>82</sup> In 1667, the Commonwealth of Virginia passed a law stating that Christian baptism will not alter a person’s status as a slave. Ironically, New York did the same thing in 1674. Bradley states,

White missionaries taught the slaves not to be concerned with their present circumstances but to be concerned exclusively with eschatological issues. Even after the emancipation of slaves, “white theology,” as many have described it, failed to acknowledge the humanity of African Americans, perpetuating a system of white supremacy. The nineteenth century systematic and exegetical dehumanization by theologians such as R.L. Dabney demonstrates dramatically the nature of the objection to “conservative theology” by many black liberation theologians.<sup>83</sup>

It should be noted that R. L. Dabney a Presbyterian theologian, in his 1867 book, *A Defense of Virginia and the South*, defends the institution of slavery, and refers to African Americans as “morally inferior.”<sup>84</sup> He also refers to the white race as a “nobler race.” Bradley argues that statements such as these have made it easier for black liberation theologians to state their case and encourage people to think of Christianity as purely a white man's religion.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Lewis Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia and the South* (Berryville: Hess Publications, 1998), 180.

<sup>85</sup> Bradley, 122-126.

So where does the Evangelical church go from here? According to Bradley, black liberation theology, with its ideological hermeneutic of victimology, is simply incapable of producing its desired results because it presupposes the black experience as authoritative over scripture. While black liberation theologians offer many poignant critiques of “conservative” theology, what is needed is better application of the biblical text. America's increasing cultural diversity calls for new vistas in the field of hermeneutics.<sup>86</sup>

Bradley's book is important in that it not only balances and challenges the beliefs of the black theologians, especially in their exaltation of the black experience over the scriptures, but it also challenges all preachers to preach a gospel that is true and not for profit—something that every race in America is tempted to do. Bradley's section on exegetical preaching speaks to the problems of black slaves hearing sermons that “kept them in their place.” This section also speaks to the challenge that black church planters may have when preaching sermons on submission or the will of God using texts in which Paul challenges people to accept their position in life as God's will.

### **The “Moderate White” Church and the Civil Rights Struggles in America**

Martin Luther King wrote his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” on April 16, 1963. One text that contains this letter is the book *A Testament of Hope*, edited by James M. Washington. In this book, Washington compiled an essential library of King's most notable letters, sermons, and speeches. The letter was written to challenge clergy to understand and advocate for the black Americans who were being denied their civil rights. Some clergy thought that King's presence was problematic and wanted things to

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<sup>86</sup> Anthony B. Bradley, 159.

remain status quo. King wrote this letter as a response to those critics while he was serving time in jail for disturbing the peace.

This letter is important because it speaks to the need for church planters to understand that some social actions must be championed by the conservative church. This is especially true in light of the assumption held by some conservatives that social actions involve a liberal agenda, and are therefore avoided by conservative denominations like the PCA. The following are important excerpts from this letter:

My Dear Fellow Clergymen:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities “unwise and untimely.” Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.<sup>87</sup>

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self- purification; and direct action.<sup>88</sup>

You may well ask: “Why direct action? Why sit ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?” You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word “tension.”<sup>89</sup>

I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the

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<sup>87</sup> James Melvin Washington, ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 289.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exists for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with.<sup>90</sup>

King began the letter by identifying a belief held by the clergy of Birmingham that his activities were "unwise and untimely."<sup>91</sup> He alerted them to the fact that they were not the only set of people who had a problem with his methods and presence. He affirmed that they were "of genuine good will and that their criticisms are sincerely set forth." Then he respectfully admonished them to understand why he had to do what he did—basically because they wouldn't take responsible action themselves.

These excerpts address a number of things that black church planters may need to consider when planting a PCA church. They need to keep in mind that the PCA is predominantly a white, southern, conservative, Presbyterian denomination. That will impact how they are perceived if they are supportive of blacks, the poor, immigrants, social change, or democratic politicians. Black church planters may have some congregants who fit King's definition of the "white moderate," and depending on the church planters' passion for controversial issues (such as social justice, racism, or sexism), they might find themselves struggling with members who act out their stated

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 289.

convictions to these things. The four steps of Dr. King's non-violent campaign are stated simply but firmly. They are helpful guides for many of life's scenarios where there is a need to reach agreement and enact change. They are very similar to what has been expressed in the previous sections dealing with racial reconciliation, peacemaking, and negotiation.

### **Racial Reconciliation and Cultural Intelligence**

Cultural intelligence/quotient (CQ) is the level of one's understanding of how their cultural background affects their behavior. CQ can also indicate how well one understands the culture in which one operates at any given time. Missionaries need, through cultural education on the customs and values of their assigned areas, to be very aware of the values and norms of their target audience. The researcher in this study sought to understand how these African American church planters defined their cultural intelligence, or if they even understood the concept of CQ and how it informed their theological and ecclesiastical views and worship practices.

In his book, *Cultural Intelligence: Improving Your CQ to Engage Our Multicultural World*, David A. Livermore defines culture as

...an elusive, dynamic concept that shapes everything we do. Things as basic as how we eat, sleep, and bathe ourselves and as abstract as how we read the Scriptures, relate to God, and communicate truth are all rooted in our cultural context. We live in a sociocultural world of our own creation. As a result, the cultures of which we are a part are always in flux. They are forever reinventing and interpreting themselves, and the final word on them can never be said. There is no such thing as a cultureless human. To be human is to live in culture.<sup>92</sup>

This definition and the elaboration on the universality of culture that follows suggests that one must engage and study cultures constantly in order to build a bridge of

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<sup>92</sup> David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence – Improving Your CQ to Engage our Multicultural World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 90.

relationship into those cultures. In his book, *Many Colors: cultural intelligence for a changing church*, Soong-Chan Rah states,

An important aspect of cultural intelligence is the awareness cultural tendencies in our own churches. If the church culture is established in such a way that one expression is valued over another, those coming from a different type of expression will be marginalized, albeit unintentionally. If you are unaware of your own tendencies, you will be sensitive or aware of the cultural patterns of others.<sup>93</sup>

Literature on this subject sheds light on how the cultural upbringing of the African American church planters enhanced the challenges they faced in the PCA. Did their culture dictate that certain beliefs and values had to be maintained in the churches they planted? Was their cultural intelligence high enough to allow them to operate outside their culture and yet not feel that they had to assimilate to the dominant Anglo culture of the PCA to be successful? Again, this is what some people call the Anglo-African American “dance.” It is assumed that African Americans working in predominantly Anglo denominations have had to learn the values of those organizations in order to be successful. However, there may be times when the values of these organizations clash with the cultural values that these church planters learned as children. The researcher believes that it is important for the church planters to explain whether being black exposed any negative emotions they were carrying. Did they feel inferior because they represented a minority race?

A text that clearly and comprehensively addresses how the church deals with racial reconciliation and the accompanying justice issues is *The Heart of Racial Justice*, written by Brenda Salter McNeil, an African American woman, and Rick Richardson, a white man. Each chapter of the book offers the reader the difficult but biblical steps that

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<sup>93</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: cultural intelligence for a changing church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), 107.

are necessary for the church to move forward on the road to real reconciliation. The book also serves as a primer on how to avoid the pitfalls into which many well-meaning white people fall when desiring to empower African Americans to function as leaders in the quest to demonstrate that reconciliation and justice are realities in their organizations. The book challenges the idols of ethnocentricity while reminding readers to embrace their true selves. It also addresses the racial and cultural hypocrisy to which African Americans are tempted to yield in order to make themselves more acceptable to white power structures. One chapter, entitled “The Model Minority Identity” discusses how African Americans do, at times, yield to this temptation to be someone else – someone less threatening. This model, according to the authors, is a model of living based on shame.

Although you may appear quite competent, the false identity of the model minority is another way for people of color to bend toward white European Americans, another way to internalize racism. The call is for you to be genuinely bicultural and to embrace the whole of your ethnic and cultural inheritance. Then when white European Americans compliment you for being so unlike others from your racial or ethnic background, you will set a boundary for them, making it clear that you are not complimented by such aspersion cast on others.<sup>94</sup>

This book is valuable to the study because it helps to explain why some African American church planters may have felt pressure to do things in a certain way to satisfy Anglo supporting churches.

Cultural awareness literature from the 1960's, such as E. Franklin Frazier's book, *The Negro Church in America*, suggests that African Americans who made it into the middle class, and thus the mainstream, during the fifties and sixties had to assimilate to the dominant culture in order to survive. Frazier states, “But as these Negroes rise to

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<sup>94</sup> Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 83.

middle class status they reject the folk heritage and seek to slough off any reminders of their folk inheritance.”<sup>95</sup> Later in the same chapter, Frazier addresses the internal relational/marital confusion that occurs within those recently successful mainstream Negroes who still behave according to their “folk” pasts. Frazier states,

However, since their rise to the middle-class status has enabled them to marry into families with the genteel tradition of the old middle class, there is often a confusion of aristocratic and folk values. It is for this reason that many middle-class Negroes exhibit in their manners and behavior the characteristics of both a peasant and a gentleman.<sup>96</sup>

Although this book was written five decades ago, this study investigated how this phenomena still works itself out in the behaviors of African American church planters who work in a predominantly Anglo, affluent denomination and yet continue to conduct church services that resemble the black church services of their ancestors .

Two very important books that deal with African Americans and their struggles as a race in the United States were written by a conservative black man named John McWhorter, who holds a PhD in linguistics from Stanford University. In his books, entitled *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* and *Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America*, McWhorter challenges the views of black liberal leaders and offers an apologetic that challenges African Americans to realize that they have to rise above victimization to responsibility. In *Losing the Race*, McWhorter addresses certain “cults” that have risen up among African Americans. These groups have exerted a major influence on how blacks in general approach the dominant Anglo culture and the United

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<sup>95</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 1964), 81.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.



States as a nation. McWhorter identifies these three areas of influence as “the cults of ‘Victimization,’ ‘Separation,’ and ‘Anti-Intellectualism.’”<sup>97</sup>

An example of McWhorter’s position on the Cult of Victimization can be understood in what he says about “victimology.” He states,

Approaching victimhood constructively will naturally include calling attention to it, and is healthy. However, much more often in black American life, victimhood is simply calling attention to where it barely exists, if not at all. All too often this is done not with a view of forging solutions, but to foster and nurture an unfocused brand of resentment and sense of alienation from the mainstream. This is Victimology.<sup>98</sup>

This book should serve as a valuable resource for understanding some of the dynamics that many African American church planters have to manage in their mission churches, especially if their churches are predominantly African American or racially diverse.

Of special importance is how other blacks may view African American church planters as they start congregations in a predominantly white denomination. McWhorter’s Cult of Anti-Intellectualism may have something to add to this discussion, since many blacks in America have long viewed those who study at white institutions – or even those who study at all – as lacking “blackness.” In his chapter on “The Cult of Anti-Intellectualism,” McWhorter states,

Segregation and disenfranchisement, withholding learning from most blacks, have long created a sense of alienation from learning. Separatism, however, which in defining “black” as that which is not “white” cannot help but exclude learning along with more expendable things like rock music and polenta, has focused this alienation into a rejection. To be culturally black, sadly, almost requires that one see books and school as a realm to visit rather than live in.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> John McWhorter, *Losing the Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), Contents.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

African American church planters may be perceived by other blacks as too white to be their pastors. In addition, as planters, they may have to deal with the dynamic of anti-intellectualism in those black youth who do attend church. In *Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America*, the follow-up to *Losing the Race*, McWhorter has an especially intriguing chapter entitled “What About the Black Middle Class Rage?” Here, McWhorter discusses the claims of racism by some middle class blacks, as well as the accusation that those middle class blacks who believe that racism is not nearly as bad as in the past are simply “sellouts.”<sup>100</sup> The researcher believes that some of the African American folks who seek to attend PCA churches planted by blacks may have to be pastored through the accusation that they don’t want to be black, and are thus selling out to a white form of religion.

McWhorter does concede that racism still exists in America to some degree, pointing out that “degree” is the key word, but he stresses that things are a lot better than they used to be. He argues, “Degree is the key issue here. Yes, there are the ‘slights.’ Yes, whites still may occasionally stand guard at a door or two here and there for reasons traceable to what color we are. But as often as not, we are free to enter through one of about ten other doors.”<sup>101</sup> The researcher believes that it is important to understand how African Americans interpret their world when it comes to deciding what church to attend. Many of the challenges of the black church planter in the PCA will probably be in-line with the struggles of other blacks who choose to align themselves with a denomination like the PCA.

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<sup>100</sup> John McWhorter, *Winning the Race, Beyond the Crisis in Black America* (New York: Gotham Books, 2006), 199.

<sup>101</sup> John McWhorter, *Losing the Race*, 214.

In *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller writes, “Racial pride and cultural narrowness cannot coexist with the gospel of grace. They are mutually exclusive. One forces the other out. Because of the self-justifying nature of the human heart, it is natural to see our own culture or class characteristics as superior to everyone else’s. But this natural tendency is arrested by the gospel.”<sup>102</sup> In another book written the same year, *Follow Me To Freedom*, John Perkins and Shane Claiborne maintain that equality is essential to reconciliation. They explain the place of equality in the task of biblical reconciliation, writing:

Reconciliation assumes equality; that all people are equal. For people who look different and live different lives to become friends, we first have to be reconciled. For me to be reconciled to you, I have to feel and see dignity in you, not just accept you because the Bible tells me to or because it is comfortable. I have to ask myself, “Do I really see you as equal?”<sup>103</sup>

Martin Luther King highlighted the issue of denial of dignity, a basic human quality, in many of his speeches during the Civil Rights Movement. In his book, *Is Racial Reconciliation Really Working? Winning the Race to Unity*, Clarence Shuler, an African American pastor who is an adjunct professor at Knoxville Theological Seminary as well as the manager of Focus on the Family’s national outreach to black pastors, says:

Building relationships with someone who is different demands faith and trust. It demands an attitude of hoping for the best. This attitude—motivated by the love of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit—must move white evangelical leaders to attempt to understand what it is like to be a minority in a workplace or a ministry where they are. It means understanding that whatever the position the black has been hired for, he has multiple inherent responsibilities. One is to do the job for which he or she has been hired. Another is as a bridge builder between two cultures and/or races. Another is serving as an in-house race relations consultant. Still another is exercising public relations skills: protecting the organization, often when it needs protection but doesn’t realize it. Finally, he is a pioneer, taking the

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<sup>102</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 139.

<sup>103</sup> John Perkins and Shane Claiborne, *Follow Me To Freedom: Leading and Following as an Ordinary Radical by Reconciliation* (Ventura: Regal Publishing, 2009), 56.

organization or church where it has never gone before. All of this will demand much understanding and support by the organization or the church. It will also require that the individual be part of the decision-making body of the particular organization or church.<sup>104</sup>

Shuler addresses many of the challenges for authentic racial reconciliation. Like Martin Luther King, John Perkins, and Shane Claiborne, Shuler addresses the role of dignity in attaining reconciliation. He declares, “Dignity, respect, and self- esteem must be taken into consideration, and in fact encouraged, when seeking to develop a relationship with a people who have been oppressed or feel they have been oppressed.”<sup>105</sup> In his chapter entitled, “Is Racial Reconciliation Really Working?” he cites obstacles such as the avoidance of discussion about Negro slavery and its effects, the denial of civil rights to blacks, racism inside the white church, and the hesitancy of blacks to leave their churches, where they feel safe, in order to enter white organizations where they have no control or dignity. He also suggests that both races are ignorant of the contributions of blacks in everything from missions to important American patents. In his chapter entitled, “Did You Know This History?” Shuler lists some of the major contributions of blacks in an effort to demonstrate that blacks are just as involved as their white counterparts in the formation of America as both a missional and innovative nation. He laments, “History is selective. People write about the history important to them. In America, the majority of people are of European descent, and so historians have written primarily from a European perspective. This is a dynamic of the majority/minority system. Unfortunately, in such a system much of the history of minorities is often omitted.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Clarence Shuler, *Is Racial Reconciliation Really Working? Winning the Race to Unity* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 46.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

Shuler also addresses a sad dynamic that exists between blacks when white Christian organizations decide to hire more blacks. In a chapter entitled “The Responsibility of Black Christians in the Race Game,” he addresses the hiring of the wrong blacks by white organizations. By the term “wrong blacks,” he is suggesting that some blacks feel that their security is threatened by the hiring of other blacks. He states,

In order for us as black Christians to have solidarity, some changes must be made in how we relate to each other. This may be difficult because some blacks have been blessed financially by the white evangelical community. Some of these individuals enjoy being the only black Christians “in the house.” This allows them to be the center of attention and the “expert” on the black community.<sup>107</sup>

Shuler’s concern is that real reconciliation requires dealing with real issues.

Many books on this particular topic have threads similar to Shuler. One example is the publication, *Breaking Down Walls*, by Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein. Washington is a black pastor from Chicago’s west side, and Kehrein is a white pastor from the northern Chicago suburbs. They met in 1983, and these men share a ministry in Chicago’s west side called Circle Urban Ministries. Both of them have experienced a lot of pain in their lives due to racial problems. Washington was a career army officer destined to become a full colonel and on the fast track to the rank of general. But according to his account, he was discharged from the army over false sexual charges based on racism. He recalls, “With the army’s decision to kick me out, I experienced a profound sense of loss. I’d given the military twenty years of my life and did not deserve what was happening to me. Racism, jealousy, and envy succeeded in drumming me out

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 185.

of the army, and I was devastated.”<sup>108</sup> A few months later, he followed his wife into faith in Christ.

Kehrein had a traumatic experience when a multi-cultural ministry of which he was a part dissolved because blacks and whites were committed to a reconciliation vision but not to relationships. Things went downhill when one of the black pastors preached that one of the white pastors was theologically incorrect. According to Kehrein, “This was just an event that triggered an eruption that had been building for a long time.”<sup>109</sup> Of special note was what Kehrein reported as the response of the black pastor who was involved. This pastor said, “As a black man, I can no longer have a white person tell me what or how to preach. I won’t be throttled; I must be allowed to speak prophetically.”<sup>110</sup> Kehrein also mentioned an incident when this black pastor, along with four other white leaders of their church, had attended a musical in a predominantly black college. When they arrived at the auditorium, the black pastor separated himself and sat with other blacks. Kehrein explains, “It was obvious that in a black setting he didn’t want to be identified with us.”<sup>111</sup> Their book contains eight principles of reconciliation that have become guiding principles for many who participate in reconciliation. The principles are: (1) commitment to relationship, (2) intentionality, (3) sincerity, (4) sensitivity, (5) interdependence, (6) sacrifice, (7) empowerment, and (8) call. Each of these principles is based on scriptural proof texts.

Even though they consider themselves pioneers of racial reconciliation in the church, Washington and Kehrein agree with Clarence Shuler that the black church is a

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<sup>108</sup> Raleigh Washington and Glen Kehrein, *Breaking Down Walls: A Model for Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1993), 67.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

place where blacks find their kind of worship, control of the agenda, and dignity apart from whites. Washington states, “Well-meaning white people wonder why African Americans don’t flock to their churches when they open their doors. But for many, the feeling is, ‘Whites control every other aspect in society; at least the black church has been ours.’”<sup>112</sup> However, Washington also affirms that breaking down the “wall” of separation is a biblical mandate based on the fact that Jesus is our peace.<sup>113</sup> Washington states, “As a black Christian working in the impoverished inner city, I will take the risk and say, ‘I need my white brother.’”<sup>114</sup>

In each of their chapters addressing these eight principles, the authors discuss the necessity that the church overcome the obstacles hindering it from accomplishing the goal of racial reconciliation. Agreeing with Schuler, Washington and Kehrein call for intentional strategies for developing real relationships based on the love of Christ. They also declare the need for courage to talk about and repent over America’s past and present racial problems in the church, and a willingness for those of different races to respect and depend upon each other. While Shuler seems to address black/white relationships within a predominantly white organization or church, Washington and Kehrein address reconciliation as a means of serving a community in need. Both books address the need for reconciliation without disrespecting the contributions of the black church.

Another important book on this topic is *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation*, edited by Timothy George and Robert Smith. George is a white man with a Th.D. from Harvard University, currently serving as the Dean of Beeson

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>113</sup> Ephesians 2.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 180.

Divinity School. Robert Smith is a black man with a Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, currently serving as the Professor of Preaching at Beeson Divinity School. The book is a compilation of sixteen sermons preached on the topic of reconciliation by various preachers. The sermons are split equally between African American and Anglo pastors that were chosen because they were known by the authors to be men of integrity, whose sermons are matched by a credible witness and life commitment to racial reconciliation. They state, “Some of the preachers represented in this volume have stood courageously against the sinister forces of discrimination at great personal and professional risk.”<sup>115</sup>

The authors present five major themes that they suggest run through these sixteen sermons. These themes are: 1) “God’s Word calls us to confront the horrible sin of racism,” 2) “The urgency of biblical faith requires prophetic proclamation on reconciliation,” 3) “The transforming gospel of Jesus Christ is essential to racial reconciliation,” 4) “True reconciliation must extend to the level of personal relationships,” and 5) “We are not there yet, but the gospel of reconciliation beckons us forward.”<sup>116</sup> In one of his sermons, George D. McKinney Jr. defines racism as sin because it teaches that man’s dignity is determined by skin color and not related to God. God’s word declares that man’s worth and dignity are derived from his position as a child of God by creation. He points to Psalm 8, in which the psalmist ponders, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Timothy George, ed., *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 4.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Psalm 8:4.



In an effort encourage more than personal piety, McKinney explains that racial reconciliation must include the races working together for a full integration of schools, colleges, and seminaries. He expresses,

We are deeply concerned that in many Christian schools around the country, the percentage of black and other minority students still remains between 3 and 6 percent. We must equip believers to confront institutional and systematic racism, so that those who have responded to God's call to reconciliation will be encouraged and emboldened to do what is right in the face of cultural and historical realities.<sup>118</sup>

Stephen F. Olford preaches that James 2 instructs people on how they should treat each other, especially those who are not considered to be important or who are less profitable financially. He specifically focuses on verse 8, which says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."<sup>119</sup> Here, Olford exegetes that racial discrimination is a violation of three types of laws – spiritual, social, and moral.<sup>120</sup> Olford explains the spiritual violation by comparing this behavior to the way God chooses his elect. He argues that God has not chosen his people based on merit, place in society, or wealth. The social violation is found in James 2:6, which states that the people have sinned by "dishonor[ing] the poor."<sup>121</sup> Finally, racial discrimination is a violation of moral law because James 2:9 says that whoever shows partiality is committing sin and is convicted by the law. According to Olford, the book of James goes on to "...liken this type of sin to adultery, murder, or the violation of any other aspect of the moral law."<sup>122</sup>

At the end of the sermon, Olford offers what he calls, "The Theological Answer to Racial Discrimination." This answer comes directly from Romans 10:11-12, which

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<sup>118</sup> George, 19.

<sup>119</sup> James 2:8.

<sup>120</sup> George, 56.

<sup>121</sup> James 2:6.

<sup>122</sup> George, 58.

states, “The scripture says, ‘Whosoever believes on him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon him.’” Olford concludes, “The body of divinity (theology) reveals without equivocation or even elucidation that God the Father loves all people. God the Son saves all people, and God the Holy Spirit claims all people without racial discrimination.”<sup>123</sup> When applied to church planting, these sermons by McKinney and Olford exhort planters and their core groups to understand that God has called them to minister to whoever comes to the mission church. They are to treat each person with dignity and respect, no matter what their race or culture.

### **Black Preaching and Reformed Theology**

In the book, *Conversations on Preaching*, which was edited by Michael Duduit, Gary Robinson, a Church of Christ pastor from Conneautville, Pennsylvania sums up the life of the preacher when he says,

The preaching life is a life of temptations and dangers, not the least of which is the temptation to think that you are more important than you really are. None of us is irreplaceable. It’s the message that’s essential, not the messenger. As long as the preacher remains a servant of the Word of God, he’ll be blessed. If however, his ministry becomes a vehicle for his own self-aggrandizement, he’s got a big problem.<sup>124</sup>

This quote has, unfortunately, proven to be true, through the destruction of some black pastors in white denominations. Partly as a result of the attention, celebration, and egotism, these men forgot that they were, as stated above, “replaceable.”

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>124</sup> Michael Duduit, ed., *Conversations in Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Salem Publishing, 2004), 14.

In his book, *I Believe I'll Testify*, one of the newer, more important texts on black preaching, author Cleophus J. LaRue discusses the dynamics of blacks being trained to preach in white seminary contexts. He explains,

While it is clear that blacks have benefited from the theoretical and methodological insights of the major homileticians of the past century, what is equally clear, at least from a black perspective, is that this learning has often been a one way street. What was being taught in the classrooms always came to blacks from the majority culture as if white homileticians were the lone guardians of those standards by which we are to teach, gauge, and assess what constitutes good preaching. In preaching classes throughout America, twenty centuries of preaching could be taught without ever mentioning the name of a prominent black preacher. In some instances, white homileticians openly express their ignorance of black preaching and black preachers. And even more troubling, all too many indicated little desire to be exposed to what they clearly did not know.<sup>125</sup>

This is the tension experienced by many black planters who are trying to figure out how to preach. If their preaching style is in line with general Anglo style, they will not have a personal dilemma, although they may have trouble with preachers from predominantly black denominations that may believe they have sold out to a “white” way of doing things. They may also be seen as embracing doctrine that is viewed as racist in nature.

The book, *Glory Road: The Journeys of 10 African Americans into Reformed Theology*, is a compilation of the testimonies of ten African American preachers who have embraced reformed theology. These testimonies were compiled by the Reformed Theological Seminary graduate, church planter, and author Anthony J. Carter. One of the men in the book, Eric C. Redmond, states the following:

If a person would allow himself to be pigeonholed into becoming a person of nationalistic or ethnocentric thought out of the fear of being viewed as an Oreo or Uncle Tom, then Reformed theology is not for that person. But then neither is the

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<sup>125</sup> Cleophus J. LaRue, *I Believe I'll Testify: The Art of African American Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 22.

gospel, for the gospel calls each of us to stand against an ethnic centered philosophy of Inez's one race, for such a philosophy is naturally conformed to this present world and is in need of redemption.<sup>126</sup>

Another book edited by Anthony Carter entitled, *Experiencing the Truth:*

*Bringing the Reformation to the African American Church*, exalts the doctrine of the reformers as not only superior theology but also as “truth.” Carter exclaims,

Experiencing the truth—that is what Reformed theology is all about! True Christian experience is not the error often found in Pentecostalism and neo-Pentecostalism, where the experience with the truth (namely the Spirit of Truth) supposedly only occurs when some excitable, emotional, and even spasmodic outburst has been seen or heard.<sup>127</sup>

This statement would cause tension for the vast majority of black Christians, who have never ever heard of reformed theology, John Calvin, Martin Luther or the Westminster Confession of Faith. Carter is attempting to bring the black church in line with these creeds and confessions.<sup>128</sup> He continues, “The Reformation was successful not because it was new or promoted new revelatory knowledge. On the contrary, it was successful because in bringing back the glorious gospel of grace it sought God's glory through the recovery of His Word.”<sup>129</sup>

Most black PCA church planters would probably agree with this type of thinking. However, if reformed black preachers want to teach reformed theology, there is still the question of how this message will be delivered. So the question for many black preachers, is “What are the traditional characteristics of black preaching?” and “Can I use these as I preach reformed theology?” Again, referring to the book, *I Believe I'll Testify*,

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<sup>126</sup> Anthony J. Carter, ed., *Glory Road: The Journeys of 10 African Americans into Reformed Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 150.

<sup>127</sup> Anthony J. Carter, ed., *Experiencing the Truth: Bringing the Reformation to the African American Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 18.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

LaRue quotes Henry Mitchell, one of the foremost authorities on the art of black preaching. Mitchell states that there are three chief characteristics of preaching in traditional African American churches:

First, among the characteristics was intonation or whooping—or sing song style of delivery in black preaching. Second was spontaneity, by which he means the ability to respond to the movement of the Spirit among preacher and congregation and to express deep feeling without shame. Third was the basic structure of the sermon, which Mitchell characterized as imaginative, narrative, and prone to generate an experiential encounter.<sup>130</sup>

LaRue's book *I Believe I'll Testify* celebrates black preaching without an emphasis on a certain type of theology. He argues "...there is high regard for Scripture. Black preaching has historically been noted for its strong biblical content...Indeed, it is no secret that the Bible occupies a central place in the religious life of black Americans."<sup>131</sup> However, the preachers in *Glory Road* would contend that reformed doctrine is more important than delivery style, spontaneity, and expressing deep feeling while preaching. A reconciling comment written by Henry H. Mitchell states,

The sermons of Martin Luther King Jr. are an excellent example of Black preaching as help from God. They share the goals of God. The Presbyterian Shorter Catechism holds that the chief end of humanity is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Black preaching does not deny this. It simply holds that no sermon glorifies God which avoids God's plan to uplift humanity. Far from a secular, humanistic requirement, this stems from the admonition that, when the hearers perceive and receive the help of the gospel, they will in fact glorify God who is in heaven.<sup>132</sup>

### **Reformed Theology and the Expository Sermons**

In his article entitled "Redemptive History and Preaching," Sidney Greidanus describes four valuable insights that must be considered when applying the redemptive-

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<sup>130</sup> Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of a Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 3-9.

<sup>131</sup> LaRue, 61.

<sup>132</sup> Mitchell, 130.

historical approach to sermon preparation. He uses the term “biblical preaching” to describe preaching that he considers redemptive-historical. Greidanus states that biblical preaching continues God’s redemptive history, is theocentric, views scripture in historical progression, and is thematic.<sup>133</sup>

The book *Glory Road: The Journeys of 10 African Americans into Reformed Theology* gives a lot of insight into why black pastors are attracted to reformed theology. The book explains that the emphasis on the sovereignty of God and the five points of Calvinism drew these men to reformed theology. And although they are not all a part of a reformed church, they are reformed in their exegesis and preaching of the scriptures.

In the book *The Souls of Black Folks*, W.E.B. DuBois referred to the black preacher saying, “He early appeared on the plantation and found his function as the healer of the sick, the interpreter of the Unknown, the comforter of the sorrowing, the supernatural avenger of the wrong, and the one who rudely but picturesquely expressed the longing, disappointment, and resentment of a stolen and oppressed people.”<sup>134</sup> This quote is a strong statement of what blacks on the plantation expected and hoped the preacher could do for them. Many of the sermons of early black preachers were not great expository sermons. However, some men such as Jupiter Hammon, Lemuel Haynes, and Daniel Alexander Payne, after being converted in the early nineteenth century, became great evangelical preachers and authors.

The researcher will now analyze a series of books on preaching that would benefit church planters who desire to preach in an expository manner. The value of these books is that they stress preaching Christ-centered sermons from both the Old and New

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<sup>133</sup> Sidney Greidanus, “Redemptive History and Preaching,” *Pro Rege* 19, 2 (December 1990): 9-13.

<sup>134</sup> W.E.B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1904), 119.

Testaments. The first of these, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, written by the renowned preacher Bryan Chapell, is a textbook that delivers instructions on how to develop and preach expository sermons. The author defines the expository sermon as "...a message whose structure and thought are derived from a biblical text, that covers the scope of the text, and that explains the features and context of the text in order to disclose the enduring principles for faithful thinking, living, and worship intended by the Spirit, who inspired the text."<sup>135</sup>

Chapell suggests that sermons have the basic structure of "explanation," "illustration," and "application."<sup>136</sup> The book builds around this structure as it explains how to create sermons that remain faithful to the original intention of the text. Chapell explains the process of selecting a text, developing introductions and conclusions, determining main and sub-points, and effectively transitioning between these points. He also discusses how to illustrate and apply the text. The book continuously uses a proposition statement that depicts how the text's fallen condition focus will be manifest to the listeners.

This book serves as a sort of "expositional preaching for dummies" type of manual. It addresses almost everything church planters might need to enhance their ability to preach to biblically illiterate people. This book puts forward six questions that are appropriate to ask about expository sermons. These questions are: 1) What does the text mean? 2) How do I know what the text means? 3) What concerns caused the text to be written? 4) What do we share in common with those to (or about) whom the text was written and/or the one by whom the text was written? 5) How should people now respond

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<sup>135</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 1994), 31.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

to the rules of the text?” and 6) What is the most effective way I can communicate the meaning of the text?”<sup>137</sup>

Bryan Chapell’s book adds much to the discussion regarding proper sermon preparation and delivery. He is concerned with the proper preparation of faithful and effective sermons and how they are delivered to a contemporary congregation. He wants sermons to focus on the grace of God, humanity’s knowledge of God, God’s knowledge of humanity, and the work of Christ. He wants the preacher to reach the audience in a way that touches the heart and communicates both the sin of man and God’s remedy for sin. He continually stresses the need for sermons to be relevant to fallen people. He wants preachers to carefully consider each part of the process and to work hard to present a well-prepared meal for people hungry to hear from God. He sees the need for preachers to reach out, grab the listeners quickly, and hold on to them until the final application is made. Church planters would benefit greatly from Chapell’s passion for skillful preaching. The book is simple and easy to follow. It also appears to be adaptable to any style of sermon design and delivery, because the formula for preparation is not rigid. There is a sermon preparation pyramid in the back of the book to help the church planter remember the process, from reading the text until time of delivery.

Edmund Clowney’s *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* presents an argument for preachers to see Jesus Christ as present throughout the entirety of the Bible. He emphasizes that all scripture leads to Christ in its fulfillment, and that he is present throughout scripture in appearance, symbolism, and types.<sup>138</sup> In chapter one, Clowney argues that Jesus is the God of the Old Testament as well the Lord and Christ of the New

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 104-05.

<sup>138</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 31.



Testament. Then, in Chapter Two, he instructs readers on how to prepare a sermon that presents Christ, as well as how to prepare oneself before presenting the sermon. The last thirteen chapters of the book contain a collection of sermons that reinforce the aforementioned argument by using texts from both the Old and New Testaments, showing how each text leads to Christ as the apex of God's plan of redemption. The central concern of the author appears to be that preachers understand that God speaks through them to contemporary congregations.

Like Chapell, Clowney appeals to the preacher to skillfully preach sermons about Christ and his redemptive work. He passionately contends that preaching from the Old Testament points to Jesus Christ as God and coming messiah. He wants preachers to understand that all references to a divine presence (such as the Angel of the Lord that led Israel through the desert) represent Jesus Christ himself in pre-incarnate form.<sup>139</sup> Further, the author also wants readers to understand that certain people, symbols, and types point to Jesus as their fulfillment. Some of the examples given are Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac and the rock that provided Israel with water in the desert. Clowney believes if the text speaks of God acting to redeem, it is intended to convey a message about the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>140</sup> This book is further intended to ensure that congregations don't mistakenly believe that Jesus came into existence in the New Testament, but that he is the "Ancient of Days." The book reminds church planters to tell the whole redemption story that is laced throughout the books of the Bible.

*Preaching to the Black Middle Class*, by Marvin A. McMickle, addresses how to minister to the black middle class. The book defines eight areas that preachers to the

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 15.

black middle class must address in order to move their congregations forward in action. They are: 1) social services, 2) economic development/land acquisition and development, 3) financial management, 4) education, 5) health and wellness, 6) voter education and registration, 7) civil rights advocacy, and 8) traditional spiritual programs.<sup>141</sup>

One of the areas that is noticeably missing from this list is racial reconciliation. McMickle states, “Many black middle-class people travel great distances to attend black churches because they want to share in the substance and spirit of the black worship experience that is harder, if not impossible, to find in most white churches.”<sup>142</sup> Blacks are not just seeking a worship culture experience. They sense a lack of equal status among whites, as previously mentioned in the Olford’s sermon on the book of James, recorded in *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation*. McMickle addresses this concern when he says, “Over the last thirty years, many black pastors and lay leaders have expressed frustrations over what seemed to them to be their second-class status within largely white denominations.”<sup>143</sup>

### **Church Government, Leadership, and Conflict Management**

The books reviewed in this section include *The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande, *The Peacemaking Pastor* by Alfred Poirier, *Healing the Wounded* by John White and Ken Blue, and *Getting to Yes* by Roger Fisher and William Ury. These books proved to be relevant and therefore helpful in explaining why and how to resolve conflict. They reinforced many of the same principles, which was to be expected since the truths about human nature and interpersonal conflict are generally basic – people have interests, fears,

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<sup>141</sup> Marvin A. McMickle, *Preaching to the Black Middle Class* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000), 60.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

anger, and agendas. However, the Christian books deviated from the group in that they employed the Bible as their main reference for conflict management principles.

*The Peacemaker* by Ken Sande, an attorney who serves as the President of Peacemaker Ministries, provides a Bible-based guide to resolving personal conflict. The book is endorsed by many well-respected scholars and church leaders. Dennis Rainey, a family life consultant and trainer, endorsed the book by noting, “Sande weaves the theology of conflict resolution into a tapestry portraying Jesus Christ and his gospel as the true foundation for peacemaking...”<sup>144</sup> *The Peacemaker* contains twelve sections that walk the reader through how to manage and resolve conflict based on the participants’ perceptions of the depth of the problem.

The book is relevant to this study because most church planters will have to deal with conflict. Questions such as “How can conflict be seen as an opportunity for deeper relationships?” provide a different and better perspective on what appears to be a situation out of control. The question, “How can I change the attitudes and habits that lead to conflict?” was helpful because Sande is suggesting that the church planter be proactive rather than reactive to conflict. Although not specifically addressed to pastors, the book provides ministry leaders with tools to understand the conflict that occurs among people in the pews. Sande provides training that every churchgoer should have in order to resolve conflict and therefore limit the “drama” and disunity in the church. Readers are led through the conflict resolution process and shown how to write out peacemaking plans before confronting those with whom they need to negotiate. This suggests that people tend to fail when they try to deal with troubling issues without a

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<sup>144</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 1991), Acknowledgments.

plan. *The Peacemaker* also provides a guide called “The Slippery Slope of Conflict.”<sup>145</sup> The “slope” is defined as the twelve different ways that people respond to conflict, and it proved to be helpful during this study, as it was easy for the researcher to memorize and recall during the interviews. The “slope” contains three escape – “peacefaking” responses (suicide, flight, denial), three attack – “peacebreaking” responses (assault, litigation, murder), and the six peacemaking responses (overlook, reconciliation, negotiation, mediation, arbitration, accountability).<sup>146</sup>

In *The Peacemaker*, Sande offers ideas about how to respond to conflict as well as how to create an atmosphere of peacemaking. This is relevant to the study when the emotional quotient (EQ) of the congregation is considered. The section of the book entitled “Cultivating a Culture of Peace in Your Church,” gives insight and suggestions on how to transform the church into a place where peacemaking is instinctive. An example of how this proactive transformation can help a church is seen in the statement, “When a local church teaches its people to live out the gospel in the conflicts of daily life, people are more willing to admit their shortcomings and ask for help before a crisis occurs.”<sup>147</sup>

*The Peacemaking Pastor* by Alfred Poirier emphasizes many of the same values and skills. In this book, Poirier reinforces the need for pastors to respond to conflict in a biblical manner. He expresses concern that the failure of leaders and congregations to effectively address conflict comes from a tendency to neglect the teachings of the scriptures. Poirier states, “A ministry of reconciliation is not an appendage to real ministry. Peacemaking is not a skill among many that pastors keep in their toolbox.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 289.

Peacemaking is the embodiment of pastoral ministry even as Christ is the embodiment of the God of peace.”<sup>148</sup> Both of these books attempt to place the pastor firmly into the ministry of reconciliation and peacemaking, and proactivity on the part of the church planter/pastor is suggested as a major asset in handling conflict.

Poirier’s book could also help church planters identify flaws that their churches may have in the areas of church government, conducting discipline, or dealing with conflict. Unlike *The Peacemaker*, this book is specifically written for pastors. However, it employs many of the same concepts used in Sande’s book. Poirier focuses on how a pastor can act as a mediator, understand the need for arbitration, and effectively use church discipline principles to assist the peace process in the congregation. He states,

Pastors are busboys washing the dirty dishes of our hatred, anger, lusts, deceits, malice, and filthy words in the purifying stream of Christ’s blood. It is tiring work. It is battle work. It is Messiah work. But we are compelled to persevere, because serving this way is at the heart of our calling as pastors, as mediators.<sup>149</sup>

A third book on this topic, *Healing the Wounded* by John White and Ken Blue, focuses on “corrective” church discipline. According to the authors, “Corrective church discipline would heal the wounded more and be less distasteful if all of us had a broader understanding of discipline.”<sup>150</sup> The book examines church discipline in depth, defining it, explaining the reasons for it, discussing who is required to participate in it, illustrating church failures in doing it, presenting the wrong motives for it, and showing how it restores sinners and glorifies God when it is handled correctly. The authors used insightful fictionalized accounts of pastors, elders, and members dealing with these

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<sup>148</sup> Alfred Poirier, *A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing, 2006), 87.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>150</sup> John White and Ken Blue, *Healing the Wounded: The Costly Love of Church Discipline* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1985), 11.

matters. White and Blue base their discussion on the assumption that the heart of man is evil, as seen in Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”<sup>151</sup> The following excerpt sums up their perspective on the human condition during times of conflict resolution: “Reconciliation means replacing a state of war with one of peace. Whereas hostility and alienation separate, reconciliation restores harmony and closeness. We are at war. We are at war within ourselves. We are also at war with one another, and ultimately, we are at war with God.”<sup>152</sup>

The authors’ straight-forward approach clarifies the issues of conflict resolution so that church planters or pastors might help people come to a “state of peace.” Another helpful insight was to stress that pastors must not see themselves as the only persons responsible to heal people. It is the responsibility of every member to participate in bringing peace to the congregation.<sup>153</sup> This is important for church planters to understand so that they don’t burn themselves out trying to handle every situation in the church. The latter part of the book informs leaders that they are often facing what can be termed as “besetting sins” in people – problems that just won’t go away.<sup>154</sup> It is helpful for church planters to understand that they might be dealing with someone whose struggle has existed for a very long time.

The fourth book, *Getting to Yes* by Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, is valuable for helping church planters understand the dynamics of negotiation. It offers step-by-step strategies for reaching agreement. The book stresses that most negotiation takes place in situations where each party takes a “stand,” from which they refuse to

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<sup>151</sup> Jeremiah 17:9.

<sup>152</sup> White and Blue, 46.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

move. Therefore, no agreement can be reached without a long and intense struggle.

*Getting to Yes* suggests that negotiations should instead be principled, not positional. The book offers four tenets of principled negotiation and explains them in simple terms that are easy to remember. The four principles are: 1) separate the people from the problem, 2) focus on interests, not positions, 3) invent options for mutual gain, and 4) insist on using objective criteria.<sup>155</sup>

By using these four basic tenets as guides to negotiating, this book suggests that wise, efficient, and amicable agreements can be reached. The book explains how parties can define the basic problem of a conflict. In the chapter entitled, “Focus on Interests, not Positions” the authors state, “The basic problem in a negotiation lies not in conflicting positions, but in conflict between each side’s needs, desires, concerns, and fears.”<sup>156</sup> This insight could help church planters to understand the basic issues of a problem: people want what they want, and they want it now.

### **Black Presbyterians**

Why do some blacks want to be Presbyterians? Some answers to this question can be found in the book, *Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope*, by Gayraud Wilmore. This straightforward history challenges and encourages blacks in the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). While not focusing on conservative Presbyterian denominations like the PCA, it provides a look at the conversations and concerns of black members in the same denominational family. Many of the issues for blacks in any Presbyterian denomination are the same.

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<sup>155</sup> Roger Fisher, William Ury and Bruce Patton, *Getting To Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 15.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

The book covers the beginnings of Christianity among African slaves, the definitions of Calvinism and Presbyterianism, and how these doctrines interacted and impacted the black race in America. It also reviews church government, ecumenism, the actions of the Presbyterian Church during the Civil Rights Movement, and where the PCUSA is headed with respect to the question of race. The book begins by reiterating that in colonial days, many whites believed that blacks were not redeemable by Christ. They also feared that if slaves were saved by grace, they might get the idea that they should be free. Wilmore reveals,

At first the English settlers of the North American colonies did not intend to make their slaves Christians. That was considered a dangerous practice, for a baptized slave might get the foolish idea that freedom in Christ (Galatians 5:1) had to include freedom from bondage. The conversion of slaves was also thought to be unreasonable, because who would suppose that people who were believed to be little more than savages could understand the Christian religion well enough to be benefitted by it?<sup>157</sup>

The book mentions the three traditions that characterized black worship – survival, liberation, and elevation. Survival was the attempt to use religion to cope with their condition. Liberation was the use of religion to demand more personal and political freedom. Elevation was the advancement of blacks socially as well as culturally. It is easy to see how all three of these “traditions” of religion led to the Civil Rights Movement, the rise of the Black Muslims, and even the militant efforts of groups such as the Black Panthers. Wilmore describes the idea of elevation as follows, “A classic statement of the elevation motif is found in the old Spiritual ‘We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder,’ which meant, among other things, ascending out of slavery, immaturity, and degradation

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<sup>157</sup> Gayraud Wilmore, *Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope*, Rev.ed. (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon Press, 2006), 5.



towards a better, more respectable, and progressive future among other races of the world.<sup>158</sup>

This literature review has already discussed the fact that some blacks select Presbyterianism because of reformed doctrine, the preachers/theologians associated with doctrine, seminary training, and systems of accountability employed by the denominational structure. However, in his chapter entitled, “Some Erstwhile Fantasies about Black Presbyterians,” Wilmore posits other answers to why blacks might chose Presbyterianism. He states,

There are undoubtedly, some African American Presbyterians who are flattered to be a part of a non-black church, and as visitors used to report, lack the friendliness and warmth that is usually found in traditional African American congregations. Some African American Presbyterian churches want to give the impression that their services are “better,” or “of a higher quality,” or “more intellectual” than those of other churches.<sup>159</sup>

So among some blacks, there is a sense that there is social “elevation” involved with being a Presbyterian rather than a Missionary Baptist or Pentecostal. This concern that some denominations are too emotional and theologically imprecise was also expressed in the book *Experiencing Truth* by Anthony Carter. Wilmore defends the followers of John Calvin as being against oppression, but he also affirms that the Presbyterian experience is not a natural one for oppressed blacks. He states,

The Reformed or Presbyterian tradition was originally much concerned with freedom from the tyranny of civil power and resistance to all forms of religious oppression. The true followers of John Calvin had a guilty conscience about the treatment of the poor and other kinds of social injustice. Despite the deplorable record of some of their churches in America on the slavery question, they found it difficult to shrug off a sense of responsibility for doing something about it. Yet, we have to concede that, taken as a whole, Anglo-Saxon Presbyterianism is about

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 55.

as close a cousin to the Black religious experience as “Annie Laurie” a song by the Royal Bagpipes of Scotland is to “Body and Soul” by Fats Domino.<sup>160</sup>

### **Church Planting**

Locating books that speak specifically to African Americans planting churches in predominantly Anglo denominations is a challenge. It is difficult to find material that does not stereotype black church planters as those who only want to plant black, cross-cultural, or urban churches. Therefore, a cross-section of material was selected.

The first contribution to this section is a review of the MNA email report from Wy Plummer, which started this chapter. That report laments, “. . .it fails to address the question of whether we can or should start churches that specifically target African Americans. And it leaves major segments of black population unreached because they will never attend a multiethnic church.”

A second document for review is a letter written to Jim Bland, the coordinator for Mission to North America, written by a woman that the researcher will call “Cynthia Johnson.” This letter expresses the passionate desire of an African American woman who was part of an unsuccessful church plant with a black pastor. She saved part of her income and donated it to MNA, appealing that Mr. Bland use the funds to conduct a study on why African Americans struggle to plant churches in the PCA. The following are extended portions of this letter that apply to the topic of this review. The letter states:

Dear Mr. Bland:

Enclosed you will find a check in amount of six thousand dollars (\$6000). The express and SOLE purposes of this check are to a) establish an account that would provide funding for the completion of a study that looks at the dynamics of church planting in the Black Community, and to b) leverage matching funds that would cover the completion of this study. It is due to my love of the PCA and my

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 25.

concern for its lack of data regarding the challenges and needs of Black pastors doing church planting that I am requesting that this study be done. My request is that an announcement of this fund and the request for matching funds be placed on the MNA website and in written promotional materials sent out by MNA and the African American Ministries. I am also requesting that Dr. Carl Ellis be intimately involved in the study. I would also like to provide some input into the study design and review the document before its final publication.

As a Black person in the PCA for almost 30 years who has participated in three church plants and served in varied roles in the church, after the closure of [my former church], one of the only African American church plants in the United States, I am faced with the decision of remaining in the PCA or moving to another pre-eminent denomination that is well known in the Black community. You may wonder why I am faced with this decision. As an African American in the PCA, I CONTINUALLY must sacrifice worship that is informed by and expresses the African American experience; the ability to have the preached Word delivered in a manner that addresses the socio-cultural issues and needs that are being faced daily by me as a Black woman and by my Black sisters and brothers; and seeing the lack of positive images of Blacks purported by the PCA at large. Since 1983 my involvement with PCA churches has exposed me to the following scenarios for Blacks:

- a. Mercy ministry churches wherein Blacks are usually the “down and out,” the dysfunctional population that is always in need of help.
- b. PCA churches in which the number of Blacks are extremely disproportionate to the congregation numbers. In other words, there are only a handful of Blacks present in the congregation indicating a lack of outreach to Blacks in the community.
- c. Lack of Blacks in leadership roles in the church (i.e. Elder, Pastor)
- d. A very limited number of PCA churches wherein the congregation consists of Black achievers who are able to provide meaningful contributions, support and leadership to Blacks and other people groups including Anglos in the congregation.
- e. A total of 38 Black pastors NATIONWIDE, not enough Black pastors to have one in each state in the United States. The growth rate of Black pastors suggests that EACH YEAR maybe one Black pastor will graduate from seminary and pass ordination exams. By this rate it will take 12 to 15 years to have enough Black pastors to have one in each state in the US; a rate that I find to be ridiculously slow. This indicates that there may be a lack of planning to project the need for Black pastors and to deliberately increase the number of Black pastors in the PCA proportionate to the projected needs.

- f. Of the 38 pastors that currently exist, they are only serving in congregations in 15 states in the United States while Blacks live in all 50 states in the U.S.
- g. Black pastors struggling with a model of Best Practices for church planting that has not been documented as being applicable OR effective for planting churches in the Black community.
- h. Lack of defined proven outreach models for reaching Blacks in the community. ESL exists for reaching non- English speaking people. The PCA does not seem to have a proactive plan for how to reach the Black community. Currently, a PowerPoint of Best Practices exists that recommend factors for success in church planting and survivability. These Best Practices are recommended from data taken from responses of churches that are mainly in the Anglo culture. Due to the fact that the data was not further analyzed to look at differences in all areas reported for churches that were Hispanic, African American; Multiethnic or Other, from a research perspective, one cannot transfer these findings to church plants in ethnic communities and anticipate the same results.”(used with permission of writer).<sup>161</sup>

*Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, by David J.

Hesselgrave, is a sort of manual for “Planting Churches Cross Culturally for Dummies.”

The book lays out in a very simple manner how a church planting plan for any target group in a cross-cultural context should look. Hesselgrave instructs the sending church on who would be best qualified to send into the field for the church planting task. He also discusses the process of commissioning the missionaries/planters, as well as how the church planter should begin entering into the mission area. In the last section of the book, Hesselgrave discusses the continued relationship between the sending church and the church plant after the new congregation starts to meet. All of these themes are considered key to the survival of church plants, especially the maintaining of the lifeline to the sending church or denominational agency.

Hesselgrave stresses the need for pre-evangelistic courtesy contacts where people already in the target area are informed of something new coming into their community.

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<sup>161</sup> [Cynthia Johnson], letter to Jim Bland, December 30, 2010.

He offers a sample letter that a planter could send to pastors and churches in the target area, graciously and respectfully informing these people of who he is, his denomination, and the fact that some in their congregations might receive surveys. His letter also presents the purpose of the survey and his church's vision to partner with existing churches, not to grow by stealing their church members.<sup>162</sup> The book also contains rating sheets and surveys to help planters and sending churches decide on a target area and prioritize the needs of the people in those areas. There is also a stress on prayer, emphasizing that the Lord must lead them to this area for their work. Hesselgrave's work helps sending churches answer questions such as: "Do we want to reach urban or suburban people?" and "Do we want to go after previously responsive but disillusioned church people or the unreached?"<sup>163</sup>

In stressing the need for an informed plan based on data, as well as on prayer, Hesselgrave states,

We cannot completely understand our task until we are able to define it in relation to the particular area to be entered. That will require continued study. But analysis should begin before church workers actually enter the area. No area should be entered with a church planting effort simply because some believer, however saintly, has a desire or vision for a work, however noble or lofty. We need corporate study of whatever demographic data may be available.<sup>164</sup>

*Church Planting in the African American Context*, by Hozell C. Francis, focuses on six principles of church planting in the black context. These principles include 1) shape a vision, 2) plan wisely, 3) know your community, 4) lead effectively, 5) reach

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<sup>162</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 135.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

families, and 6) transcend ethnic boundaries.<sup>165</sup> One of the issues to which Francis devotes significant time is that of location. He believes it is better to start a church in a church building. His church plant started in a hotel, but his core group was anxious to get into a place specifically used for worship. He states,

I contracted with an Anglo-Presbyterian church after a couple of inadequate meeting places did not work out. The availability of “church” facilities immediately elevated the congregation’s morale. One could argue that it should not make any difference where we meet, as long as we have the Spirit of the Lord with us. While this is true in theory, as a practical matter it does necessarily follow.<sup>166</sup>

Francis presents a simple but informative view of the struggles that black church planters face when deciding who they want to reach with their churches. He presents the differences that black and white churches offer to a black church planter. In the chapter, “The Homogenous Principle in African American Churches,” he explains,

Clearly, misunderstandings and a desire of blacks for autonomy from white hegemony led to the further distancing of black and white in the church. This separation was more comfortable for all. Still, a major concern is whether it is theologically tenable to promote a principle of homogeneity for the sake of expediency and comfort. Would not the unbelieving world be impressed if black and white Christians were more comfortable and cohesive in all our churches?<sup>167</sup>

He continues, “Obviously homogeneity has been a way of life in the United States for some time and will likely continue to be so.”<sup>168</sup> This chapter emphasizes that planters must be able to articulate the mission and target demographic of their church before they plant it. Wy Plummer reports that black church planters have more success when planting multi-cultural churches, but for the most part, blacks aren’t attracted to these models.

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<sup>165</sup>Hozell C. Francis, *Church Planting in the African American Context*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), title page.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

This Literature Review has cited books, journal articles, reports, and magazine articles, that present the issues and concerns of African Americans who seek to plant churches in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The next chapter will explore the methodology used in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American church planters in the Presbyterian Church in America. This chapter presents the research design, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, researcher position, and research limitations.

#### Design of the Study

The research design for this study followed a qualitative approach, using the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis as Sharan B. Merriam defines it in her book *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. She explains, “The constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities or differences...the overall objective of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data.”<sup>169</sup> This study focused on how African American church planters interpreted their worlds. Their “worlds” or experiences were self-interpreted and recounted to the interviewer. Merriam describes qualitative research as “interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.”<sup>170</sup>

The qualitative method provides an excellent tool for discovering and understanding data from the participant’s perspective. The participants in this study

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<sup>169</sup> Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 30.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.



shared the same racial, denominational, and vocational demographic, which helped to limit the variables in the study. Not only did this serve to limit the variables, it also narrowed the criteria for participant selection.

### **Sample Selection**

The researcher used what Merriam describes as “purposeful sampling,” which is a sampling “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned.”<sup>171</sup> The researcher interviewed ten of the twenty-two African Americans that the Presbyterian Church in America has officially recognized as church planters. The researcher then selected eight of these ten participants in an effort to further protect the participants’ identities and need for privacy. The initial goal of the study was to seek out best practices, but the responses to the interview questions overwhelmingly indicated that there were other major themes to be reported.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data gathering. During this type of interview, the researcher uses a mixture of more and less structured interview questions. The open-ended nature of the interview questions facilitates the ability to build upon participant responses to complex issues in order to explore them more thoroughly. As Merriam notes, “less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways.”<sup>172</sup> She adds, “This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 90.

the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.”<sup>173</sup> Ultimately, these methods enable the researcher to look for common themes, patterns, and concerns, as well as contrasting views across the sample of participants.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Why do African American pastors join the PCA?
2. How are African American pastors assessed to plant churches in the PCA?
3. What are the cultural challenges within and without the denomination that African American PCA church planters face?

In order to gather data that answered the three research questions, the researcher utilized the following interview questions:

1. What is your church background?
2. What attracted you to Reformed doctrine and led you to come into the PCA?
3. What types of cultural challenges have you faced since coming to the PCA?  
How did you handle these challenges?
4. How did you come to the realization that you should plant a PCA church?
5. What is your view of the MNA assessment process?
6. What have been the challenges you have faced while church planting?
7. Describe how your financial support was raised.
8. What were the most effective practices of your church planting experience?
9. Describe the cultural/racial demographics of your congregation.

The researcher conducted the interviews face-to-face when possible, recorded them with a digital voice recorder, and then transcribed them. Recording the interviews

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 90.

ensured that everything said by the respondents was preserved for later analysis. Interview transcripts were formatted to facilitate analysis. Each page of the transcripts contained identifying information regarding when, where, and with whom the interview was conducted. The majority of the interviews took place during the summer and fall of 2011. For six of the interviews, the researcher traveled to the participant's location in the United States. Two interviews were conducted over the phone.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The results of this research are necessarily limited to the parameters that were used to conduct the study. The main limitation of the study is a result of its focus on the limited number of pastors who qualified as participants. The study focused only on African Americans. It was further limited in that it focused only on those African Americans who were church planters in the Presbyterian Church in America. The PCA does not ordain women to the office of pastor. Therefore, no females were interviewed for this study.

The PCA is somewhat unique in that it mostly consists of small, conservative, white congregations in the southeastern United States. The denomination's adherence to Reformed theology further sets it apart from many other denominations. The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) has more African American pastors, but it is considered to be a more liberal branch of Presbyterianism, especially in its stance on the ordination of women and homosexuals. The conservative Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP) has had one African American pastor, but as of the time of this writing, he has transferred to another denomination. The lack of published work focusing on the problem statement, coupled with the limited pool of subjects, will serve

to limit the transferability of the data to like research problems, no matter how representative it may be of the experiences of African American church planters in the PCA.

### **Researcher Position**

This researcher is a male African American teaching elder in the Presbyterian Church in America, but not a church planter. Prior to joining the PCA, the researcher spent twelve years as a pastor to African American Pentecostals. The researcher does have a particular perspective on the black church, black history, black culture, racial reconciliation, the Presbyterian Church in America, and African Americans planting churches that represent predominantly Anglo denominations. He has experienced some challenges working in a denomination that is predominantly Anglo and conservative.

The researcher believes that throughout its history, the black church has been a place where blacks did not have to worry about being controlled by white agendas. The researcher struggles with the issue of racial reconciliation in the church, not because he is a racist, but because he believes it usually comes across as a white-led program. He has personally witnessed that in the process of tearing down the idols of race and culture, the black church at times mistakenly comes under attack for simply being “too black.” The researcher believes that the destruction of the black church should not be a part of the reconciliation agenda.

The researcher has planted churches in black denominations, but he has never attempted to plant one in the PCA or in any other predominantly Anglo denomination. Therefore, he is interested in the challenges and dynamics that African Americans must navigate in order to succeed in this part of the body of Christ. The researcher is not biased

against those African Americans who choose to plant these churches. Rather, he believes them to be attempting a heroic feat. The researcher hopes this study will increase the success rate of these endeavors.

### **Data Analysis**

Sharan Merriam defines data analysis as “the process of making sense out of the data.”<sup>174</sup> She explains that the goal of data analysis is to find answers to your research questions.<sup>175</sup> The answers to these research questions are called “findings,” “categories,” or “themes.”<sup>176</sup> The data gathered during this study was analyzed using the constant comparative method of data analysis. This method “involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences. The overall object of this analysis is to identify patterns in the data.”<sup>177</sup> An underlying assumption behind the use of qualitative data analysis is that this type of analysis is “inductive and comparative in the service of developing common themes, patterns, or categories that cut across the data.”<sup>178</sup>

The data set for this study consists of the transcribed interviews with the participants. The recordings of the interviews, which were stored on the digital voice recorders, have also been saved on a laptop computer and transcribed via a word processing program. The researcher organized and managed the data utilizing a system called “coding.” Merriam defines coding as “assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 173-175.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 269.

of the data.”<sup>179</sup> These codes were used to organize the data into specific categories.

Categories are “conceptual elements that ‘cover’ or span many individual examples of the category.”<sup>180</sup> Merriam instructs that the categories constructed during the data analysis must meet several criteria. Categories should be “as sensitive to the data as possible, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and conceptually congruent.”<sup>181</sup>

An important note about the process of qualitative data analysis is that it should be conducted along with, rather than after, the data collection. Merriam counsels that “collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research.”<sup>182</sup> She adds even stronger words on the importance of keeping analysis and collection together: “You have undermined your entire project by waiting until after all the data are collected before beginning analysis.”<sup>183</sup> Merriam explains:

The much preferred way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it simultaneously with data collection. At the outset of a qualitative study, the investigator knows what the problem is and has selected a purposeful sample to collect data in order to address the problem. But the researcher does not know what will be discovered, what or whom to concentrate on, or what the final analysis will be like. The final product is shaped by the data that are collected and the analysis that accompanies the entire process. Without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating.<sup>184</sup>

In order to analyze the data, the researcher first read through the transcripts of the interviews and gave them descriptive coding tags. The location of the quote was then described in the researcher’s notes for later reference. The data were then sorted under

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 171.

the four research questions. Subheadings were then developed to allow the researcher to further sort the tags collected under each question.

This chapter has detailed the data gathering process, as well as the criteria for selecting the interview subjects. In the chapter that follows, the interview data will be reported.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of African American pastors who have planted churches in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The researcher sought to discover information that might benefit the PCA as they commission African Americans to plant churches in the future. In order to explore the problem and bring out best practices, the following research questions were employed:

1. Why do African American pastors join the PCA?
2. How are African American pastors assessed to plant churches in the PCA?
3. What are the cultural challenges within and without the denomination that African American PCA church planters faced?

The findings from the interviews with the eight African American PCA church planters are revealed below. The findings are categorized according to the major themes that surfaced in response to the interview questions, which were used to gather data regarding the four research questions listed above. In order to protect their privacy, the interview subjects' names will be replaced by pseudonyms. The following pseudonyms will be used: Aaron, Benjamin, Caleb, David, Elijah, Felix, Gideon, and Hosea. All of the research participants met the interview subject criteria laid out in chapter three.

Some minor themes surfaced with two or three of the participants, such as the importance of the church plant's geographical location, the struggle to raise funds, and what they stated as an unrealistic time expectation that for black men to plant PCA



churches, especially in black communities. However, the researcher discovered that these minor themes emanated from the major themes that prevailed in the majority of the interviews. A theme had to be present in five of the eight interview participants' responses to be considered "major" for purposes of this study. The researcher focused on these major themes. In the quest to answer the research questions, the following eight major themes were identified: 1) reformed theology, 2) the divine call to racial reconciliation, 3) MNA assessment challenging cultural sensitivity, 4) MNA assessment being culturally insensitive, 5) the challenge of overcoming preconceived assumptions, misunderstandings, and underestimations of the impact of black culture on black leaders in white denominations, 6) the challenge of overcoming the lack of a significant historical presbyterian presence in the black community, 7) the need for affirmation from family and friends on the church planter's ministry in the PCA, and 8) the challenge of reaching the African American male.

### **Why do African American Pastors Join the PCA?**

The first research question addressed the reason why these African American pastors came into the PCA. Why would they join a pre-dominantly Anglo denomination with southern conservative roots? The two themes that surfaced in all eight of the interviews were reformed theology, and a sense of divine calling to racial reconciliation.

#### **Reformed Theology**

As stated, all eight interview participants cited reformed theology as a factor that drew them into the PCA. Seven out of eight listed this as the first and foremost factor in their decision to enter the denomination. David, who had spent time in the Baptist church as well as the Assemblies of God, stated,

The PCA church we started attending drew people from all over, but not black people. Not in large numbers at all. So we were leaving a black church to go to a white church. But we really weren't leaving the black church for the white church; we were leaving the black church we were in because we were so desperate for teaching. We believed the PCA pastor was a man who was accurately teaching the scriptures. Then we found out it was called Reformed Theology. We soaked it up like a sponge.

Benjamin added to this sentiment when he explained, "I went to seminary after hearing another black brother preach an expository sermon on Acts chapter nine. It blew me away. When I asked him where he was trained, he said he went to a reformed seminary. I had to get some of that."

Caleb, who grew up Catholic and then moved to the Baptist church, reflected that his introduction and attraction to reformed theology was the result of seeking out a seminary to further his theological education. He recounted,

I came to faith in the Catholic Church, so I was fascinated with the Reformation. By the time I was ready to study theology at a graduate level, my personal views on salvation had changed, inasmuch as I believed that salvation was something that God did first, that the conviction for salvation was from God. I was beginning to understand what election was all about and that drew me to the PCA. It seemed like God was using my hunger for good theology to draw me into a predominantly white denomination; pretty incredible, but that's what happened.

David reinforced the attractiveness of this theology when he explained, "My wife and I were searching for right theology, and we found it in the PCA. I really wanted to go to...seminary and then go back to my home church. I think guys who do that should be prayed for greatly because sometimes they suffer for that. However, Jesus wanted me to stay in the PCA. I believe in sovereignty."

Gideon, also a former ordained Baptist minister, re-enforced this theological theme when he shared,

The thing that really attracted me to reformed theology was this appreciation of the gospel, which placed a lot of emphasis on the doctrines of grace and the sovereignty of God, the continuity that exists between the Old and New Covenants. Those things just really captivated me, and it caused me to go deeper in the word of God. And, you know, I had a crisis there for a minute in some of the areas where I had different convictions, but as I studied the scriptures and was sort of mentored by some guys in the PCA, I was able to come to grips with what the Bible teaches about some of these issues.

Felix, who grew up without a church background, but sensed a call to ministry while he was a teenager, added,

I was attracted to the reform faith because I wanted something different than what I was taught growing up. I came up under what some call “legalism.” When I came to seminary, I was already open to a different way of thinking about God and how I approached scripture. The doctrines of grace were most appealing to me. After listening to the teachings at my PCA seminary, I quickly embraced the reformed faith. Afterwards, I was very anxious to go back into the black community and teach grace from the reformed perspective. Later, I officially joined the PCA because I believed the denomination was teaching the truth of scripture. I still believe the Lord wants blacks to grasp reformed theology, especially in these days of the health and wealth gospel.

Elijah made these simple remarks, “I think right theology has to be applied to every aspect of life, and when people in churches are under wrong theology, the enemy messes up everything. Right theology, which is what I think most of the PCA preaches, is what drew me here. I know that right theology is more than regurgitating the Westminster Confession, but that is a good start.”

#### The Divine Call to Racial Reconciliation

The topic of racial reconciliation was prevalent in all eight interviews. The interview participants each expressed a burden to be a part of God’s reconciling work in their church and community. To them, this work was predominately the reconciliation of blacks and whites, especially in the churches in the United States. Three participants specifically remarked that their presence as black men in the PCA, along with their

efforts to plant PCA churches, are a direct response to God's command to walk in reconciliation and unity. Five of the participants revealed that they were initially reluctant to change denominations and join the PCA, since they thought that the racial and cultural divide between blacks and white conservative evangelicals might be too much to overcome, but they had faith that God was in charge. The other three participants did not mention racial or cultural divides as a reason for hesitancy in joining the PCA.

Discussing his call to racial reconciliation as a major motivation for joining the PCA, Benjamin explained,

I would have never come to the PCA if it wasn't important to God that blacks cross over racial lines to lead churches. The Lord guided me here through the call to be a part of a real bridge between two cultures that have not always had good history in America. I never wanted to be the only black brother in the room, but the Lord is in charge.

Aaron also expressed confidence and concern about joining the PCA. He admitted,

I believe that Jesus wanted me to be in the denomination (PCA), but I had my doubts. But after getting to know a few of the men in the local Presbytery and coming under care at a PCA church, I started to come under conviction that these people were good folks, who just didn't have a lot of exposure to black people as church people.

Hosea talked of being challenged by the theological battles between factions of the PCA and the appearance of caring more about doctrine than people. He related his initial exposure to the denomination as follows:;

My first real exposure to the denomination was during my seminary years when I attended a General Assembly with one of my PCA pastor friends. That was probably not a good way to be introduced to the denomination. It really scared me. I was used to more of a celebration, and not what seemed like a court of law. I had never seen so many white people in one place in my life. There were no other colors there except for the folks who worked at the hotel. But God in his sovereignty called me here to add some blackness to this place, and here I have been for a decade.

Caleb expressed his commitment to racial reconciliation within the PCA when he detailed an event that almost made him leave the denomination. He recounted,

Prior to coming into the PCA, I thought that racial reconciliation was a good idea and biblical, but I didn't understand how hard it was. We tend to settle on being diverse, which is not hard to do. People do it all the time at sporting events, rock concerts, movie theaters, in the park, whatever. But Christian unity is a killer. It is difficult to submit to other cultures, especially when you believe how you do things is the better way. But God! Being in the PCA has taught me a lot about God's heart for bringing people together – even blacks and whites in the church in America. This is a God-sized task for me, because I sometimes want to go back to the black church, but I know that I am in the denomination for his glory, even if it kills me.

Gideon discussed his acceptance into the PCA by fellow African Americans. He also noted that reformed theology was key to his presence in the denomination. He stated, “The theology is exactly what our people need to hear, and that is essential to me. But I also want to stress that the black brothers have been wonderful. Their friendship and the all too infrequent get-togethers we have been able to pull off have made all of the struggles and misunderstandings worth it.”

### **How Are African American Pastors Assessed to Plant Churches in the PCA?**

The interviews showed that African American pastors are not assessed any differently than other church planting candidates. The basic assessment process conducted by MNA can be seen in the tool entitled, “The Assessment Funnel” (see Appendix A) created by Allen Thompson. At the time of this writing, there are twenty-five black PCA pastors who have been *officially endorsed by their presbyteries as church planters*. Twelve of these men have been assessed by Mission to North America, and all have received an affirmation of their calling to church planting. According to Reverend Wy Plummer, Mission to North America's African American Church Planting Coordinator, individuals who want to plant PCA churches must undergo a pre-assessment

approval process as a step to getting into the denomination's Church Planting Assessment Center. Reverend Plummer is one of the individuals who can grant pre-approval to the Assessment Center.

The researcher attended and observed this to gain first-hand experience with the PCA's assessment process. There were no African Americans being assessed at the time of the researcher's attendance, but as stated earlier by Reverend Plummer, the assessment process is the same for everyone. As of this writing, twenty-two black men who have attempted to plant PCA churches. Nine of these men have been assessed and approved by the Mission to North America Assessment Center. Eight succeeded in planting self-governing, self-sufficient, particularized churches. However, six of these church plants never left "mission" status and were terminated.

The Assessment Center requires church planters to share their Christian testimony, discuss their sense of calling to ministry and church planting, explain why they picked their particular geographic location for the plant, and describe their "target demographic" and overall strategy. Each planter is also asked to deliver a timed sermon on a text of the planter's choice. The Assessment Center further evaluates the potential church planters and their spouses, if they are in attendance, to help them understand whether church planting is the right "fit" based on their ministry gifts and personality traits.

Of the eight interview participants, six were assessed by Mission to North America. Two themes were prevalent in those six interviews with the assessed church planters. First, four of the participants emphasized that the assessment process stretched

their thinking in the area of cultural sensitivity. Ironically, four of these six interviewees also indicated that the assessment process itself was culturally insensitive.

#### Challenging Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural sensitivity is simply the understanding that culture exists and that it impacts what people do and how they do it. Elijah offered these thoughts on the cultural sensitivity of the assessment center,

I thought what they did was good, but I had picked up some of these things in my last denomination. They looked at things that you can't get around if you want to be a church planter such your testimony, call to ministry, and vision for the church plant, however I was challenged to start thinking about reaching other cultures, such as Asian and Hispanics. Actually my wife and I were a little convicted that we had put cultural insensitivity on Anglos and we were doing it ourselves. I realized that I never really think beyond black and white in America.

Felix added, "I really appreciated the approach of MNA. They really do take church planting seriously. My wife and I were blessed by that process. It challenged us to think outside the African American box and be aware of the needs of other cultures."

#### Being Culturally Insensitive

The participants who thought that MNA's process was culturally insensitive expressed a feeling that the assessment center uses a one-size-fits-all ethic to the strategy of preparing planters for the task. Elijah again states,

After my assessment, I submitted my comments on the assessment, which were suggestions for making the process more palatable for minorities, especially if the guys are going to the city. However, after talking to a white brother who just went through recently, I am told that the tools for understanding yourself and your relationships have improved, but nothing that deals with reaching minority cultures. I think there should be breakouts for that, but maybe there just aren't enough of us going through it to justify that.

David added concerning the assessment center's approach to black culture,

I am not too sure the assessment has a feel for African American culture and what it takes for a Presbyterian to reach that culture. I don't think that it is racial, I just

don't think the black culture or any culture outside of Anglo-European culture has really ever impacted PCA thinking in a significant way. I mean if I was white, I probably wouldn't walk around all day asking myself, "What does it take to reach black people?"

Aaron stated,

I sometimes thought there should have been more pushback on candidates who made comments that made it seem like entire cities were not hearing the gospel just because there was no reformed church there. I don't think MNA buys into no one else outside of PCA as having a gospel message, but when I went through assessment that is what it sounded like.

### **What are the Cultural Challenges Within and Without the Denomination that African American PCA Church Planters Faced?**

The predominant challenges observed from interview participants were: 1) preconceived assumptions, misunderstandings, and underestimations of the impact of black culture, 2) overcoming the lack of a significant historical Presbyterian presence in the black community, 3) and the inability to reach significant numbers of young black men.

Preconceived Cultural Assumptions, Misunderstandings and Underestimations

Cultural Assumptions

All eight interview participants identified some level of preconceived assumptions, misunderstandings, and underestimations of black culture by whites in the PCA as a major source of challenge they faced as church planters. Six of the eight participants cited the preconceived assumption that black church planters in the PCA want (or should want) to plant churches in the urban areas or the inner-city. Five of the eight participants also cited the assumption that black church planters should plant cross-cultural or multi-cultural churches. David, one of the six who cited the assumption that



black planters should plant churches in the inner city as a major challenge, offered this antidote:

On a more personal thing, for guys: Don't stereotype us, man, you know? When I was in D.C., this guy came up to me, and...we were talking about outreach. He says, "So I guess you're gonna be playing a lot of basketball, huh?" Now, I love basketball, but my favorite sport is actually fencing. I played lacrosse in college. And so it was really funny...I laughed, I smiled, but in my mind, I said, "You knucklehead! You...made this assumption that because I'm black, we're gonna have a wonderful basketball outreach, huh?" You know, it was just stupid.

Explaining the challenge of the assumption that black planters should be establishing PCA churches in the inner city, Felix stated, "I am not from the city, although I do pastor a church in the city. I believe that God called me here, but I don't know if I would want someone telling me or assuming that I should plant in the city just because I am black or from any other minority group. I believe you should plant where you think God has called you to plant." Benjamin commented,

There is a movement in the PCA that always plants churches in the inner city which are intentionally cross-cultural or multi-cultural. This movement is also very passionate about mercy ministries, and many of the PCA's black pastors admire and appreciate what they do and have been affected and mentored by their pastors. But that doesn't mean that black pastors automatically want to do what this movement does. Sometimes, we black men should speak up and tell people that God has called us to the "burbs." There are a lot of sinners there too.

Elijah, who pastors in a racially mixed, middle class suburban area recalled,

I was attending a presbytery meeting, and one of the pastors asked if my church has a ministry to the poor. I answered that we supported two ministries in this community that provide assistance to people in need. The pastor then stated that he was disappointed that our church was not in the city where he thought it would be able to do a "greater work." It is a struggle to not feel guilty about not being where other people think you should be, especially if you think that it is simply because of your skin tone. I love the PCA, but this race thing is so subtle. It is unfortunate. I don't know what other guys are saying, but this is a struggle for me to always feel like I have to reach certain people. It is a major source of shame for me.

Hosea also carried the theme of shame when he stated,

I wish I had more young black men in the church, but I don't. This is a strange dance you know? White brothers don't get second guessed when they have a church full of whites so why do we have to be looked at as failures because we don't enough of this or that color in the sanctuary? My sense of shame goes up every presbytery because I know somebody is going to ask me about strategies for reaching black males. They don't mean to shame me, but it always happens. Man I am to go nuts with this thing.

#### Lack of a Significant Historical Presbyterian Presence in the Black Community

Six out of eight participants identified the historical lack of a significant presence of the Presbyterian Church within the Black community as a major challenge when attempting to plant a PCA church. Aaron, who grew up in an inner-city stated, "We had Presbyterian churches in the city, but they were all white. Mostly older white people who seemed to be either left behind or refused to leave after the community became mostly black. Most of those congregations sold or gave their buildings to black or Hispanic congregations." Elijah explained the lack of a significant Presbyterian presence amongst blacks in the United States as a result of a pro-slavery stance by Presbyterians in the South, coupled with a real or perceived lack of white evangelical participation in social justice movements that benefit the lower classes. He elaborates,

Southern Presbyterians were aligned with cotton pickers and tobacco growers during the time of slavery, and this was about profit. There was also the belief that blacks were destined by God to remain slaves in this country. Even when you mention recent injustices in the area of civil rights or like causes where people have fought or are still fighting for social justice, the average black person doesn't think of the Presbyterian church. If you ask black folks what churches have been active in social justice or mercy types of movements, they will name Baptists, Methodist, AME, or maybe a liberal white denomination. Even if this is not true, it is the perception. Black people identify with the churches they grew up in or around. Presbyterian is not what they know or do.

Hosea further explained the misunderstanding when he stated,

I mean, think about it, when Anglos do a church plant, you know, they don't have some of the barriers that we're facing. I mean, you go into a church, you know,

and you go into a community, and first you're Presbyterian. Sometimes blacks don't know that is. And then you're Reformed. They don't know what that is. But if you go in with the idea that the verbage is important as opposed to the essence of what the verbage means...

#### *A Lack of Understanding in Areas of Black Church and Culture*

Five of the eight participants cited a lack of understanding by many whites in the denomination as to how the black church came into existence in America. They expressed that whites have forgotten or never investigated how, as a result of racial and ecclesiastical segregation between slaves and slave owners in the majority of the South, the black church was born. Elijah stated, "The preacher was seen as the first citizen of the slave population and was usually the most educated and the most gifted speaker. He had credibility with slave owners." The participants noted that the slave worship services would have a huge impact on how the slave viewed God, his servitude, his dignity, and his humanity. Aaron elaborated,

I sometimes think that many whites in our denomination think that the black church is just about health and wealth gospel, whooping and pastors with big cars and bad theology. Now there are churches like that, but they are in many other cultures also. I believe the majority of black churches are in existence because people want the gospel and dignity. They want to hear good preaching, sing celebratory songs, and for a short while, be in the majority for once. They want to be human. That's what the slave worship did for our forefathers, and that's what most churches exist for today. Does the black church need a shot in the arm? Yep! But it still needs to be respected for what it has done for people.

Five of the eight participants cited the notion that Anglos may not think that they too have culture and are influenced by it. It appears that everyone else is part of a culture, but not whites. The participants expressed this lack of understanding in the white community as a major contributor to the underestimation of how great an impact black culture will make on the success of a church plant led by a black man. Felix stated,

Whites in the PCA have got to understand that black teaching elders cannot magically become white Scottish Presbyterians, and we shouldn't have to act white, and I am not sure exactly what that means. Black people reject black folks who don't want to be black. I like my culture, but I don't worship it. The trouble is that whites don't understand how they are influenced by their cultures. I mean aren't there books entitled, *Scottish Presbyterianism*, and there are Dutch Reformed Churches?

Benjamin explained the phenomena as follows: "Whites tend to, when they talk about their own culture, sometimes they don't even use the word 'culture.' It's just become that's what's normative. Now, it's not normative. That's your culture. But when it's their culture, it is not culture, it's normative."

#### *The Need to be affirmed by Family and Friends*

Six of the eight participants revealed that they had to deal with the challenge of not having their ministries in the PCA affirmed by family and friends. Five of those participants stated that presently they have that affirmation, but when they began to plant PCA churches, it was hard on these relationships. Hosea acknowledged, "It is tremendously important for my family and friends to see me as authentic and not a 'white folks' negro." Felix recalled that his family did not initially receive his entry to the PCA very well, but have come to accept it. He explained, "At one of our family get-togethers a few years ago, one of my cousins asked me why I was wasting my seminary education on a white denomination when so many black churches need trained pastors. That really hurt, and I actually went into a mild depression." Celeb related a similar story. He recounted,

I really, really struggled with coming into the PCA since all of my family is Church of God in Christ. They didn't understand my coming to this denomination, and frankly I think they would have struggled with me becoming Missionary Baptist, but Presbyterian? Really? My dad thought it was terrible and still hasn't mentioned it to the people in my old church.

David reinforced the need to have some affirmation from family and friends by stating,

I have not been able to raise one dime from the people in my family for this church plant. Don't get me wrong, my family has no problem financially assisting my family. I mean my kids are their grandchildren, and they love my wife, but they are hard core Baptists. My grandmother is a learned woman when it comes to church history, and she usually starts her sentences with the phrase "Now I am not racist, but..." When she talks about white folks, that's how she starts things off.

The Challenge of Being Considered A Great White Hope.

Six of the eight participants spoke of the challenge of being considered the answer to their presbytery's or denomination's struggle to become more diverse as a result of reaching the black culture. David stated,

You do not, and I would not ever, look at a black church minister or planter within the PCA and automatically think that he is the key to connecting with any community of black people. I would say please don't put him in the position where he's supposed to be the one that's going to get the black folks to come to a PCA church. Please don't think that once you get him up and started and going, black people are just going to start coming out of the woodwork, flocking in droves. I just don't think that's going to happen, and I think our experience shows that that is not going to happen, so please don't put him in a position.

Caleb also observed,

I want the denomination to realize that most black men, if not all, when they join the PCA, they are taking risks. I don't want the PCA to see black men joining the PCA as, you know, something to rejoice over only. Yes, rejoice over them, but I wish that the PCA in general would realize that when African American and black men cross the line, so to speak, and join up with the PCA, they're literally becoming – invariably they become ostracized from their own cultures. So there's some risks involved in being a black teaching elder in the PCA.

Aaron stated,

I feel like my value in this denomination is tied to me reaching the black community. If you look at my congregation on Sunday morning, it is obvious that I am not reaching a lot of black folks. There are a lot of black churches in this area, and that's where black people go. When I go to presbytery meetings, people think I have this great silver bullet strategy for reaching blacks. I don't have it.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the data gathered during the interview process was categorized and reported. The final chapter of this dissertation will analyze the themes that have emerged from the literature review and the interview process, providing recommendations for future research and practice.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This dissertation has been a blessing to me. I hope that it will prove helpful to those who are interested in learning from eight African American pastors who have undertaken the task of planting a church in the Presbyterian Church in America. The interviews helped me recall the faithfulness of God in the fight for unity among the cultures and races in the body of Christ. I am especially reminded of the struggle for reconciliation among blacks and whites in the church in the United States of America. As depicted in the Revelation of John, the Lord will bring all nations, races, cultures, and languages together with the express purpose to worship him all at once before his throne.<sup>185</sup>

How the Lord does this is a great mystery to humans. Even in the church itself, we sometimes struggle with getting two churches within the same denomination to worship in harmony. When we think of trying to establish reconciliation and unity between whites and blacks, many of us have become exasperated. This task seems almost impossible if the blacks are in the cities and the whites are in the suburbs. I believe these seemingly insurmountable tasks are a part of the Lord's reason for bringing the people he has brought into the denomination. A majority of the black church planters interviewed for this study grew up in urban inner-city areas and have been members of black churches. Some have already been ordained in those churches. They understand and have

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<sup>185</sup> Revelation 7:9-10.

credibility in the black church culture. However, the Lord chooses them for this type of work. He is the one who planned their steps and used those steps to bring his plan closer to completion in denominations like the PCA. Six of the eight church planters interviewed grew up in urban inner-city environments, and three have previously been ordained or licensed to preach in a black church. The two church planters who did not grow up in the inner-city grew up in middle class suburbs that were, according to them, rapidly transitioning from white to black. For this reason, they would probably say that they too grew up in a black context.

It is extremely important that I explain the tremendous sacrifice that black pastors make in coming to the Presbyterian Church in America. For most, this sacrifice involves being misunderstood by family, friends, and members of their previous home church and denomination. Because of the perceptions of blacks in the United States, these pastors sometimes need to suppress their emotions and keep silent, so as not to appear combative and angry. So there is the tension of wanting to be heard, but sometimes not knowing how to express oneself. There is also the struggle of trying to be honest about “heated” issues without coming across as “too black.” For the most part, these men are still strangers in a strange land.

Coupled with the dynamics of this sacrifice is the PCA’s lack of cultural intelligence. The denomination “does not know what it does not know” when it comes to minority cultures. Minorities in predominantly white “worlds” really don’t have any choice but to become cross-cultural if they want to thrive. That means that they have to understand and navigate “whiteness.” However, for the most part, whites don’t have to be cross-cultural; they are dominant. Whites, can afford to not know, but minorities must



know. As an African American officer in the United States Army and a Presbyterian pastor, I can confidently claim that I have had to spend an overwhelmingly greater amount of time studying of the writings, doctrines, rules, mores, values, politicking, and family dynamics of the white culture than I have spent studying the black culture. It isn't that I don't love black culture. I do. But I was raised by proud black folks who taught me early in life to know my own culture, because they knew that I was going to have to spend a lot of my adult life learning how to navigate the dominant culture in the United States.

The purpose of this study was to explore how African American pastors have experienced planting churches in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). This study was intended to discover issues and knowledge that might benefit the Presbyterian Church in America as the research questions were answered during the eight interviews that were conducted by the researcher. In order to explore the problem and bring out best practices of African American church planters, the following research questions were employed:

1. Why do African American pastors join the PCA?
2. How are African American pastors assessed to plant churches in the PCA?
3. What are the cultural challenges within and without the denomination that African American PCA church planters faced?

In the quest to answer the research questions, the researcher identified the following eight major themes: 1) reformed theology, 2) the divine call to racial reconciliation, 3) MNA assessment challenging cultural sensitivity, 4) MNA assessment being culturally insensitive, 5) the challenge of overcoming preconceived assumptions,

misunderstandings and underestimations of the impact of black culture on black leaders in white denominations, 6) the challenge of overcoming the lack of a significant historical Presbyterian presence in the black community, 7) the need for affirmation from family and friends on the church planter's ministry in the PCA, and 8) the challenge of reaching the African American male.

Revelation 7:9-10 states, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"<sup>186</sup> This text tells us what Christian unity in the church will eventually look like. We will all be worshipping before the throne of God, finally together in one place! The walls of division in the church between Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female that were destroyed at the cross of Calvary as described by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Ephesians and the Galatians will finally be realized. I believe what I found out in the process of this study is that God is at work in the PCA to bring about change that reflects the end-state of our struggle to manifest the unity that Paul discusses in scripture.

I believe this study addresses the hope we have in Jesus for racial reconciliation and unity in the church in the United States. I believe it demonstrates the hard work and struggle that must be endured to achieve that unity. I believe it testifies to the fact that without faith in Christ to accomplish this mighty task through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will be destined to futility and exasperation. The interviews demonstrated that

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<sup>186</sup> Revelation 7:9-10.

black PCA church planters are responding to the call for racial, cultural, and ecclesiastical reconciliation. However, those interviews also revealed the significant racial, cultural, and ecclesiastical challenges that these men face in the PCA.

The study should confront all who want to believe that we have arrived. The notion that there is no significant threat to Christian unity is a trick of Satan's subtlety to keep us from having the hard conversations that take us beyond simple diversity, which can be accomplished by putting two people of different colors in the same room. Diversity is important. However, it is not the finish line, but rather the start of the race to unity. Unity will only be attained when the church has overcome the uphill and rocky course that is racial and cultural separation between blacks and whites in the church in the United States. I believe there is yet the fear of losing too much to the "other side" in the quest for unity.

This study has shown that African Americans can plant PCA churches, but they have to navigate through major challenges along the way. Most of these challenges appear to be the result of racial (or at least cultural) assumptions and misunderstandings within the denomination and also within the planters themselves. These assumptions and misunderstandings have led to significant underestimations of the influence of culture on all involved. These assumptions and misunderstandings need to be "unpacked" as much as possible before future church planters get into the field. However, this is a bigger job than MNA can handle in a few days of assessment. The unpacking must be motivated and sponsored by the sending churches and presbyteries. I believe that it is generally a good thing that the MNA church planting assessment process is the same for everyone, because that helps to prevent it from being prejudicial. However, this equality in process may

cause the denomination to miss racial or cultural nuances that need to be addressed. I also believe that, as stated by some of the interview participants, when you are black in a predominantly white training setting, equality of treatment translates into doing things the “white way.” So the question becomes, “Do we need to have a separate assessment center for blacks?” This rhetorical question has been considered for as long as I have been in the denomination.

I will now address the results of the research with respect to the major themes that emerged during the study.

### **Reformed Theology**

I have never asked a black pastor why he came into the PCA without hearing something along the lines of “It’s the theology!” Reformed theology recognizes God as the sovereign agent of his creation as well as the redemptive story that follows the fall of that creation. He is in total control over all, including the evil in this world. That is a message that many black churches preach and to which black people would shout “Amen!” However, reformed theology also stresses the covenants of God, including his covenant language and character. We see this in the discourse in Genesis 12:1-3, where God reaches covenantal agreement with Abraham. The text states,

The LORD had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”<sup>187</sup>

Reformed theology also includes certain tenets that may be understood by using the acronym TULIP. TULIP was coined by the reformer John Calvin, for whom

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<sup>187</sup> Genesis 12:1-3.

“Calvinism,” is named. He is considered by many to be the father of Presbyterianism. TULIP gives five phrases that help one remember the background of reformed theology. These are: 1) total depravity, in which sin taints every aspect of life, 2) unconditional election, which states that God sovereignly chooses those he will save and that this choosing is not based on anything any person did to warrant this gracious act, 3) limited atonement, which states that the death of Christ was directed specifically at those God chose to save, 4) irresistible grace, which states that God calls us to him and we come, and 5) perseverance of the saints, which states that our salvation is secure in the work of Christ on the cross, and not in our ability to keep from sinning.

“The Calvinist Corner” is a website focused on helping people to understand this John Calvin’s theology. One quote (which is unattributed to a specific author) from that website states,

The system of Calvinism adheres to a very high view of scripture and seeks to derive its theological formulations based solely on God’s word. It focuses on God’s sovereignty, stating that God is able and willing by virtue of his omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, to do whatever He desires with His creation. It also maintains that within the Bible are the following teachings: That God, by His sovereign grace predestines people into salvation; that Jesus died only for those predestined; that God regenerates the individual where he is then able and wants to choose God; and that it is impossible for those who are redeemed to lose their salvation.<sup>188</sup>

The appeal of reformed theology may be seen in the fact that many black PCA pastors, as well as the majority of this study’s participants, have come out of denominations that did not fully embrace all the tenets of reformed theology. This caused these pastors to view their former denominations as somewhat legalistic. It was this legalism and the prevalence of the health and wealth gospel in some black churches that

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<sup>188</sup> <http://calvinistcorner.com/tulip>

not only caused their exodus to reformed theology and ultimately to the PCA. This same concern over legalism now motivates these men to take reformed theology to the black community.

### **The Divine Call to Racial Reconciliation**

Ephesians 2:14-16 states,

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.<sup>189</sup>

The call to racial reconciliation has impacted these men in such a way that they have left their former denominations and sought to plant churches in *strategic places* in order to display God's heart for reconciling races and cultures. As the above scripture shows, God wants to establish one new humanity by destroying barriers and walls of hostility. However, God will not destroy race and culture. He will cause these things to submit to the unity of the body of Christ. These church planters believe that their call is to be proclaimers and examples of this unity by joining the PCA. They want to be used of *God in the PCA, a denomination which, according to American history, is not a "comfortable" church to join or to lead.* I would venture to say that these men must possess a high level of emotional intelligence to "survive" their church planting endeavor.

### **Assumptions**

The most prevalent assumptions appear to be related to two areas of church planting: 1) where these planters should plant their churches, and 2) what their focus

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<sup>189</sup> Ephesians 2:14-16.

should be – in this case, it is assumed that they should focus on blacks, minorities, and cross-culturalism or multi-culturalism. People also assume that these church planters are the “the answer” or the “magic bullet” to end the racial and cultural struggles of the denomination. As discovered in the interviews, these men believe in racial and cultural reconciliation in the church, denomination, and community, but they resist the notion that they must be the ones to carry the weight of bringing about this reconciliation. This has been a source of pain and shame for them, as they believe they are judged according to the skin tone of the people in their churches rather than according to the health of their ministries in general.

The interviewees have also reported facing people’s assumption that the PCA way is the right way. I believe this assumption may be facetiously termed “PCA-ism.” I don’t believe that this is necessarily a racial issue, however one cannot avoid the fact that the PCA is predominantly a white conservative evangelical denomination. This combination of phrases has not usually been associated with a congenial relationship with blacks in the United States. This relationship struggle unconsciously and unintentionally inserts race into most of the challenges revealed in this study.

### **Misunderstandings Which Have Led to Underestimations**

This study has helped me understand how the past has impacted the present and future church planting endeavors of black church planters in the PCA. In speaking of the past impacting the present and the future, there appears to be a misunderstanding regarding how the black church was formed. It appears that the impact of American history upon the formation of the black church in this country has not been fully estimated and appreciated. The black church has its roots in the segregation and

separation of the South. In general, slaves could become Christians, but they could not be free or walk together with whites in Christian unity. Eventually they were allowed and assisted by whites in forming their own churches. The black church was essentially “created” by the white church, and it has survived as a separate and very content entity. The black church in the United States has its struggles, as any church does, and it is definitely not without flaws. However, it is a place where blacks can be in the majority, control how they worship, and possess a sense of worth and dignity. This is not easily relinquished, and it appears to have emotionally impacted these men as they transitioned into the PCA from their former denominations. What makes a black or woman make such a sacrifice? This study appears to show that the sovereignty of God is what brings about such a change.

#### **Lack of a Significant Historical Presbyterian Presence in the Black Community**

In the book, *Black and Presbyterian*, written by Gayraud S. Wilmore, the author comments on the uncomfortable relationship between blacks and Presbyterians in the United States. In chapter two, I quoted his statement that the relationship between African Americans and Anglo-Saxon Presbyterians was about as close as the relationship between the tunes of the Royal Bagpipes of Scotland and those of Fats Domino.<sup>190</sup> In the same text, Wilmore further discusses the dearth of relation between blacks and Presbyterians. In the section entitled, “The Evangelization of Presbyterian Slaves,” he explains,

The hard fact is that the class conscious Presbyterians were more prejudiced against Blacks than either Methodists or the Baptists. None of these white churches did anything to crow about, but both the latter denominations made a

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<sup>190</sup> Gayraud Wilmore, *Black and Presbyterian: The Heritage and the Hope*, Revised. (Louisville, KY: Witherspoon Press, 2006), 25.



bolder effort than the followers of John Calvin to rid themselves of slaveholders and bring Black converts into their congregations. One of the consequences was that both the Baptists and the Methodists attracted a larger number of slaves to their services than the Presbyterians, and throughout the history of this country those two denominations have been more intimately known and regarded favorably by African Americans.<sup>191</sup>

It seems that blacks have not forgotten this sad piece of Presbyterian “non-action,” and they have favored the denominations that they believed were concerned with their plight in America. This evolutionary thought plays itself out in the statements made by the interview participants that many of their family and friends have a poor view of the PCA. The fact that this book is a publication of the Presbyterian Church United States of America (PCUSA) further reinforces this dynamic, since the PCUSA, as a liberal denomination, is sometimes thought to have a better relationship with blacks than the conservative PCA. However, it seems that even the PCUSA has its black woes.

#### **Affirmation of Family and Friends**

“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”<sup>192</sup>

This leads me to the question of risk. The interviewees spent considerable time discussing the risk of losing the relationships and affirmation of people significant in their lives a result of being non-white and planting churches in the PCA. Those black pastors who choose to enter predominantly white denominations take a great risk, and this study identifies the possible loss of familial support, cultural credibility, and ecclesiastical credibility from the black church. The interview participants do not consider themselves heroes. They all confessed to following the call of Jesus into the PCA. They would undoubtedly say that not only did Jesus issue the call to the PCA, and

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>192</sup> John 1:11.

to the struggle for reconciliation and unity in the denomination, but that he also provoked the right answer to the call.

Even in the face of these relational risks, they have placed their ultimate hope for comfort in the Lord Jesus. In his book, *The Healing Path*, Dan Allender offers some solace to those who tend to look back and become saddened about their decisions to follow the Lord into unpopular places. He states, “Faith, hope, and love free us (to a degree) from the regret of the past, the fear of the future, and the emptiness of the present.”<sup>193</sup> He follows this up with a mantra that encapsulates life in Christ when he states, “A radical life begins with the premise that I exist for God and for His purposes, not my own.”<sup>194</sup>

### **Reaching the African American Male**

As recorded earlier in the study, six of the eight interview participants revealed that reaching the African American male with the gospel has turned out to be a major challenge for them. None of the interview participants specifically mentioned this as a reason that they joined the PCA, although there is the obvious implication that they desired to have good theology so that they could share with it anyone who came to the church. So, why don't many black men join their churches? The answer may lie in Thurman Williams' 2011 dissertation entitled, *Centered-Preaching in Hip-Hop Culture*. Williams states, “There seems to be a disconnect between the ministry of the church and the felt needs of young African American males, especially those residing in urban areas.” He then discusses valuable methods for bridging this disconnect when he offers the following four recommendations: 1) recognize the core concerns of young African

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<sup>193</sup> Dan B. Allender, *The Healing Path: How the Hurts in Your Past can Lead You to a More Abundant Life* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 1990), 189.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

American males in an urban context, 2) recognize the primary avenues young African American men turn to and why, in order to address their core concerns, 3) preach Christ-centered sermons, and 4) do the hard work of contextualizing in sermon preparation.<sup>195</sup>

### **A Conclusion, but not the End of the Story**

According to Dan Allender, “Doubt, despair, and disappointment are not only a reality in daily life, they are also the tools God uses to grow faith, hope, and love in us.”<sup>196</sup> This study has continuously observed that there is still a struggle for reconciliation and unity between blacks and whites in the PCA. The black church planters interviewed for this study stated plainly and consistently that there are racial or at least cultural assumptions and misunderstandings placed upon them by whites, and they have to navigate through these barriers as they attempt to plant churches. I believe that the cultural awareness of the PCA would improve greatly if the denomination emphasized cultural intelligence to a greater degree. Certain key texts, such as the previously cited *Cultural Intelligence* by David A. Livermore, would help the denomination understand the values and struggles of minority cultures as they seek to navigate a white-dominant culture.

This study has also consistently shown that there is an underestimation of the impact of culture and close relationships on the research subjects’ endeavors to plant churches in the PCA. Caleb summed it up in this statement, “The race and culture battle is a very old and tiring thing, but it is where we are as a nation and a church.” The following is my January 2011 published response to the PCA’s *ByFaith* magazine, when I was asked to share my perspective on race and the church:

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<sup>195</sup> Thurman Williams, “Christ-Centered Preaching in Hip-Hop Culture” (D.Min. diss., Covenant Theological Seminary, 2011), 142.

<sup>196</sup> Allender, preface.

The negative effects of racial segregation in America's past are yet exerting force on the church. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not powerless in this struggle; I believe it has the ability to make right whatever is wrong with the church. However, I think the church is far from finished with the race problem.

For hundreds of years, whites enforced segregation, and blacks adjusted to it. Unfortunately, this is basically where we are ecclesiastically. During slavery, whites had church on the main floor of a building, and blacks—when they were allowed in—went to the balcony. Eventually, blacks formed their own churches, and nobody seemed to care. We “circled the wagons,” and now we can't get them un-circled. So when the concern about racial reconciliation in regards to church attendance arises, many blacks respond with the attitude of “What's the problem now?” One of my former church members once told me, “I believe that if there had never been a ‘white’ church, there would never have been a ‘black’ church.”

When it comes to reconciliation, I am definitely for it. Ephesians 1, 2 Corinthians 5, Revelation 7, and many other places in Scripture speak to the gospel's power to reconcile. I believe that my presence as a black teaching elder in this denomination—at the risk of being ridiculed by my former denominational colleagues—speaks to my commitment to bringing down the walls.

Until recently, I pastored Redemption Fellowship, a PCA congregation in Fayetteville, Georgia, made up almost entirely of blacks. That church is within a mile of a PCA congregation whose members are predominately white. I want to be cautious about using the terms “black” and “white” to describe these congregations because they deny the diversity one encounters among people of the same color. For instance, although the congregants of Redemption are primarily black folks, they don't all share the same heritage. They are from the United States, Panama, Haiti, Barbados, Puerto Rico, and Africa. Most of the members of Redemption believe that their congregation is diverse. I am sure that there is a similar Anglo-European diversity in the sister church up the road.

The two churches have a great relationship. We co-sponsored denominational conferences, community youth initiatives, participated in joint services, shared building resources, and the pastors preached in each other's pulpits. However, there has never been an outcry from the leadership or members of either church to join the two congregations into one. Everybody seems to be fine with the present arrangement. I think I know why. Each congregation's members believe they are self-sufficient, autonomous representatives of the church of Jesus Christ. They don't think they need to be physically connected or integrated with each other to be validated as a communing body of believers. Each is a particular church. Each has a session.

Along these lines is the strong desire at Redemption to maintain its own worship culture—a “Bapto-Presby-Costal” worship style encompassing traditional and contemporary black gospel music, hymns, passionate preaching, and a culture where the pastor's wife is called “First Lady,” etc. Many at Redemption say that

although they believe in Reformed doctrine and appreciate the structure and accountability of the PCA, they don't relate to many of the PCA churches they have visited. One Redemption member stated, "It isn't my place to tell people how to have church; but after I hear the Word of God, I want to rejoice out loud."

Last year I polled the Redemption congregation to find out what they thought about the following questions:

How do race and ethnic culture influence your decision to attend a church?  
 Would you attend a church of predominately white people?  
 Would you attend an inter-racial church?  
 What draws you to a black church?

Some responded that they would not mind attending a racially diverse church, but they would not want to be one of only a few black members. One respondent asked, "Why don't whites come to our church and sit under black leadership?" Another said, "I have no problem being in the PCA, but I am not a white Presbyterian; I am a black Presbyterian." Finally, one respondent asked, "Do whites realize what it takes to be black and be in the PCA? My family thinks I am nuts."

In the book *Divided by Faith*, authors Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith offer what I consider significant insight into how racial groups define themselves. They state: "In many respects, we know who we are by knowing who we are not. Thus, an in-group always has at least one out-group by which it creates identity. Blacks are not whites, Lutherans are not Presbyterians, evangelicals are not mainline Christians, Carolina Tar Heels are not Duke Blue Devils."<sup>197</sup>

We may not like what these authors say, but I think this is what has happened. And when it comes to having church, I have found that most blacks are happy about who they are not.<sup>198</sup>

One of reasons that I include this article in this study is to capture the risk that black church planters take when they choose to represent a denomination that traditionally may be viewed by their former black churches, friends, and family as the polar opposite of the black religious experience. These men have made a decision to step out on faith and leave the historically protective walls of the black church, the place where so many still find, as their slave ancestors did, relief from the perceived struggles of minorities in the United

<sup>197</sup> Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford Press, 2000), 143.

<sup>198</sup> <http://byfaithonline.com/page/in-the-church/the-divided-church-a-racial-reality>

States. In the black church, they are the dominant culture, and they are in charge. There, they are the ones who speak for God.

I believe we can and must continue to bring more black church planters into the denomination, and the major draw will be the testimonies of present and past black church planters. We must help their testimonies be ones of victory over challenges. We must ask ourselves, “What do we change in order to move ahead with drawing blacks and other minorities into the PCA’s church planting process?” I believe Carl Ellis, Wy Plummer, Phil Douglass, and the PCA’s MNA Assessment Center are keys to these necessary changes. It is vital for the denomination to evaluate how and why African American men are attracted into the PCA, to assist them in answering the Lord’s call to become candidates for church planting, to take the necessary steps to become church planters, and finally, to plant their churches. Continued evaluation of the successes and failures of black church planting endeavors will give the denomination, presbyteries, and MNA some indicators of what needs to be changed. This is vital to the success of black church planters, and the denomination wants to see these men succeed. If something is ineffective, counterproductive, culturally insensitive, or even unintentionally racist, we must address it, asking ourselves through prayer and dialogue how we will move forward without it.

In his book, *Necessary Endings*, Henry Cloud addresses the problem of trying to continue with relationships, business paradigms, ministry practices, and even people who just drain you and hold you back. He says that we must face the reality that sometimes what worked in the past will not work in the present and the future. He states, “If you are looking for the formula that can get you motivated and fearless, here it is: you must

finally see reality for what it is—in other words, that what is not working is not going to magically begin working. If something isn't working, you must admit that what you are doing to get it to work is hopeless.”<sup>199</sup> As a Christian, I believe that Jesus has the final say about what works, but I also believe that the members of this denomination must continually examine themselves, and not merely assume that they are doing things correctly. This study suggests that the PCA has a good grasp of theology, but the denomination's cultural intelligence and understanding of the influence of African American culture must be enhanced.

### **Recommendations**

I would like to offer some strategies to the reader, as I believe that there are things we can do to help the denomination move forward in facing the challenges raised by this study. First, we must read! In order for the PCA to overcome its lack of cultural intelligence and insensitivity, denominational leaders, presbyteries, and pastors must reinforce the reading of books that provide an education on black culture and the inherent struggles of being black in the United States. Many of the texts in the bibliography of this study will enhance the understanding of both black and white culture in the United States and how they interact in the church. Of particular value are those texts that deal with being a black Christian among conservative white Christians.

One good book that interacts with this dynamic is *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity*, by Edward Gilbreath. Gilbreath has an edge, but what he says is true. The aforementioned books, *Breaking Down Walls: A Model for Reconciliation in an Age of Racial Strife* by Raleigh Washington and Glen

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<sup>199</sup> Henry Cloud, *Necessary Endings: The Employees, Businesses, and Relationships That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Move Forward* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 74.

Kehrein, and *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a changing church* by Soong-Chan Rah will serve as great starts in this endeavor to increase the denomination's cultural savvy. Washington and Kahrein's text uses the eight reconciliation principles as a quick guide to building real relationships across racial divides. Soong-Chan Rah's writings are impactful in alerting culture groups to the importance of cultural self-awareness. If we don't understand why we do things as a culture, then we don't understand how our thoughts and actions impact those cultures around us. This is something that the PCA needs to understand about itself as a predominantly white, southern, conservative, male culture.

Second, there are many African American Teaching Elders in the denomination who would welcome the chance to speak into the issues and challenges observed in this study. Wy Plummer, the African American Network Coordinator for the PCA's Mission to North America, can provide anyone who is interested in learning about these or other issues from a black church planter in the denomination with the names and locations of these twenty-two men. Many black Teaching Elders would welcome the opportunity to come individually or as a team to address presbyteries or sending churches about the challenges and best practices of being a black PCA church planter. The presbytery or group could pay their trip expenses.

Also, it would be helpful for those who want to delve further into this topic to attend the conference R2K12 "The Race Set Before Us: Pursuing Unity for the Sake of the Gospel," is an event whose "genesis" was that of African American Teaching Elders on the United States' east coast. It is usually held in June in Baltimore, Maryland. The purpose of the conference is to bring the conference attendee to a place of revival and



unity. Here is a quote from the conference's 2012 website: "We know that the Scriptures teach and our Lord prayed for the unity of His people as a visible witness to the power of the gospel. So then why does it still seem so difficult for us to demonstrate that unity across ethnic lines? That's the main topic at this year's Revival."<sup>200</sup>

Another such conference is the African American Leadership and Recruitment Weekend. This event is held yearly during Labor Day weekend and presently rotates between Chattanooga, Tennessee, Jackson, Mississippi, and Saint Louis, Missouri. The 2012 website described this year's event as follows:

This year's conference will address topics and issues pertaining to ministry by and among African Americans in a Reformed and Presbyterian context. The weekend features a series of workshops from more than half a dozen speakers teaching in areas ranging from contextualizing Reformed theology in the African American community, to ministry to college students, to leading in African American or multi-ethnic settings, and more.<sup>201</sup>

Some other places to learn would be in urban pastor's fellowships. (This name is not a brand, but a description.) These groups can provide information and dialogue for presbyteries interested in caring for black pastors as they seek to start church plants. Also, MNA usually hosts breakfast or lunch meetings at the PCA General Assembly to provide testimonies from planters throughout the world. This is good place to get answers to questions on church planting and meet key men such as Wy Plummer, Randy Nabors, and others who have devoted themselves to cross-cultural work. The PCA's New City Fellowship network of churches also has a tremendous amount of knowledge about black and minority cultures and how to effectively attempt to reach these communities.

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<sup>200</sup> <http://fcfchurch.org/Websites/faithcf/images/Revival12.pdf>

<sup>201</sup> <https://sites.google.com/site/aaldrweekend2012/home>

Another useful tool is the documentary, *The Color of Fear*. This is an excellent display of how racial stereotypes have influenced how people think about each other in the United States. The movie depicts a group of men who are at a retreat site participating in a small group discussion on race and culture. The group consists of younger and older men from Asian, Anglo, Latino, and African cultures. They come together in this setting to discuss racial and cultural challenges in America. Initially, the men are somewhat reluctant to voice their honest feelings about race in the United States, but then an Anglo member of the small group relates how he believes people in America should “stand on their own two feet.” This triggers an angry response from one of the black group members, who counters with the statement that “Whites in America have been standing on the shoulders of red and black people in this country for centuries.” This opens a flood gate for honesty from the rest of the group, and the discussion is thought-provoking and informative.

Three things are important to note here. First, I have seen these trigger points cause explosive displays of anger in two of my interviews. Second, I believe these hidden emotions, if dealt with in a healthy way, can inform denominational agencies and presbyteries as to how being black might impact the emotional health of an African American church planter in the PCA. I recommend that presbyteries, sending churches, and MNA leaders watch this film and validate its usefulness in the process of understanding race relations in the United States. Third, I believe a documentary of this sort may inform all other races and cultures in the PCA as to how they may unconsciously be viewing African Americans in general.

Finally, I would encourage anyone interested in this subject to read Thurman Williams' doctoral dissertation entitled, "Christ-Centered Preaching in Hip Hop Culture." In this excellent piece, Williams addresses how the church can reach urban African American males by focusing on their core concerns. It is very informative and speaks to the challenge and anguish that the interview participants voiced concerning their longing to reach young African American men. Williams has done an excellent job challenging traditional thinking on contextual sermon preparation as he stresses the need to touch these young men where they are. He also offers sound recommendations that will enhance the accomplishment of this important task.

### **Final Words**

When I set out to research the experiences of African American pastors planting churches in the PCA, I knew that I was entering an area that was sensitive for cultural, emotional, and historical reasons. My goal in this project was two-fold. First, I wanted to uncover and report on information that would help black pastors to know what they would face if they undertook to plant a church in the PCA. Second, I wanted to provide the PCA with information that would help the denomination's leaders understand the struggle these pastors experience, and how to equip and support them to face that struggle.

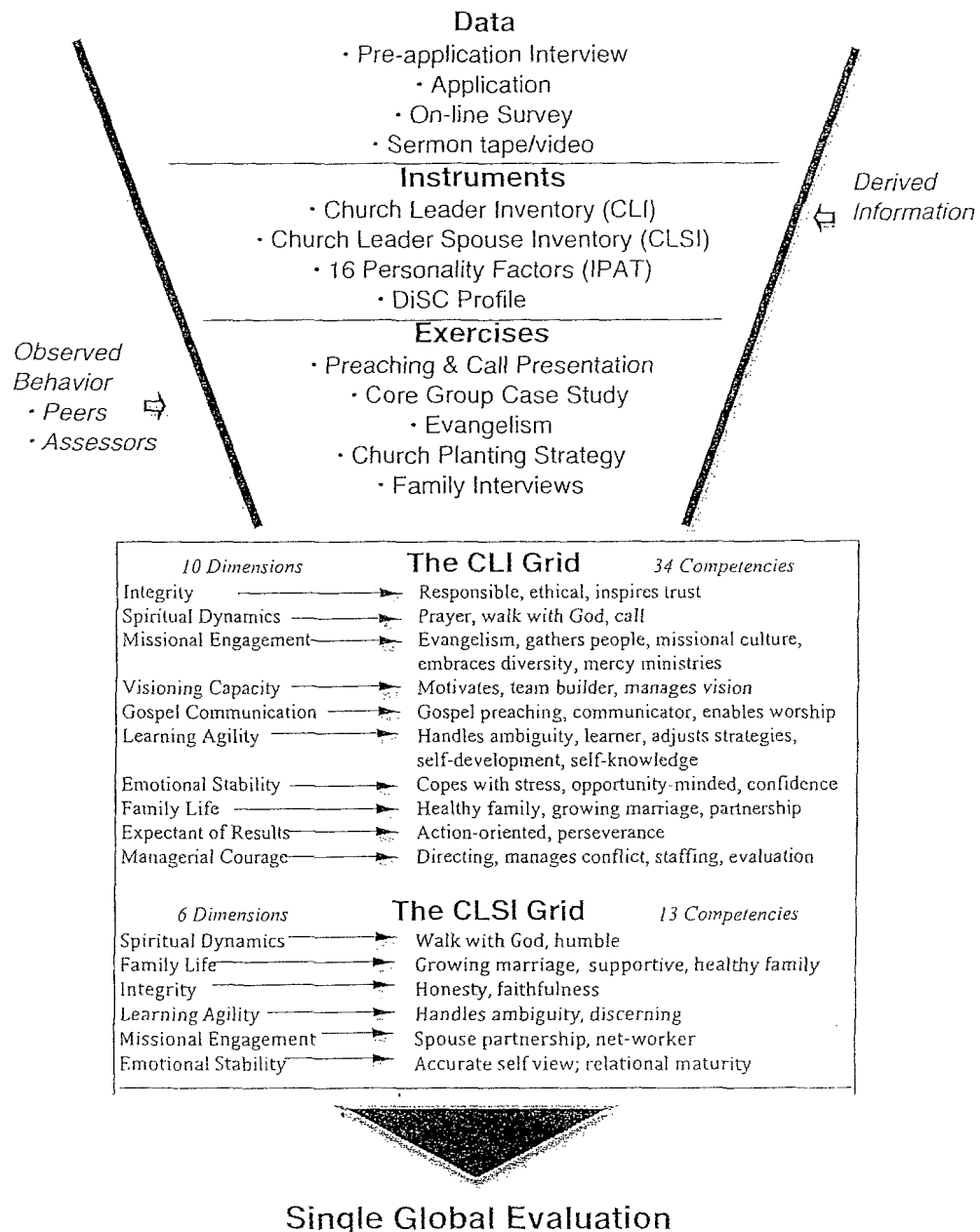
Both of the constituencies that I hope will benefit from this research – black church planters and the PCA leadership – need to come to a full recognition of the importance of cultural intelligence in the process. Black planters must remember that they are entering foreign territory, and that they will often be misunderstood. In addition, the PCA, and in particular the leadership at MNA, need to embrace the cultural

differences of these pastors, recognizing the need to invest in the cultural intelligence of those leading the assessment, equipping, and support process as they interact with these black pastors. Church planting is hard under the best of circumstances. Church planting for black pastors in the PCA is even harder. But the Lord calls us to this work, and he will bless our efforts as we obey his commands.

## APPENDIX A

# The Assessment Funnel

An Assessment Center is an intensive, multiple-day process validating information about candidates. Evaluation is done by observing behavior in exercises organized around a grid of church planting competencies to arrive at a single, global rating of church planter readiness.



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