Fifty Years Later: Commentary on the Covenant's Response to the Black Manifesto[1]

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Hauna Ondrey's careful research and winsome writing is an important contribution to a small but significant chapter in Covenant history. "Small" because the event and its influence are all but forgotten today; "significant" because it signaled, I believe, both a growing openness and commitment to issues of justice in the Covenant Church and a more diverse, socially aware Covenant. As I remember the Black Manifesto and its presentation at the 1969 Annual Meeting, several aspects stand out fifty years later.

In 1969 I was a student pastor at Oakdale Covenant Church on Chicago's South Side. I was very inexperienced to be sure but, like many of my seminary classmates, impassioned not only about the gospel but also about racial justice. We had studied the great Hebrew prophets, read the books of Martin Luther King Jr., Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and perhaps even Carmichael and Hamilton's *Black Power*.[2] We felt the pain, anguish, frustration, and anger of many in the black community over "a dream deferred," to recall Langston Hughes's memorable words. These

[1] This and the following responses reflect on the two articles that with it comprise volume 77, nos. 2–3 of the *Covenant Quarterly*: Hauna Ondrey, "The Covenant Responds to the Black Manifesto (1969)," 3–30, and "Covenant Commentary on the Black Manifesto (1969)," 31–44. Both can be accessed at http://covquarterly.com.

[2] Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967).

writings had left their mark. We were also influenced by our North Park Seminary formation, with its openness to truth no matter its source. We were shaped by faculty mentors like Donald Frisk, F. Burton Nelson, Earl Dahlstrom, Henry Gustafson, Fredrick Holmgren, Sigurd Westberg, and Wesley Nelson, who believed deeply in the gospel of God's grace and its far-reaching implications for our life in the church and world.

The Covenant heroes, if I dare call them that, in the events Ondrey describes were Milton B. Engebretson, president of the Covenant, and Worth V. Hodgin, director of urban ministries for the Central Conference, though I don't think we realized it at the time. There were other prophetic voices then and in the years that followed: Douglas Cedarleaf, Dewey Sands, Arnold Bolin, Wesley Nelson, Irving Lambert, Jean Lambert (Irving's daughter), Richard Carlson, and Sally Johnson, to name but a few of an ever-expanding list. Engebretson anticipated Holmes's arrival at the Annual Meeting and worked with the Executive Board to craft a gracious rather than reactionary response to the appeal. Engebretson saw the truth beyond the Manifesto's politicized and polarizing rhetoric and recognized the opportunity for a courteous Covenant response. Though he avoided overt mention of reparations, his reasons, I believe, were more political than philosophical.

Many of us Covenant pastors saw the call for reparations not as an unfair requirement for Americans several generations removed from slavery, or for Swedish Americans, most of whom immigrated here well after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, but as an unpaid bill that America owed to our black brothers and sisters. We saw, and still see, reparations as an expression of justice and a tangible expression of our repentance, a penance if you will, for America's communal sins *whether we were the perpetrators or not*. If we, as an immigrant church, shared in America's blessings, then we must also embrace America's liabilities and seek forgiveness and healing for America's original sin. There could be no cheap grace.

Ondrey singles out Worth Hodgin who courageously set forth the case for reparations in the *Covenant Companion*, a stance that, incidentally, had its accompanying cost. Hodgin, like Wesley Nelson, was known for his deep commitment to evangelism but was equally devoted to racial righteousness. As a young pastor at an integrated Covenant church, I was grateful for the unwavering friendship, support, and encouragement he gave me. I loved the man. We approached the issues of the day with the same outlook and disposition. Many of us like Hodgin, though uncom-

fortable with the document's harsh tone, did not reject the Manifesto as out of hand. My guess is that this too was the opinion of the handful of black Covenanters in our midst at that time.

Hodgin and I had coffee with Herman Holmes Jr. after his presentation to the assembly. Though steadfast in his support of the cause he represented, we found him to be gracious and affable in contrast to the exacting tone of the Manifesto itself. And Hodgin and I concurred that Holmes was pleasantly surprised by the reception he received. The standing ovation when he completed his presentation showed empathy for the petition and its cause and a shared hope for a more just and equitable America and church. Regrettably, the financial response by Covenanters to the fund's appeal was disappointing, as Jim Hawkinson pointed out in his fine *Companion* editorial, "Stones for Bread," and as President Engebretson voiced in remarks at subsequent Annual Meetings. Ondrey indicates that this was probably due to Covenanters' failure to separate need from tactics in the Manifesto itself.

I have never understood white Christians' reticence in admitting complicity in the injustices perpetrated on black America nor our hesitation to accede to the fairness of reparations. Our tendency to claim innocence in matters of racism seems rather out of place for Christians who believe in the subtlety of sin but also in God's abundant grace and forgiveness. Even if we have no animus or prejudice on a personal level toward African Americans, we white Americans have all benefitted from structural racism. Why not simply confess our duplicity and receive God's forgiveness? Confession of sins for failures personal or communal, "known or unknown, remembered or forgotten," is not a negative but a positive act, and a bedrock of our theology. And once forgiven, to become "drum majors for justice," as Martin Luther King Jr. described himself.

Though the financial fulfillment of commitments made at the 1969 Annual Meeting was disappointing, I think the Covenant response to Herman Holmes Jr. and the Black Manifesto revealed deeper realities. It made visible a growing acknowledgment of our sharing in the sins against black America. It also revealed a Covenant temper of hospitality, largesse of spirit, and hope for both fairness and a welcoming posture to America's diversity. It also signaled the continuance of a seismic change in the old conflict that pitted evangelism against social action. Rather than seeing the two in opposition, the Covenant was growing in its awareness that these were two sides of the same gospel coin. I think all of this helped set the agenda for an increasingly inclusive Covenant Church, like the

one we see today, even as we long for a more expansive inclusion for tomorrow. These things do not happen apart from leadership, and in 1969 Engebretson, Hodgin, and others provided it.

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I am grateful to the editor of the *Covenant Quarterly* for the opportunity to reflect on the Covenant's response to the Black Manifesto. My entry takes the form of an ethical analysis of violence and oppression. I conclude that the Covenant's responses demonstrated some sympathy for the demands of the Black Manifesto yet also contributed to racial oppression and misunderstood the Covenant's complicity in violence, rendering the denomination unable to consider the good news of reparations.

Any system of historical and ongoing oppression such as racism requires four forms of support: ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized. Ideological oppression requires ideas that are normalized in widespread beliefs that one group is superior to another.[3] An example of this is the view that the US is superior or that white working class people are racist or sexist.[4] Institutional oppression includes the use of social, political, or economic power to support the ideology of a superior group. For example, African Americans are twelve times more likely to be wrongly convicted of drug crimes than whites (institutional oppression),[5] while over 90 percent of those who decide which TV shows are aired, which books we read, and which news is covered are white

[3] Cf. Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2019), 32. Charles and Rah call these mediating narratives that provide "fuel for dysfunctional systems." Their work goes into depth regarding the connection between toxic narratives and diseased spirituality as they adapt and reinforce systems such as racism and white supremacy in the United States.

[4] For an excellent analysis of the class ideologies present in liberal white professionals, see Joan C. Williams, *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017).

[5] Tanzina Vega, "Black People More Likely to Be Wrongly Convicted," *CNN Politics* (March 7, 2017), https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/07/politics/blacks-wrongful-convictions-study/index.html, accessed September 21, 2019.

(institutional superiority).[6] Interpersonal oppression finds expression in individual members of a dominant group mistreating those within an oppressed group: sexist jokes, gendered stereotypes, or dehumanizing language such as "illegals." Internalized oppression occurs when oppressed people *believe* ideologies about their inferiority because these ideologies are reflected in institutions and interpersonal interactions.

The above forms of oppression are root causes of violence. Because oppression is often invisible to dominant groups, the dominant culture labels as violent or militant peoples who make their oppression visible through resistance. The original name of the Black Panther Party was the Black Panther Party of Self-Defense. Their Ten-Point Platform was based on the repayment of the promised forty acres and a mule[7] in the form of fair access to housing, education, and safety against police brutality. Many Panthers exercised their second amendment right to carry guns. The Panther's effectiveness in making institutional oppression visible, joined with their resisting internalized oppression by physical and other methods of power, gained them the label militant—even before members carried guns—because the Black Panthers were not afraid to engage in violence.[8]

This example demonstrates how ideologies of oppression supported by institutional power cause violence, especially when they are resisted or exposed. It is misleading to conclude that the Black Panthers were violent without making visible the ideological oppression in the narrative of white superiority, the institutional oppression of the LAPD, and the internalized oppression that Black Power actively resisted. Myopic

[6] Robin Diangelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 31.

[7] "Forty acres and a mule" refers to the compensation promised by Special Field Order 15 to each freed African American family following the Civil War. However, rather than being used for black settlement as promised, the 330 miles of land was returned to white ex-Confederate landowners.

[8] The outcome of the primacy of militant labels, rather than viewing Panthers as advancing black flourishing, was the escalation of state-sanctioned violence. In 1969, four days after Fred Hampton was killed by a raid of the State's Attorney's tactical unit, the Los Angeles Police Department initiated an assault on the LA Black Panther office. Eleven Panthers were in the office. They defended their lives against two hundred LA officers; no one was killed, remarkably. The raid was justified based on false information provided by the FBI. Equal Justice Initiative, "Los Angeles Police Attack Black Panthers in Violent Raid," *A History of Racial Injustice*, available at http://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/dec/8, accessed September 21, 2019.

labeling, e.g., "Panthers are militant," conceals the root causes of violence and the most powerful forms of oppression.

Notably, the commentary on the Black Manifesto published in the August 1, 1969, *Covenant Companion* names ideological oppression such as racism. It also acknowledges interpersonal forms of oppression.[9] Yet institutional oppression goes largely unrecognized, and internalized oppression is misconstrued. For example, the consistent opposition to threats of violence against the US government reveals the inability to see institutional violence perpetrated by the US government. The result is that in most of the clergy responses violence is imputed to blacks and benevolence to whites. In this way, the Covenant was complicit in racial oppression by protecting two forms of it—institutional and internalized.

The Covenant was unique among evangelicals in its openness to financial giving, however. Covenant leadership's sympathetic response to the social claims of the Manifesto is distinct from most evangelicals who dismissed the Black Manifesto's claims outright and who were outraged by the demands of the Black Economic Development Conference. The Covenant made clear that the claims of the Black Manifesto were in fact very legitimate, as seen in the *Covenant Companion* and the Annual Meeting recommendations.[10]

On the surface, one might conclude that churches such as the Covenant who responded positively to the financial demands but rejected what they perceived as violent methods acted ethically. Yet the primary impetus behind the Black Manifesto was an *amending of power*, underscored by the Manifesto's appeal to reparations. Reparations is an acknowledgement of a history in which white America, in the words of the Manifesto, "exploited [the] resources, minds, bodies, [and] labor" of black people who have been "victimized by the most vicious, racist system in the world" in order to build and benefit from what has become "the most industrial country in the world." Reparations assumes that, beyond harm done to African Americans through slavery and its legacy of social institutions such as mass incarceration, repair is needed between people groups, and part of that repair is sharing power.[11] Finally, reparations is an opportunity for

[9] Cf. Wesley W. Nelson, "Financial Control," *Covenant Companion* (August 1, 1969): 10.

[10] For more on this, see Ondrey, "The Covenant Responds," 13–17.

[11] It is important to note that the Black Manifesto *never* demands white churches to give up all financial or other kinds of power. The fact that the Manifesto asks only $15 per black citizen underscores that it comes from a place of sharing—forty acres and a mule is not a request for everything.

the relationship between institutionalized oppression and internalized oppression to be interrupted. Reparations is the space where the possibility for healing—even flourishing—is born.

The clergy responses to the Black Manifesto published in the *Covenant Companion*, in combination with the broader Covenant responses to recommendations by the Annual Meeting for financial giving, offer an important lens for examining racism in the Covenant today. Rather than critiquing Covenanters in the past for not exposing institutional forms of violence or not recognizing the effects of internalized oppression, I commend Covenant churches today to receive this historical lens as an opportunity to assess our gaps around racial consciousness and abolish destructive behaviors that reinforce white cultural power.[12] Perhaps, this historical lens might even serve as a prophetic call from the past to revisit to good news of reparations.

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It is a comfort, and yet a cold comfort, that to some degree the Evangelical Covenant Church and its leaders were ahead of other similar evangelical faith groups in responding to the claims of the Black Manifesto in 1969. I believe it would be remiss not to acknowledge and give thanks for progress, however small, in addressing the profound legacy of toxic systemic racial injustice in the United States. There was limited yet nevertheless important progress to celebrate, both in 1969 and today.

However, Hauna Ondrey's outstanding study of the Covenant's response to the Black Manifesto of 1969 demonstrates all too clearly the profound grip the enemy and the enemy's powers of racial division continue to hold on Christ's church in the United States—and how the Covenant Church remains in that same grip. I grieve the window this paper gives into the way the church too often marches to the tunes of toxic secular polarization rather than to the strains of a life guided by

[12] See also the Resolution on Antiracism passed by the Covenant Ministerium (by 84 percent) in their 2019 Annual Meeting. The resolution includes laments and practices for white clergy to raise racial consciousness and address sins of racism. Available at https://www.eccclergy.org/resolutions, accessed September 22, 2019.

God's righteousness as found in Scripture.

Again, I am grateful that the leaders of the Covenant, including my father, Milton Engebretson, chose an active financial response to the Black Manifesto and chose a path of limited engagement rather than outright, wholesale rejection to the Manifesto's claims. I am grateful that the representative from the Black Manifesto, Herman Holmes Jr., found the Covenant Annual Meeting to be a relatively welcoming place in contrast to other hostile church environments. I am grateful that thoughtful Covenanters brought an amendment to the motion to raise funds requiring black leadership be engaged in the distribution of those funds. I am also deeply grateful that there were Covenant voices that gave expression to the realities of racial injustice that were the genesis of the Manifesto.

But as Ondrey's careful study demonstrates, the response of the Covenant Church, as recorded in the actions of the Annual Meeting, failed to address the core issues of racial injustice that are so deeply ingrained in the United States, issues with which the Manifesto confronted the Covenant directly. President Engebretson hoped that "generosity" would create a new day of opportunity for addressing America's tragic legacy of racial oppression. But he and the voting delegates sadly rejected the Manifesto's call for a response rooted not in generosity but in justice. Without a profound recognition of the history and ongoing oppression of people from the African diaspora, the destructive consequences of that oppression continue generation to generation. This was tragic in 1969, and it is tragic today.

Richard Carlson's *Companion* article, written a year before the emergence of the Black Manifesto, was indeed prophetic. Carlson anticipated that, "Walls between men will become so imposing, hatred of men so intense, and frustrations of men so feverish, that violence will rule the land. And this 'government of the people' may well perish from the earth."[13] Today we see tragic and profoundly accelerated levels of racial division in the United States, fueled by a toxic polarization that is cynically used and fueled by our leaders to build their own base of power. These angry and divisive movements that have captured much of the evangelical church in the US are entirely and tragically in opposition

[13] Richard W. Carlson, "Second Thoughts on Black Power," *Covenant Companion* (August 1, 1968): 8.

to even the most elemental tenets of God's word, the Bible. The events reported in Ondrey's paper are tragic in that an opportunity to turn and repent was lost in 1969, and in many ways is still being lost today. Lost opportunities for the people of God are always opportunities for the forces of division fueled by our enemy who seeks only to "steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10). May this article be another opportunity for the Covenant to reflect, to turn, and to repent.

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Fifty years ago, in 1969, Richard Nixon had begun his presidency of the United States, and the country was still in deep pain and outrage because of the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert Kennedy, the year before. Fifty years ago, white Christian churches and Jewish synagogues rejected the Black Manifesto because of its call to revolution "by any means necessary." Fifty years ago, the Black Manifesto was presented to the delegates of the eighty-fourth Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Covenant Church.

At that meeting, the Black Economic Development Conference's (BEDC) Midwest director, Herman Holmes Jr., cautioned Covenant delegates not to be distracted by the Manifesto's harsh language, but instead to respond to its request for reparations as expressed in the ten-point document. The delegates applauded, and survey responses reported the Covenant's reception of Holmes as "the only BEDC encounter with a church which was not stormy at some point."[14] Delegates were hospitable and convicted that something should be done, yet subsequent efforts to actualize annual fundraising goals were unsuccessful, leading Covenant leaders to proclaim that the church had missed a real opportunity to respond to the national crisis of systemic racism.

Fifty years later, this nation remains deeply polarized and traumatized by a growing internalized narrative about racism that communicates that

[14] Robert S. Lecky and H. Elliott Wright, "Reparations Now? An Introduction," in *Black Manifesto: Religion, Racism, and Reparations*, ed. Lecky and Wright (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1969), 27.

it is acceptable to distance, disassociate, and disengage from any responsibility to fix our unjust framework of racial hierarchy. In January of 2019, HR 40 was reintroduced to request the establishment of a commission to examine the institution of slavery in the United States and its early colonies and recommend appropriate remedies. Every year since 1989, Representative John Conyers Jr.—a lawyer and ranking member of the House Judiciary Committee—has introduced HR 40, and no action to form a commission has been taken. Every year, for the past thirty years, this bill has been introduced for action and no action has been taken. Let that sink in! This year, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee introduced a revised version of the bill.

The church is called to be "in" but not "of" this world. God's plan, Jesus's ministry, and the Holy Spirit's work continue to be about the liberation, restoration, and reconciliation of humanity to God and to one another. That work extends from creation in the garden in Genesis to every nation, tribe, people, and language depicted in Revelation 7:9–10. As messengers of God and disciples of Jesus who are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we have been given the ministry of reconciliation to make right what is wrong in this broken world. Two guiding documents in this journey for the Covenant are our Six-fold Test[15] and the 2019 Antiracism Resolution passed by the Covenant Ministerium.[16] These documents mark and monitor our church's journey through three movements in response to the demands of the Black Manifesto.

Liberation, restoration, and reconciliation are three movements that require the Covenant to do the hard work of confession, forgiveness, and repentance. We live in a unique time in history as disciples of Christ who have been given the ministry of reconciliation. God's journey includes a diversity of voices to model the Revelation vision of being both witnesses and agents of God's love to, for, and in the world. When one part of the body is being targeted through systemic racism and marginalization, the whole body must mobilize in response.

James Forman writes in the Manifesto, "for centuries, we [black people] have been forced to live as colonized people inside the United States,

[15] See https://covchurch.org/resources/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/10/5-Six-Fold-Test.pdf. The six areas are population, participation, power, pace-setting, purposeful narrative, and practicing solidarity.

[16] See n. 12.

victimized by the most vicious, racist system in the world."[17] As agents of God's restorative justice, we in the church must not only know this broken history but also name through confession the many ways in which the church is the "moral cement of the structure of racism in this nation,"[18] as we implement God's plan for restoration together. Liberation is a movement that begins with an understanding of how something became broken in the first place. In the struggle for equity and justice, having a historical understanding of the effects of slavery provides significant keys to determining what is needed to repair the imbalances produced by a system that benefits some and marginalizes others. A critical part of this historical work is naming through confession how our human experience was broken, as well as our call to do the rebuilding work together. From understanding and confession, the church moves to "the challenge of a radical commitment to undo, as much as we are able, the injustices of the past and to eliminate the injustices of the present. The means are available. The will to use them now, must not be withheld."[19]

Fifty-one years ago, Richard Carlson, a Covenant pastor and later North Park Seminary professor wrote, "Shook by a conscious or unconscious guilt, we the white church, might simply be frightened into inactivity, or we might repent and act."[20] Carlson outlined the worst approach for white Christians ("to continue to ask how we can help the Negro and what we can do for him") and named the necessary means for moving forward in response to the demands of Black Power that would be embodied in the Manifesto a year later: "provide financial backing to black capitalism, but with no strings attached and with no expectation of great thanks."[21] In essence, we all have work to do, but it is different work for black Christians than for white Christians—but it is work that we are called to do together as Christ's church. Carlson's article ended with these words: "If the church does not respond affirmatively, responsibly,

[17] For the text of the Black Manifesto, see the Archives of the Episcopal Church digital exhibit, *The Church Awakens: African Americans and the Struggle for Justice*, available at https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/items/show/202, accessed September 30, 2019.

[18] "Statement of the Board of Directors of the National Committee of Black Churchmen," no date. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Carlson, "Second Thoughts on Black Power," 8.

[21] Ibid.

and actively to the phenomenon of Black Power, the consequences for our nation will be grave.…Walls between men will become so imposing, hatred of men so intense, and frustrations of men so feverish, that violence will rule the land. And this government of the people may well perish from the earth."[22] Fifty years later, we are living into the reality of these prophetic words.

Restoration is the second movement of the Black Manifesto. The ten-point document gives voice to restoration owed in the amount of $500 million, with $50,000 being the portion Holmes assigned to the Covenant. Although raising this amount was possible, as evidenced by the parallel amounts raised for the World Relief fund, it took the Covenant three years to do so. In a March 1970 editorial in the *Covenant Companion*, Jim Hawkinson wrote:

> The truth is that we never really took up the challenge presented to us by the 1969 annual meeting. Whether out of fear, prejudice, economic self-centeredness, or just plain lethargy, we have acted irresponsibly and need to be told so. To a world writhing in physical and spiritual anguish, we offer little more than a cold shoulder. Stones for bread is what it amounts to, and disdain for God-given brothers and sisters appealing for freedom and a fair chance.[23]

This marks the role of forgiveness in the movement of restoration. Along with repair, Hawkinson reminded Covenanters that "insofar as we have failed to respond to the appeals as we were able, each of us must share the blame. A signal opportunity was missed, not because the church was uninformed—unless it was uninformed, or misinformed, at the local level—but because we just didn't care enough."[24] God's plan for restoration is only possible through forgiveness. Asking for forgiveness for inaction, forgiveness for remaining uninformed, and forgiveness for not caring enough, moves us deeper in our work of understanding the broken history that must be healed. This understanding entails naming and dismantling structures designed to benefit some and exclude others and making the steps of healing accessible to everyone to fully liberate through restoration. If we fail to restore, we also fail to be reconciled.

[22] Ibid.
[23] James Hawkinson, "Stones for Bread," *Covenant Companion* (March 1, 1970): 32.
[24] Ibid.

Reconciliation is the call, work, and ministry of the church. Missing from the public witness is what this authentic ministry of reconciliation actually looks like. Fifty years later, we still struggle with the paralysis of the church and the causes of our immobility and silence. Fifty years later, we have a much clearer history of what needs to be done, but the question remains: Is it our will to do what needs to be done? With guiding documents and measurable markers for our journey together, will the Covenant Church be able to offer an authentic witness of reconciliation? Fifty years ago, Hawkinson wrote, "The time has come for us to quit playing games with world relief and aid to Black America. What the situation requires is a new determination to offer our means ourselves now in Jesus' name. No more is asked of us. No less will ever be enough."[25] Fifty years from now, what will our witness be?

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Hauna Ondrey's article contextualizes the Covenant's response to the 1969 Black Manifesto. Her article carefully describes where the ECC was in its own transition as a denomination when presented with the Manifesto and elucidates how white denominational leadership engaged, processed, and responded to the Manifesto. Before responding directly to Ondrey's article, I would be remiss if I did not briefly outline the black experience in the United States leading to the Manifesto and connect this legacy to the Manifesto and its aggressive language. I want further to link this history and the ethos of the Manifesto to present-day struggles for racial justice arising from the black community. This background and context are just as important as the framework Ondrey provides for understanding the ECC's response to the Black Manifesto.

Slavery (1619–1863). The black experience in the United States began with two and a half centuries of chattel slavery, slave lineage passed down through the matrilineal line at birth, making female slaves vulnerable to rape and forced reproduction from owners. In many states this practice persisted until Juneteeth, June 19, 1865.

[25] Ibid.

Dred Scott Case (1857). In this case the US Supreme Court ruled that no black person, whether free or slave, could claim US citizenship, rendering black residents unable to petition the court for their freedom.

Convict Leasing (1865–1921). This exploitative system existed legally until 1921 but persisted illegally in practice until 1941. Known as "Slavery by Another Name," convict leasing was enabled by the loophole in the Thirteenth Amendment, which legally outlawed slavery in the US, "except as a punishment for crime."

Lynching Era (1877–1952). 1952 is the first year since 1877 in which the US could record that no black person was lynched. Conservative estimates state that at least 5,500 black people were lynched over this period.

Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). This US Supreme Court decision upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation under the "separate but equal" doctrine.

Jim Crow Era (1877–1968). Jim Crow laws were a collection of state and local statutes that legalized black subjugation, racial segregation, and socioeconomic disparities.

Red Summer (1919). Red Summer refers to a series of approximately twenty-five anti-black riots that erupted in 1919 in major cities across the nation, including Houston, East St. Louis, Chicago, Washington DC, Omaha, Charleston, Tulsa, and Elaine, Arkansas.

Desecration of Black Wall Street (May 31–June 1, 1921). Greenwood, Oklahoma, was a suburb of Tulsa known as "Black Wall Street." An armed white mob of five thousand—hundreds of them deputized by the police—descended on Greenwood the night of May 31 and into the next morning, looting and burning to the ground thirty-five square blocks that housed hospitals, schools, churches, and 1,265 African American homes. The mob killed 300 African Americans, injured 800 more, and destroyed 150 businesses, accruing $1.8 million in damages (about $26.24 million in today's dollars).

Murder of Emmett Till (1955). Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old African American from Chicago who was lynched while on summer vacation with his family in Money, Mississippi. Carolyn Bryant, a white cashier at a local grocery store, falsely charged Emmett with making sexual advances at her. Bryant's lie led to a group of white men gruesomely mutilating and murdering Emmett.

The War on Drugs/Mass Incarceration (1971–present). Since its launch in 1971, the War on Drugs has been the primary driver of the unprecedented growth within the US criminal justice system. In the US

today, it is predicted that one in three black men will spend time behind bars, and one in eighteen black women. Although black Americans are no more likely than whites to use illicit drugs, they are six to ten times more likely to be incarcerated for drug offenses. Consequently, black Americans make up roughly 6.5 percent of the American population but 40.2 percent of the prison populace. In 2016, twelve states had prison populations that were over 50 percent black: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. In Maryland, 72 percent of the prison population was black.

The polarizing language of the Black Manifesto flowed from this history of oppression and systemic injustice. As Dr. King said in an interview with Mike Wallace, September 27, 1966, "I contend that the cry of 'black power' is, at bottom, a reaction to the reluctance of white power to make the kind of changes necessary to make justice a reality for the Negro. I think that we've got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard." While I understand how the language of the Manifesto prohibited some potential allies from joining the cause, I believe those individuals were missing the forest for the trees.

I appreciate the Covenant's maturity in 1969, authentically considering the Manifesto's content amid its polarizing language. Many contemporary leaders do not embody this disciplined compassion, as evidenced by responses we've witnessed in the era of Black Lives Matter. Covenant leaders set an important precedent for us in their response to the Manifesto. They illustrated that one must not agree with every single detail, claim, tenant, or tactic of something—be it a movement or the language of a manifesto—in order to affirm the truth that movement or manifesto seeks to expose. In a nation where black people have been legally reduced to property, rendered three-fifths of a person, and financially exploited to make the nation's economy the greatest in the history if the world, joined with the history surveyed above, calls to consider reparations, the question of whether Black Lives Matter, and the demands of the Black Manifesto are all logical. Furthermore, they are all laments rooted in theological truths. As Worth Hodgin ultimately concluded, "In face of the facts, the idea of the churches paying reparations is neither offensive nor ridiculous."[26]

[26] Hodgin, "Reparations," 8.

I am exceedingly impressed by Worth Hodgin's leadership. Hodgin embodied Philippians 2 by publicly wrestling with the concept of reparations—which he initially dismissed as "a preposterous hoax"—and arriving at the affirmative declaration that, "Reparations are an essential part of the idea of Christian repentance."[27] Hodgin showed a Christlike disposition in his humble leadership, moving from his own perspective to a place where he could consider the subject from the standpoint of his neighbor. He wrote, "However, there are a large group of responsible but angry men who see this action as most reasonable. Consequently, it is important for us to try to understand what they are saying to us."[28] This humility should be a Christian hallmark and an ECC virtue. When Philippians 2 informs our disposition, we are better neighbors and more faithful disciples of Christ.

Additionally, I appreciated the *Covenant Companion*'s willingness to print Hodgin's "case for reparations" alongside President Engebretson's thoughts on reparations despite their disagreement on the subject. This serves as a beautiful model for what constructive disagreement among denominational leadership could, and should, look like. The ECC should be intentional about drawing from both leadership examples today, amid the racial animus that continues to paralyze far too many, the political polarity that divides us, and the continued theological dismissal of reparations as biblically illegitimate and theologically unwarranted (Luke 19, Matthew 3:8, Acts 6:1–7).

Ondrey correctly critiques President Engebretson for his failure to respond to the Manifesto on its own terms, his inability to see the ECC as beneficiaries of systemic racism, and consequently his inability to see a denominational response as an act of repentance or justice in light of systemic sin. Yet I still want to note that I appreciate his ability to nevertheless rightly conclude "that the Covenant has a responsibility before God and all men to help lift the burden of indignity imposed on the black communities of America."[29] While Engebretson chose the comfort of compassion in the face of being charged to respond with justice, I am grateful that his leadership helped the Covenant reject the apathetic response many other denominations elected.

[27] Ibid., 15.

[28] Worth V. Hodgin, "Memo to Chicago Area Pastors re Black Manifesto," May 19, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[29] *Covenant Yearbook 1969*, 157.

Furthermore, I appreciate that Engebretson concluded his 1969 presidential report with "an acknowledgment of the church's complicity in the national sin of racism and warned the church against allowing revolutionary rhetoric to dissuade it from confessing its true sins and so finding renewal and unity," as Ondrey reports.[30] I express my appreciation not to valorize or completely absolve Engebretson but because I honestly do not know whether, if presented with such a strong manifesto today, we Covenanters would be able to consider its truth beyond its charged language—much less that we would commit to raising $2.3 million for a cause many regarded with suspicion.

We would do well to be more intentional about exploring, celebrating, and canonizing our prophetic legacy of white leaders who took countercultural stances of faithfulness regarding racial justice. Covenant voices like Douglas Cedarleaf, Dewey Sands, Richard Carlson, Herb Hedstrom, Craig Anderson, Worth Hodgin, David Kersten, Mary Miller, Evelyn Johnson, Dick Lucco, David Swanson, Tammy Swanson-Draheim, Daniel Hill, and Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom and many others should be household names and models of what faithfully pursuing racial justice as a white leader looks like. I especially appreciate the prophetic words of Jim Hawkinson who wrote, "The truth is that we never really took up the challenge presented to us by the 1969 Annual Meeting. Whether out of fear, prejudice, economic self-centeredness, or just plain lethargy, we have acted irresponsibly and need to be told so."[31] We need truthtellers among us, people who will hold us accountable while speaking the truth in love.

I appreciate Ondrey's conclusion,

> Yet the action the Covenant took was a rejection of the very substance of the Manifesto and not merely its rhetoric.…It named white Christians as the beneficiaries of this centuries-long system of exploitation and called on them to make material repair as a matter of justice. The Covenant fund was not an act of justice but charity. It addressed the problem of generic poverty rather than the unjust distribution of wealth as the consequence of the particular history of black oppression, with its corollary of white responsibility.[32]

[30] Ondrey, "The Covenant Responds," 23.
[31] Hawkinson, "Stones for Bread."
[32] Ondrey, "The Covenant Responds," 24.

In this way, the Covenant not only missed a chance to be a pace-setting denomination regarding its commitment to racial justice; it also enacted a very problematic erasure of the black freedom struggle. When charged with the particularity of concerns arising from black oppression, the Covenant found it more palatable to shift the conversation to marginalization in general, expanding the fund and its beneficiaries, rather than sticking with the particular charges of the Black Manifesto. This response has strong parallels to proclamations that "All Lives Matter" in response to the declaration that "Black Lives Matter." Finally, the Covenant's refusal to contribute the funds it raised to the BEDC's United Black Appeal, as the Manifesto specified, illustrated that the ECC believed that the creators of the Manifesto could not be trusted to most faithfully steward the funds.

Ondrey concludes that, "Through the fund established, Covenanters sought, through their voluntary generosity, to be part of the solution; they did not see themselves in the problem—they did not see themselves as debtors."[33] This remains the case far too often. We must stop confusing, and conflating compassion, mercy, and justice. The myths of innocence and exceptionalism are extremely dangerous. Both prohibit us from seeing and understanding how we too harm our neighbors, through what we do and through what we leave undone. We may be well intentioned and still cause harm. We see this in our response to protests over systemic injustice today, be it protest over water rights, tribal land, sexual assault, police brutality, the separation of families at the border, gun violence, or the economic exploitation of our incarcerated sisters and brothers. Our responses, or lack of response, our civic engagement around these issues, and spiritual framework regarding these issues all profoundly matter. The revelation of our connection to these injustices should lead us to confession, lament, and repentance. We must acknowledge that all have sinned and fallen short—there is blood on our hands, too, individually and collectively as a denominational family. And Scripture calls us, both individually and collectively, to discern how the Holy Spirit is leading us to partner with God in the work God has already begun and is still actively engaged in: restoring all things to God.

[33] Ibid., 25.

Mary Miller, lead chaplain, Covenant Living of Cromwell, Cromwell, Connecticut

The year 1969 was a finale for the turbulent sixties. Our country knew despair over the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., anger over the Vietnam War, shock over the women's movement, violence against civil rights participants, and widening conflict over the have and have nots. The phrase "doing CD" (civil disobedience) was used by activists to heighten awareness of any number of causes. This was the state of the nation when the Black Manifesto appeared.

Combative language used in the Manifesto's demands should not be a total surprise considering the murders of civil rights leaders, lynching of black men, and Ku Klux Klan bombings of churches and burnings of homes and crosses. The propriety of the ecumenical church quickly threw out those words of righteous outrage. With them it threw out acknowledgment of US history and its systems of injustice. Embedded in that history is an understanding of reparations. "America was born with two birth defects—slavery of Africans and genocide of first peoples."[34] Birth defects do not magically disappear.

The comedian Trevor Noah, raised during apartheid in South Africa, was stunned to meet US citizens who denied the existence of racism in this country and in themselves. "America is weird," he said in an interview, "because someone can be offended more by being called a racist than being a racist. There is a lack of acknowledgement that African Americans are working from a place of deep oppression, and if there is no system where we are working to reform people or try to have a discussion, then that racism is not going to go anywhere."[35] As James Baldwin wrote, "People who shut their eyes to reality invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster."[36]

The deep dynamics of injustice mandate Christian discipleship. I have declared in sermons, "We are all racist, sexist, and classist."[37] These are

[34] Marian Wright Edelman in a speech to the Hartford Interfaith Clergy Association, November 9, 2015.

[35] Trevor Noah, Nightline interview with Norah Roberts, ABC News (2017).

[36] James Baldwin "Stranger in the Village," *Harper's Magazine* (October 1953).

[37] Based on the seminal book of Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (Random House: Toronto, 1981).

matters for our discipleship to Christ who spoke much about oppression, especially in the parable of the good Samaritan and Matthew 25. The Black Manifesto demanded repentance of the primal sin of enslavement as well as its consequential systems. No one can erase or undo centuries of slavery, but to acknowledge it notes ownership in it, inviting foundational repentance and, ultimately, recommitment to addressing its consequences.

Despite good-hearted intentions, the Covenant fund begun in response to the Black Manifesto attended to the consequences of slavery rather than admitting to the original sin. Giving money to address economic, educational, medical, and religious poverty is good. Widening leadership and donating to appropriate church programs is good. If more money had been given it would have been even better.

It is notable that Forman rejected the language of capitalism that was common at that time. Based on economic competition, capitalism has winners and losers. When that competition has rigged resources, opportunities, and systematic biases, it cannot be relied on. The Manifesto's list of corrections to racism described the heart of the matter. Reparations are a result of historical and ongoing racism.

I marvel at the vulnerable, growing, and inquiring spirituality present in the leadership of Worth Hodgin and Wesley Nelson. I doubt they had heard of reparations before. Their personal spiritual journey toward inclusion modeled a Covenant ethos. They led with the Spirit's generosity and grace. In an era where lines were drawn in the sand declaring moral rightness, they were motivated instead by righteousness. May God raise up more leaders in their example.

That the country in 2019 does not have race imbedded in public history classes is remarkable. Attempts to convey historical knowledge that encompasses the full diversity of America—including race, class, and gender for starters—are spotty. Although white secondary school graduates likely know African Americans were enslaved, Harriet Tubman ran an underground railroad, and Martin Luther King Jr. was a great leader, most of us know little of the whole complex chronology of our country.[38]

In April of this year, the Connecticut House of Representatives

[38] For example, is Sally Hemings's secret brick cell in Monticello a white historical fact, a black one, or an American one? And how do people learn that she was Martha Jefferson's half-sister?

approved a bill mandating and funding a course in every Connecticut high school to teach black and Latino history (Connecticut HR 7082). Many argued it would be better to infuse this into all public school history courses, but this bill is seen as a corrective first step. That it is an elective is telling. Fountain of Life Covenant Church's Nehemiah Center offers a class on African American history called "Justified Anger." Understanding of the history entails a necessary discussion of reparations.

Based on Deuteronomy 15:12–15, Ta-Nahesi Coates provides a moving and logical presentation of "the Case for Reparations."[39] It was good to see him in the discussion of national HR 40 in June 2019. This bill, first introduced by Representative John Conyers in 1989, was repeated annually until Conyers's 2017 retirement. The next year another from the committee forwarded the bill. It is "to establish a commission to study and consider a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery" (HR 40).[40] This is the first year that arguments supporting even discussion of the bill made it to national visibility. (One can only wonder if there was any discussion on Bishop Desmond Tutu's recommendation that the US would be helped if we set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission as South Africa did at the end of apartheid.)

In 1970 I began studies at a state university before Black Studies and Women's Studies were developed. I have never had a class in either. Books and boundlessly patient men and women of many ages and hues have loved and challenged my growth in racial reconciliation—often at their sacrifice. Any growth is sporadic, not systematic, and I have a long way to go. The Covenant Church and nation do, too.

[39] Ta-Nahesi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (New York: One World Publishing, 2017), chapter 6.

[40] HR 40, Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act, Congress.gov, available at https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/40.

Jerome Nelson, former superintendent of the Central Conference of the Evangelical Covenant Church, Gary, Indiana

I was not affiliated with the Covenant when it was presented with the Black Manifesto in June 1969. Our church in Gary, Indiana, was adopted into the Covenant in 1986. Covenant pastor Willie Jemison had recruited us to join this white denomination that was intentionally trying to be a diverse denomination and where being black was fine. The first time I heard a detailed explanation of the Black Manifesto was in the fall of 1969 from Angela Davis. At the time I was the president of the Black Student Union at Purdue University and a Black Panther Party sympathizer.

I was intrigued by the Black Manifesto when I read it but also a little taken aback and offended by certain aspects. It was obviously influenced by the Black Power movement, Malcolm X, the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., the Black Panther Party, and the civil rights movement. I wondered why James Forman was acting alone rather than as part of a team or group. He was not a member of the National Black Economic Development Conference but was just speaking for them. When I met him, Forman was the executive secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. I was surprised at the appeal to violence. The demand for white churches and Jewish synagogues to pay reparations to black people in this country confused me: why hadn't Forman included the broader society and government? And the call to arms for blacks in the United States to set up a black-led socialist government made no sense to me; it could never happen in America. But I understood the need for the land bank, the television stations, and the radio stations.

In regard to the divisive issue of reparations for slavery, my position puts me at odds with some black groups, leaders, friends, and associates. The subject of reparations is high in the public consciousness due to several new developments. For one, of the issues was addressed recently by the United States Congress. The US House of Representatives Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties held a hearing on a bill to establish a commission to study a national apology and proposal for reparations for the institution of slavery.

There is no doubt that the black community needs repair as a result of 246 years of violent servitude, followed by decades of Jim Crow. The problem is that reparation is very complex, with few people coming to a consensus as to how it should look. This nation became one of the richest

on the planet due to four hundred years of free labor. Along with it has come the atrocious treatment of blacks in this country, from the inception of slavery to the present day. Institutional racism and its attendant maltreatment have impacted every aspect of black society.

All black people in the United States have been and are subjected to previous and current adverse whims of institutional racism, white supremacy, socio-economic violence, and other systemic barriers that contribute to a lower quality of life for all of America's darker citizens. My interest in the Black Manifesto was fueled not by its rhetoric or demands but by my belief, which I still hold, that the Christian church in America should have always done more in fighting injustice.

Over the past twenty-five years, we in the Covenant Church have passed at least six resolutions related to criminal justice, racial righteousness and reconciliation, ministries of mercy, and poverty: Racial Reconciliation (1995), Call for Bringing Economic Hope to the Poor (1999), Call for Ministries of Mercy in Jesus' Name (1999), Our Relationship with the Poor (2003), Racial Righteousness (2008), Criminal Justice (2010).[41] Did we as a denomination ever truly take up the challenge of any of these resolutions? I call all of these "promises made but not fulfilled."

We have done a good job of being compassionate and merciful. Compassion is identifying with and joining in the suffering of others; mercy is extending God's unconditional love. But when it comes to justice, we could do much, much better. Justice is joining God in making things right, correcting what is wrong. In doing justice we ask, Why does this brokenness exist? How do we address the causes?

I truly understand the frustration and disappointment expressed by Jim Hawkinson in his *Covenant Companion* editorial of March 1, 1970, titled "Stones for Bread." Hawkinson was speaking to the failure of the fundraising efforts in response to the Black Manifesto request. In castigating Covenanters for their paltry giving, he wrote, "A signal opportunity was missed, not because the church was uninformed—unless it was uninformed or misinformed at the local level—but because we just didn't care enough." His editorial concluded,

[41] For full text of many resolutions see https://covchurch.org/resolutions/ as well as the F.M. Johnson Archives and Special Collection's Frisk Collection of Covenant Yearbooks, http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/npu_covyb.

> The least that should be said is this: the time is past when we can whisper pious nothings in the world's ear and get away with it. Our proud and often haughty judgments on the needy of this earth and our easy disdain for their plight must seem at times like a stench in the nostrils of the Almighty. The time has come for us to quit playing games with world relief and aid to black America. What the situation requires is a new determination to offer our means and ourselves now in Jesus' name. No more is asked of us. No less will ever be enough.[42]

At this year's Annual Meeting of the Covenant Ministerium a Resolution on Antiracism was passed to reaffirm the biblical call of the 2008 Resolution on Racial Righteousness. Wouldn't it make God happy if we fulfilled our promise this time?

David Swanson, pastor, New Community Covenant Church, CEO, New Community Outreach, Chicago, Illinois

The demand of the Black Manifesto was clear: $500 million given by white churches and synagogues as reparations for those African Americans who have been "exploited and degraded, brutalized, killed and persecuted." But perhaps what is most clear throughout the Manifesto is the insistence that white Christian and Jewish institutions bear a particular responsibility to repair the material impact of racism.

In their various responses to the Black Manifesto, Covenant leaders revealed several assumptions about the denomination's role in addressing racial inequities. These responses are notable for what they reveal about the lens through which we observe similar conversations about racial injustice and repair today. After all, the debate about whether reparations are owed to African Americans is an ongoing one. Ta-Nehisi Coates's 2014 *Atlantic* article, "The Case for Reparations," placed the debate on center stage, making the point that it is possible to calculate the financial impact of racially motivated housing discrimination.[43] And recently, for

[42] Hawkinson, "Stones for Bread."

[43] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *Atlantic* (June 2014), available at https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/.

the first time, a House of Representatives subcommittee held a hearing to consider studying the need for reparations.[44] How the Covenant engaged these difficult topics fifty years ago can help us see how we are engaging similar realities today.

Three broad assumptions are evident in the Covenant response to the Black Manifesto that have relevance today: the priority of appearance, the identity of the denomination, and the center of need.

The Manifesto's language is intentionally direct, a product of its revolutionary times and proximity to black nationalist ideology. It repeatedly addresses "the racist white Christian Church" and makes clear the intention to disrupt church services with force. In their own ways, each of the four Covenant responses published in the August 1, 1969, *Companion* addresses how the denomination's association with the Manifesto will appear. Worth V. Hodgin quotes Dr. Luke Mingo of the predominately African American National Baptist Church, whom he assures the reader is "a warm evangelical."[45] While agreeing with the aims of the Manifesto, Dr. Mingo disagrees with its "revolutionary rhetoric" and fears "that white people will get 'hung-up'" on it. Robert L. Sloan Jr. notes the "violent language" of the Manifesto,[46] while Wesley W. Nelson acknowledges that some will be "understandably disturbed by what seems to us to be the subversive nature of some of the documents."[47] President Milton B. Engebretson feared that some would view the denomination as "bowing to the threats of black militants."[48]

While each of the respondents went on to affirm the basic fairness of the Manifesto's demands, each felt the need to identify and, in some cases, distance themselves from its language. In their concern about appearance, about how it would look to be seen supporting a document that was so explicit about white Christian racism, we can draw parallels to similar contemporary concerns. In recent years our society has debated the motives of a black quarterback kneeling during the national anthem to protest instances of police brutality, the merits of stating plainly that

[44] Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "At Historic Hearing, House Panel Explores Reparations," *New York Times* (June 19, 2019), available at https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/us/politics/slavery-reparations-hearing.html.

[45] Worth V. Hodgin, "Reparations," *Covenant Companion* (August 1, 1969): 8.

[46] Robert L. Sloan Jr., "Force and Violence," *Covenant Companion* (August 1, 1969): 9.

[47] Nelson, "Financial Control."

[48] Milton B. Engebretson, "The Annual Meeting Decision on Aid to Black America," *Covenant Companion* (August 1, 1969): 12.

black lives matter, and the humaneness of separating migrant children from their parents at our southern border. Too often our responses to these important moments have shown a greater concern for our appearance—of associating our churches with seemingly controversial people or demands—than with the lived experiences of those suffering injustice.

In his response, Wesley W. Nelson reveals another of the Covenant's assumptions that persists to this day, that our distinct identity sets us apart from other predominately white Christian institutions. He writes, "Our immigrant background disassociates us from much (but not all) of the tensions from slavery days. The fact that we are somewhat dissociated from traditional American church life, that we are a small group, and that we have practically not endowments or large commercial holdings makes us much less of a threat to the black man." Courageously, he goes on to note that none of these things "make us any less racist."[49]

Nelson's assertion about the denomination's distinctiveness resonates with my own anecdotal experiences. Over the years I've heard it said that it is our immigrant story, our roots in Pietism, our relatively small size, and our existence outside of mainstream evangelicalism that make us different from other majority white denominations. But all of these self-understandings mistake the nature of racial whiteness and the ways racial inequity is perpetuated today.

White Covenant people and congregations have benefited, and continue to benefit, from the nation's racial hierarchy. That the Covenant was not organized before slavery was abolished makes us no less complicit in structures of racism and white supremacy. In my own city of Chicago, I think about white suburban churches—and, if I'm very honest, more recent urban church plants like my own—which benefitted from white flight from the city toward federally subsidized suburbs sustained by government-backed mortgages. African Americans were systematically excluded from these suburbs and loans and, because the vast majority of wealth in this nation is generated by home equity, today face a massive wealth gap. Regardless of how white Covenant people see ourselves, we continue to benefit from the same racist system identified by the Black Manifesto.

Finally, while the Covenant respondents all believe that the denomination should engage with the need identified by the Manifesto, they

[49] Nelson, "Financial Control."

center that need outside of the denomination. Nelson sees the Manifesto as having opened "the doors of mission in a way we have never known before."[50] Engebretson frames the denomination's financial responsibility alongside the apostles' first project "to solicit funds to help the needy."[51] By centering need outside of the Covenant, these leaders betray two assumptions. First, they imagine the Covenant as exclusively white. There is no internal repair to be done because, as a white institution, no black people within the denomination have been harmed by its racism. Second, while the respondents are admirably willing to acknowledge white Christian racism, they do not acknowledge how this sinfulness is evidence of their own need. By categorizing their response as compassion and mission, they miss the opportunity to confess their own need for reconciliation.

Each of these instincts remains with us today. While the Covenant is far more racially and ethnically diverse now than it was in 1969, we remain culturally white in our imagination and assumptions. We often expect people of color to assimilate to white norms and customs. And while we are quick to talk about our efforts to love mercy and do justice, rarely have I heard these efforts expressed as evidence of our own need for reconciliation and repair. It is possible, though, that we could pursue the work of racial justice not only because of the harm that exists in the world, but because of the profound need for equity that exists within our church.

Though I have identified how the blind spots of Covenant leaders in 1969 help us see our own similar deficiencies today, we can be thankful that these leaders willingly engaged a document that was considered controversial among their mostly white peers. It was courageous for Hodgin to confess that "the white church has been and is today deeply entrenched in the system of white oppression."[52] Unfortunately, his analysis remains as true today as it was then. Unfortunate as well is how rarely we hear this truth so plainly spoken. I pray that we white Covenant pastors and denominational leaders will take the baton from that previous generation, learning from their missteps and building on their courage. We could then become a closer reflection of the historical Covenant instinct to reflect God's friendship with all who fear him.

[50] Ibid.
[51] Engebretson, "Annual Meeting Decision."
[52] Hodgin, "Reparations."

Lenore Three Stars, community leader for racial reconciliation, Spokane, Washington

Mitakuyapi, Wicahpi Yamini emaciapi. My relatives, my name is Lenore Three Stars. I am Oglala Lakota, one of the seven bands of the *Oceti Sakowin* (Seven Council Fires), also known as the Great Sioux Nation. I was born on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, where my father was born. My mother is Minnecoujou Lakota from the Cheyenne River Reservation, also in South Dakota. This means that our ancestral lands include *He Sapa*, the Black Hills, where our creation story lives. I introduce myself this way because kinship is of primary importance in the Lakota family system.

Before the subject of reparations is discussed, it is important to first consider worldviews. You have one. When I addressed you as *mitakuyapi*, "my relatives," I was reflecting a Lakota worldview that we are all related. We are related to Creator, to each other, and to all creation, human and nonhuman, including the land. Lakota call the earth *Ina Maka*, Mother Earth, denoting a deep and honoring relationship. The goal is to be a good relative, so that we can live in the harmony of right relationship. When this right relationship of harmony is broken, we must try to find a restoration of balance. I make this point because most of the misunderstandings I have had in culture and theology were based on a difference of worldviews, between an indigenous worldview and a Euro-western worldview.

An indigenous worldview includes a theology of the land that Euro-western worldviews do not. I imagine that at one time the settlers had a deep connection to their ancestral lands. But that relationship was severed when they left their homelands, and I have to think that it caused unresolved "land trauma" for them. They tried to fill that void with a quest for property by taking our ancestral lands. But only a relationship to the land will satisfy the spirit.

Indigenous peoples are connected to their ancestral lands in a reciprocal relationship. Each creation story for Native peoples locates them in a particular place, which is their land covenant. This sense of place is foundational to Native identity and spirituality. The land is a deep connection to place—it is not portable.

This land relationship leads us to understand why monetary reparations does not fully fit a Native sense of justice. Milton Engebretson characterized African Americans as "one minority group within our nation

long subjected, at best, to a position of secondary standing in American life."[53] Of course, this can also be said of Native Americans. We have both experienced a violent history of racial oppression in the United States, marked by white Christian complicity.

The Black Manifesto demanded a particular amount of monetary reparations from white churches as a just response. As Ondrey's article pointed out, there is a reasonable basis, historically, politically, and theologically for such reparations for African Americans. I believe in the reparations paradigm and can support my black relatives in this. Yet for Natives, I believe that any just response must come from the United States government based on a treaty relationship. The United States made hundreds of nation-to-nation treaties with Native nations and kept none. Justice is not defined only by money but by honoring the legal and moral obligations spelled out in treaty terms. Let it be said that treaties were signed by Native nations under duress in order to survive. When possible, however, it was critical for Natives to reserve their sacred homelands in the treaties.

For instance, the Black Hills were promised to the *Oceti Sakowin* (Sioux Nation) in a provision of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. These terms were intentional and important to the Oceti Sakowin because that land is sacred. He Sapa is where our creation story tells us that we emerged, from the place we call "the heart of everything that is." For the Oceti Sakowin, He Sapa is the specific homeland that we are responsible to care for, as it cared for us for millennia. It is our land covenant with Creator. To not be able to live out that responsibility is a coerced disobedience.

In 1874, Custer's expedition found gold in the Black Hills and the treaty was breached in favor of army protection for incoming miners. In 1980, the Supreme Court ruled that the United States took this land without just compensation and awarded $17.1 million to the Sioux. Yet, this form of capitalism has not been a resolution in this case. In spite of uncommon poverty (e.g., over half of the residents of Pine Ridge Reservation live below the poverty line), the Sioux tribes have continually refused the money. They say that He Sapa was never for sale—that would be like selling your mother. With interest, the award has grown to about $1.3 billion, and it remains unclaimed for reasons that don't make sense in a western worldview. Monetary reparations do not fit Native ideas of

[53] *Covenant Yearbook 1970*, 8.

justice when it comes to sacred land.

With respect to the lingering question of racism in the church, I've been the lone Native in many Covenant circles for decades. As a denomination that has grown in wealth and size, I wonder what the Covenant will do to help change that. I have some thoughts. I think that it is one thing to accommodate Native identity by affirming *imago Dei* and quite another to share the socioeconomic power and alter the church structure. Could we welcome indigenous theologians to the leadership table, regardless of western credentials? Given the Covenant's emphasis on planting churches, could we include planting indigenous-led ministries into sustainability using Native cultural standards that take time? Here is what I trust: the resurrected Creator Jesus will put Ina Maka right again. Our relative is groaning and awaiting liberation and healing right alongside us. From a Lakota perspective, life is a sacred circle. It is not about a linear orthodoxy; it is about a continuous orthopraxy of being a good relative. In that worldview, reparation is an integral part of reconciliation, a lifestyle of seeking to restore balance and harmony.