The Covenant Responds to the Black Manifesto (1969)

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Introduction[1]

Fifty years ago, the Black Manifesto demanded $500 million from white American churches and synagogues as reparation for their complicity in the historical and ongoing economic exploitation of African Americans. In the wake of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the Black Manifesto confronted white Christians with the claims of black power and the charge of white guilt. Over the course of the summer of 1969, its clarion call "substantially changed the face of the race struggle. Manifesto-centered events caused greater vibrations in the US religious world than any other single human rights development in a decade of monumental happenings."[2] The Evangelical Covenant Church of America was one of the many Christian denominations confronted by the Manifesto's demands, as Herman Holmes Jr., director of the Midwest chapter of the Black Economic Development Conference, presented the Manifesto to the delegates gathered in Chicago at the 1969 Covenant Annual Meeting.

This article begins by describing the origin and reception of the Black Manifesto in the summer of 1969 and offering a snapshot of the Cov-

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[2] So concluded 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), 3.

enant at that time. It then narrates the Covenant's response to the Black Manifesto at its 1969 Annual Meeting, traces into the late 1990s the evolution of the fund established in 1969, and finally evaluates denominational reception more broadly. The Covenant's response to the Black Manifesto offers a window into a denomination in transition within a nation in transition.

The Black Manifesto: Origin and Early Reception

The Black Manifesto originated at the National Black Economic Development Conference, held April 25–27, 1969, at Wayne State University in Detroit. The conference was sponsored by the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization (IFCO), an ecumenical group organized in 1967 to coordinate faith-based community development efforts. By June 1969, IFCO membership reached twenty-five agencies, among them mission boards of the United Methodists, American Baptists, Roman Catholic Church, Lutheran Church in America, United Church of Christ, American Jewish Committee, Presbyterian Church, and Episcopal Church. On the second day of the conference, James Forman, director of international affairs for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), presented the Black Manifesto he had drafted, subtitled, "To the White Christian Churches and the Synagogues in the United States of America and to All Other Racist Institutions."[3] In his presentation, Forman prefaced the Manifesto with an introduction on "Total Control as the Only Solution to the Economic Problems of Black People." In this introduction Forman rejects Nixon's "black capitalism," insisting that as the "vanguard of the revolution," black Americans should be opposing American capitalism outright as oppressive imperialism. Black economic empowerment would come instead through total black control of the US government and means of production:

[3] The indispensable single volume for sources on the Black Manifesto is Lecky and Wright's *Black Manifesto*, and most contemporary surveys are derivative of this collection. It includes the editors' overview of the historical context and initial reception of the Manifesto ("Reparations Now? An Introduction," 1–33), a collection of official responses to the Manifesto, as well as a detailed timeline within appendices. It also includes the full text of the Manifesto including introductory remarks delivered at the conference, as Appendix 1, pp. 114–26. The Manifesto text, without its introduction, is available within 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 April 8, 2019. On Forman himself, see his autobiography, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, rev. ed. (University of Washington Press, 1997).

> We live inside the United States, which is the most barbaric country in the world, and we have a chance to help bring this government down. Time is short…and it is time we stop mincing words. Caution is fine, but no oppressed people ever gained their liberation until they were ready to fight, to use whatever means necessary, including the use of force and power of the gun to bring down the colonizer.[4]

Forman directed the goal of total control to the conference itself: "We must begin seizing power wherever we are, and we must say to the planners of this conference that you are no longer in charge."[5] Rather than the (largely white) directors of IFCO, the black members of the conference would assume control, the former leaders submitting to their leadership and helping to implement the program Forman then described in the Manifesto proper. It began,

> We the black people assembled in Detroit, Michigan for the National Black Economic Development Conference are fully aware that we have been forced to come together because racist white America has exploited our resources, our minds, our bodies, our labor. For centuries we have been forced to live as colonized people inside the United States, victimized by the most vicious, racist system in the world. We have helped to build the most industrial country in the world. We are therefore demanding of the white Christian churches and Jewish synagogues which are part and parcel of the system of capitalism, that they begin to pay reparations to black people in this country.[6]

Forman set the total monetary demand at $500 million (later increased to $3 billion) and outlined a ten-point program for the centralized funds: four publishing houses (Detroit, Atlanta, Los Angeles, New York City); four TV networks (Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, Washington DC); a

[4] "Black Manifesto," in Lecky and Wright, eds., *Black Manifesto*, 116. In describing the Manifesto, one risks duplicating responses that emphasized rhetoric over content. Yet it is essential to consider the full document to which churches were responding; its call for reparations cannot be extracted from the larger ideological context in which it was delivered.

[5] Ibid., 118–19.

[6] Ibid., 119.

research skills center; a skills training center (community organization and specific communication skills such as TV and radio); organization of welfare recipients; establishment of National Black Labor Strike and Defense Fund; establishment of an International Black Appeal for black business in the US and Africa; and a black university in the South. The Manifesto was adopted by the conference by a vote of 187 to 63.

Because no white reporters were admitted to the conference, many churches were unaware of its proceedings or the document it produced until the Manifesto's instructions were enacted that "On May 4, 1969 or a date thereafter, depending upon local conditions, we call upon black people to commence the disruption of the racist churches and synagogues throughout the United States."[7] On Sunday morning May 4, James Forman entered Riverside Church, a progressive, interracial church in New York City that benefitted from Rockefeller money. Forman read the demands of Manifesto and named Riverside's specific share as 60 percent of their annual income, as the organist tried to drown him out and pastor Ernest Campbell walked out with two-thirds of the congregation. After May 4, the entire nation had heard of the Black Manifesto. The BEDC, the organization that continued to oversee and fundraise for the United Black Appeal following the Detroit conference, came under FBI investigation soon after.[8]

Over the course of the summer that followed, Forman and other BEDC members would approach all major white Christian and Jewish religious organizations. Responses included both outright rejection and affirmation in principle, though the material response to the latter varied. Most groups who rejected the Manifesto entirely pointed to its call to revolution, by violence if necessary. Two days after Forman's delivering the Manifesto at Riverside, IFCO president Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum read a statement to the white caucus of IFCO, opposing the interruption of worship services as a violation of constitutionally assured freedoms of assembly and worship.[9] Tanenbaum referenced the Manifesto's most

[7] Ibid., 123.

[8] See United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Selection from James Forman FBI file, title page of Black Manifesto," *Queens College Civil Rights Archives*, https://archives.qc.cuny.edu/civilrights/items/show/106, accessed May 29, 2019.

[9] "Proposed Statement to Be Issued by Member Groups of IFCO, Read by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, IFCO President, to White Caucus of IFCO, May 6, 1969." Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, Covenant Archives and Historical Library (CAHL), Chicago, Illinois.

revolutionary statements, together constituting "an ideological framework that creates serious problems of conscience for all who are committed to social reform through the democratic process."[10]

> The ideological preamble of the Manifesto calls for "the use of force and the power of the gun" to "bring this government down," for "armed confrontation and long years of sustained guerilla warfare inside this country," for "black domination" of America, for state socialism through revolutionary seizure of state power. Both the ideology and the rhetoric of this document read like a page out of Marxist-Leninist doctrine and the handbooks of Mao and Che Guevara for revolution by terror and violence.[11]

Tanenbaum expressed ongoing support for the founding goals of IFCO but "reject[ed] firmly and decisively the effort to impose on IFCO's program from the outside[12] revolutionary ideologies, racist theories, and submission to blackmail."[13] These were common concerns of church groups, particularly in the context of the Cold War, in many cases ending engagement before it began. On May 12, the Synagogue Council of America and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council issued a statement that named both "the demands and the tactics [of the Manifesto] objectionable on both moral and practical grounds."[14] Most evangelical Christian groups followed this pattern.

Other groups separated demands from tactics, opposing the Manifesto's revolutionary rhetoric but acknowledging the gravity of the crisis giving rise to that rhetoric. However, support for the BEDC per se did not follow from this acknowledgment. Many groups referenced their existing efforts to address racial injustices; others committed to expanding such efforts in response to the Manifesto but channeled increased funds through their own structures rather than the BEDC.

Ernest Campbell, pastor of Riverside Church, addressed the nation on

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Forman was not a member of IFCO but was invited to the conference by IFCO director Lucius Walker.

[13] "Proposed Statement."

[14] "A Policy Statement by the Synagogue Council of America and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council," in Lecky and Write, eds., *Black Manifesto*, 141.

his church's radio station on May 10,[15] the eve of the Sunday following the May 4 encounter. Campbell affirmed the validity of reparations and acknowledged the white church's failure to respond to the crisis it was complicit in creating. Campbell nevertheless rejected the revolutionary tactics of the BEDC and called on IFCO to clarify whether these were sincerely or rhetorically intended. Irrespective, Campbell warned white churches, "Let us react to the need and not confuse the issue by over-reacting to the tactics."[16] Riverside responded to the Manifesto's demands by designating an unspecified percentage of its budget to poverty alleviation, designated for its own programs rather than the United Black Appeal.[17]

By contrast, the Board of Directors of the National Committee of Black Churchmen (NCBC) issued a statement in support of the Manifesto at a May 7 meeting held in Atlanta. Hailing James Forman as "a modern-day prophet," the board affirmed its support of the Manifesto's demands. "We are mindful that the program proposed has troubled the waters of Siloam, yet we know that however much the churches may shake to the vibrations of its own cleansing the healing of Christ is working upon them."[18] Board members named American churches as "the conscious beneficiary of the enforced labor of one of the most inhuman forms of chattel slavery the world has ever known," both by direct ownership of slaves and by tithes gained through the profits of slave labor.[19] Moreover, they named white churches and synagogues "the moral cement of the structure of racism in this nation." The directors urged churches to recognize the demands of the Manifesto as a demonstration of "the authenticity of their frequently verbalized contrition and of their faith in the justice of God."[20]

> It is too late to call for propriety and moderation. A radical challenge has been placed before us on the threshold of a

[15] Ernest Campbell, "What Shall Our Response Be? Riverside Speaks First," pp. 127–32 in Lecky and Write, eds., *Black Manifesto*.

[16] Ibid., 132.

[17] Cf. similar responses from Archdiocese of New York, Appendix 5 in Lecky and Wright, eds., *The Black Manifesto*, "BEDC Demands Presented to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York," 144–45, "Response of the Archdiocese," May 21, 1969, 145–47.

[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] Ibid.

> summer of unmitigated discontent and crisis. That challenge must be met with an equally 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.[21]

Their position remained uncompromising. As negotiations among various Christian groups progressed through the summer, the NCBC grew increasingly skeptical regarding the sincerity of the white churches. In a June 26 statement to Arthur Flemming, president of the National Council of Churches, the NCBC stated unequivocally its support the BEDC and advised the National Council of Churches to do likewise.[22]

Yet very few groups gave directly to the BEDC's United Black Appeal. By May 1970, the BEDC had succeeded in raising only $300,000, of which only $100,000 had come to it directly.[23] A full $200,000 had been given by the Episcopal Church but channeled through the NCBC—the very thing the NCBC had opposed.

The Evangelical Covenant Church of America in 1969

As it gathered for its eighty-fourth Annual Meeting in June 1969, the Evangelical Covenant Church of America was a church in transition. Only a generation prior had the denomination removed the word "Swedish" from its name (1937), and even after this decision a majority of congregations continued to operate bilingually. In 1934 the Los Angeles Swedish Tabernacle was actively debating whether to shift from Swedish to English.[24] In 1935 First Covenant of Omaha reported that it has solved the language problem, celebrating the collapse of barriers imposed by nationality.[25] Even then, however, it continued to offer a weekly service in Swedish. Only in 1955, fourteen years prior to 1969, had all Covenant publications been published exclusively in English.

[21] Ibid.

[22] "White Churchmen Have a Problem," Appendix 6 in Lecky and Wright, eds., *The Black Manifesto*, 148–49.

[23] "Black Manifesto's Birthday: Frosting on the Cake?" *Christianity Today* (May 22, 1970): 37.

[24] Emil E. Fredeen, "Swedish or English, Which?" *Covenant Weekly* 23 (June 12, 1934), 2, 8.

[25] A.N.O., "Omah, Nebr., Language Problem Solved," *Covenant Weekly* 24 (March 19, 1935), 3.

Though the denomination had grown beyond its Swedish ethnic envelope in the decades following its shift to English, especially in the 1950s, this growth was almost entirely among European Americans. In June 1969, the only formally affiliated Covenant congregations not of predominantly European ethnicity were First Evangelical Covenant Church in Anchorage, organized in 1961[26]; Iglesia Evangélica Misionera in La Villa, Texas, organized in 1950 and pastored by Nelson Eslava[27]; and Oakdale Covenant Church in Chicago, which had formally integrated five years prior. Its white pastor Craig E. Anderson was in the process of seeking a black co-pastor. At the start of 1970, Willie B. Jemison would begin his three decades of ministry at Oakdale, with Anderson stepping down later that year.

At the 1969 Annual Meeting, the first three Korean congregations were officially adopted into the Covenant—Korean Covenant in San Francisco and, in Chicago, Korean Central Covenant and Korean Evangelical Covenant[28]—as was Community Covenant Church, a self-described "multi-racial" congregation in Minneapolis, pastored by white minister Arnold R. Bolin and chaired by African American member Robert L. Sloan Jr.[29] Robert Dawson, the first black member of the ministerium, was in 1969 a licensed lay minister. He was in the process of bringing his Compton, California, church plant into the Covenant as Grace Covenant Church, the first predominantly black Covenant church outside of Chicago.[30] Only in 1972 would Alaska be transferred from World Mission to Home Mission and Howard I. Slwooko Sr. elected first native Alaskan

[26] Predominantly native congregations had existed in Alaska prior to its organization as a US territory, but in 1969 these were classified as mission churches and did not have delegate representation at Annual Meetings. First Covenant Anchorage is the only Alaskan church listed among formally affiliated Covenant congregations in the 1969 *Covenant Yearbook*. Pastored by white minister Roland J. White, it was comprised of both native and non-native white congregants.

[27] *Covenant Yearbook 1969*, 312. A second non-Swedish immigrant church organized in 1950 was the Estonian Covenant Church, formed by refugees following the Second World War. The striking fact is that there is no time in which the Covenant has operated fully in English; before it had fully transitioned from Swedish, new immigrant congregations were holding services in Spanish and Estonian.

[28] Korean Covenant in San Francisco, organized in 1966 and pastored by Ki Nam Lee; Korean Central Covenant in Chicago, organized in 1966 and pastored by Young Jae Lee; Korean Evangelical Covenant in Chicago, organized in 1968 and pastored by J. Inkyu Baik (*Covenant Yearbook 1969*, 210, 222).

[29] *Covenant Yearbook 1969*, 294.

[30] *Covenant Yearbook 1969*, xliii.

superintendent of the misson field.[31] Through the 1970s, licensed and ordained Covenant clergy serving in Alaska, both native and non-native, were listed as missionaries.

In the wake of the Holocaust, the Covenant had condemned racism, explicitly linking Nazi genocide and racism against African Americans in the United States.[32] It was noted in 1962 that resolutions in opposition to "racial discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance based on color, race, or creed" had been adopted by one of every two Annual Meetings since 1946.[33] In addition to adopting race relations as the issue of the year, the 1962 Annual Meeting "reaffirm[ed] its previous forthright stands against racial prejudice in every form" and resolved a number of "practical implications of this position," namely advocating for integration in voting rights, public schools, and public facilities and actively integrating Covenant churches. A final aspect of the 1962 resolution was "that major attention be given by the appropriate denominational agencies toward the development of a strategy for the 'inner-city' church in recognition of changing neighborhoods."[34] This latter call was answered over the next decade in various ways. In 1964 Joseph C. Danielson, executive minister of home mission, published a report on "Covenant Churches in Larger Metropolitan Areas since 1930," in order to understand and address the flight to the suburbs.[35] In the Central Conference, an Inner City Committee was formed in 1963, evolving into a Board of Urban Ministry 1966, with a full-time director position.

Resolutions continued through the decade, voicing Covenant support for Martin Luther King's non-violent direct action, repentance for racism, and commitment to active integration of schools, neighborhoods, and congregations. As with all Annual Meeting resolutions, these pointed to

[31] *Covenant Yearbook 1972,* 70, 147. Alaska became the eleventh regional conference of the Covenant on March 27, 2015, and Curtis Ivanoff its first conference superintendent.

[32] *Covenant Yearbook 1945*, 162.

[33] *Covenant Yearbook 1962*, 163.

[34] Ramelia Williams has traced the Covenant's engagement with the civil rights movement, primarily through the work of the Christian Action Commission and two congregational case studies, Community Covenant Church in Minneapolis and North Park Covenant Church in Chicago: "The Evangelical Covenant Church's Response to the Civil Rights Movement, 1963–1968," *Covenant Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2016): 16–32. Cf. David Nystrom, "The Covenant Commission on Christian Action," *Covenant Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1987): 5–35.

[35] Joseph C. Danielson, "Covenant Churches in Larger Metropolitan Areas since 1930," *Covenant Quarterly* (Nov 1964): 4–15.

a collective ideal. In reality some Covenant congregations took strong actions to ensure integration in their neighborhoods, schools, and congregations[36]; many congregations closed, as urban neighborhoods became increasingly African American, and white congregants joined the flight to the suburbs[37]; most Covenant congregations were geographically removed from these starker alternatives.

As the civil rights hopes of many were dashed with assassination of King in the spring of 1968, Covenant pastors turned increased attention to the black power movement. Richard Carlson, newly graduated from Union Theological Seminary and pastoring Douglas Park Covenant Church in Chicago, sought to interpret the movement to the Covenant in an August 1968 *Covenant Companion* article.[38] Even as he qualified the value as his article, written by a white man, he maintained that the outcome of the black power movement—whether it would be effective in ultimately securing authentic integration or whether it would end in violent conflict—was finally a white question, even a white church question.

> Shook by a conscious or unconscious guilt, we, the white church, might simply be frightened into inactivity, or we might repent and act. If we do act, the worst approach for us is to continue to ask how we can help the Negro and what we can do for him. To do so would indicate that we still see black men as children, as unfortunates, as welfare cases, as guilt-relieving objects. We should not even personally seek out blacks to help us "understand how they feel." If such encounters are to occur, let them be on black initiative. If we do want to encourage Black Power directly, we can provide financial backing to black capitalism but with no strings attached and with no expectation of great thanks.[39]

[36] See Williams, "Evangelical Covenant Church's Response"; Douglas Cedarleaf, "'Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done,'" *Covenant Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2016): 33–44.

[37] See Kurt W. Peterson, "Transforming the Covenant: The Emergence of Ethnic Diversity in a Swedish American Denomination," *Covenant Quarterly* (2009): 3–36.

[38] Richard W. Carlson, "Second Thoughts on Black Power," *Covenant Companion* (August 1, 1968): 6–8; cf. Philip J. Anderson, "Called and Kept: Remembering Richard W. Carlson," *Covenant Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2015): 4–20.

[39] Ibid., 8.

Carlson's article ended with a somber warning to the white church: "If the church does not respond affirmatively, responsibly, 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."[40] A year later, the Black Manifesto would require white churches to respond directly to the claims of Black Power, including the Covenant to which Carlson directed these portentous words.

The Manifesto Confronts the Covenant: Annual Meeting 1969

With most white church groups, the Covenant became aware of the Manifesto through news coverage of the May 4 confrontation at Riverside Church. President Milton B. Engebretson immediately obtained a copy of the document and became "thoroughly acquainted with its content."[41] Within the Chicago area, BEDC Midwest director Herman Holmes Jr. began his work by approaching John Cardinal Cody on May 19 in Quigley Chapel. On May 22 Holmes issued specific demands to the Church Federation of Greater Chicago and the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Each of these groups rejected Holmes's demands.[42]

Worth V. Hodgin, director of urban ministries for the Central Conference since 1966, sent copies of the Manifesto, including its introduction, to Chicago area Covenant pastors on May 19.[43] In his accompanying memo, Hodgin encouraged pastors to read the document carefully and sympathetically. Conscious of the larger Christian denominations Forman and Holmes had approached, Hodgin anticipated that "smaller denominations like ourselves will also have to face this kind of direct confrontation. We need to be prepared to take a position." He offered to organize a panel for area pastors, if interest were expressed, with informed pastoral representatives from both the white and black communities. Sufficient

[40] Ibid.

[41] Milton B. Engebretson to Mildred Holmberg, July 17, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[42] According to a press release issued by the Church Federation of Greater Chicago, August 25, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

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

interest led to a panel discussion June 2, 1969, at North Park Seminary.[44]

The eighty-fourth Covenant Annual Meeting was held June 18–22 on the campus of North Park College and Theological Seminary in Chicago. In the adoption of the agenda, delegates were notified of the possibility of a visit from a Black Manifesto representative, as well as a plan should such a visit take place. During the second business session of the meeting, Thursday afternoon of June 19, the Executive Board brought a preemptive recommendation, "pertaining to relief funds for black America."[45] The recommendation reads in full:

> Cognizant of and grateful for the quickening of compassion and concern for the black people in America today who have been shamefully suppressed whether by conscious or unconscious acts of the nation and at times even the Christian community, the Executive Board of The Evangelical Covenant Church of America, while not in sympathy with nor approving the philosophy and language of the National Black Economic Development Conference as stated in the "Black Manifesto," feels strongly 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 and proposes the following recommendation for your adoption and resultant action:
>
> The Executive Board recommends to the Eighty-fourth Annual Meeting of The Evangelical Covenant Church of America that it urgently request its member churches to contribute the additional sum of one dollar [$6.95[46]] per member this year over and above the amount given last year to World

[44] Invited panelists were African American churchmen Luke Mingo, president of the Illinois Conference of National Baptists, and Phil Hurley, Methodist superintendent. They were joined by Doug Still from the Chicago Church Federation. "These men will be prepared to share with us the history of this development and also the response that it has had, particularly in the black community." Worth V. Hodgin, "Memo to Chicago Area Pastors re Black Manifesto," May 27, 1969. Record Series 6/1/2/1/33a, Box 13, Folder 10, CAHL.

[45] A change was made to the agenda to ensure that the Executive Board's recommendation could be addressed prior to budget approval. "Into All the World," *Covenant Companion* (July 15, 1969): 5.

[46] Dollar amounts in brackets and parentheses throughout indicate quantities adjusted for inflation to March 2019 value. US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

> Relief to be distributed through responsible agencies to help poverty-stricken black Americans. Such agencies and distributions are to be recommended by the Commission on World Relief. It further recommends that should receipts for World Relief during 1969 exceed the amount given last year and the additional $67,000 [$465,342.46] herewith requested, the overage be equally divided between the two causes; and that the one dollar per member a year request be continued until a total of $335,000 [$2,326,712.30] has been given.[47]

In the discussion that followed, a threefold amendment from the floor moved that the fund be incorporated into the coordinated Covenant budget for 1970 and the proportion set at 10 percent. Third, it proposed that the funds be overseen not by the Commission on World Relief but rather "a committee of Black Covenant men and women."[48] While the amender is not named, it is likely the proposed amendment reflected the desires of a larger group of Central Conference pastors who had met prior to the meeting to discuss the Covenant's response to pressing current issues. At the top of their list was "The Covenant's position regarding the Black Manifesto."[49] A "period of considerable discussion" led to the amender conceding to a lower proportion of 5 percent. The question was divided, and the 5 percent voted down, obviating the vote for incorporating the fund into the annual budget. By that point, the business session had overrun its allotted time, so further discussion and action were deferred to the following day.

Discussion continued on Friday afternoon, June 20, in the fourth business session. The Executive Board led with an amended recommendation that incorporated the proposal that the fund be overseen by a committee of black Covenanters. This amendment was approved by vote. Two further amendments were proposed. The first sought to expand the application of funds, asking that only 90 percent of the funds be designated specifically for African Americans; the second sought to limit the kinds of organizations that would receive funding. Both failed. The question

[47] *Covenant Yearbook 1969*, 157–58.

[48] The inclusive language is original. Otherwise, all other texts originally use the generic masculine.

[49] Memo from Jim Anderson, June 12, 1969. Document from personal collection of Herb Hedstrom.

was called, and the amended recommendation carried.

The business session continued. Delegates approved a coordinated budget of $1,791,000 [$12,439,229][50] and heard additional recommendations from the Executive Board and National Covenant Properties. Delegates adopted amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws, heard a report from the Board of Benevolence, and considered recommendations from the Boards of Christian Education, Ministerial Standing, and Directors of North Park.

At the end of Friday's business, Holmes arrived. As planned, the moderator allowed President Engebretson to introduce Holmes and give him the floor. The meeting minutes describe Holmes as thanking the delegates for their attention, describing the Black Economic Development Conference, and reading the Manifesto's ten demands. The *Companion* report of the Annual Meeting offers additional details, noting that Holmes

> spoke in explanation of the Manifesto, placing it in the context of the church's concern for faithfulness to Christ and for racial justice. After a brief introduction, in which he expressed gratitude for being allowed to speak and cautioned against hearing only the Manifesto's language, he summarized the intent of the document and read the 10 specific demands totaling $500,000,000 to come from all church bodies addressed.[51]

Neither the meeting minutes nor the *Companion* report note a specific portion of the Manifesto's total demands stipulated for the Covenant, as other groups had received. In a follow-up letter to Engebretson, however, sent "because your organization has expressed a desire to respond responsibly to needs of the black community," Holmes named the Covenant share as $50,000 plus various in kind contributions, such as the free use of office supplies, mailing lists, typing services, and visual aid equipment.[52]

After Holmes's presentation, delegates applauded, and many stood

[50] Had the amendment passed to dedicate a set proportion of the annual budget to the new fund, this would have entailed the goal of raising annually $179,100 for 10 percent or $89,550 for 5 percent. The $67,000 approved, therefore, comprised a little over 3.7 percent of the total budget adopted for 1970.

[51] "Into All the World," 5.

[52] Herman Holmes Jr. to Milton B. Engebretson, August 21, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

as Holmes exited the stage.[53] The moderator closed the session with prayer and adjourned the meeting until the following morning. In their survey of responses to the Manifesto, written July 24, 1969, Lecky and Wright singled out the Covenant's reception of Holmes as "the only BEDC encounter with a church which was not stormy at some point."[54] As delegates dispersed, Worth Hodgin and Craig Anderson continued conversation with Holmes at George's diner on Foster Avenue.[55]

What came of this meeting and its decision, and what does it reveal about the Covenant at this point in its history? I consider practical outcomes first, tracing the evolution and reception of the fund that was launched at the 1969 Annual Meeting. The final section offers some analysis of the Covenant's response to the Black Manifesto more directly.

Outcomes: Evolution of the Fund

The inaugural committee met with President Engebretson on October 8, 1969, comprised of four African American Covenanters: Nathan Brown, member of Oakdale Covenant Church in Chicago, and first chair of the Covenant Board of Home Mission[56]; J. Ernest Du Bois, member of Emmanuel Covenant Church in Rochester, New York, and chair of the board of Christian education there; Robert Dawson, pastor of Grace Covenant Church in Compton; and Robert Sloan Jr., chair of Community Covenant Church in Minneapolis. The group established criteria for recipient organizations, deciding that funds would not be restricted to Covenant initiatives.

In preparation for the inaugural offering, collected during World Relief Week, November 23–30, President Engebretson encouraged Covenanters to give generously. Engebretson's *Covenant Companion* appeal introduced the committee members and their shared dreams for the services that could be supported with the offering (housing, job training, college preparation, cultural programs, etc.). He directly linked the fund to the larger racial conflict rocking the nation:

[53] "Into All the World," 5; Mildred Holmberg to Milton B. Engebretson, July 4, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[54] Lecky and Wright, "Reparations Now? An Introduction," 27.

[55] Author's conversation with Anderson.

[56] Newly formed, with the Board of World Mission, out of the former Board of Mission (though previously there had been distinct executive secretaries of home and world mission).

> This…could be the movement that would force open the gate to peace and understanding which is currently blocked by hatred, racism, and mistrust….We hold the key, in our small way, to share what we have been given, to demonstrate the love of Christ and to help improve the chances for peaceful, orderly development of the world, rather than for increased anger, rage, and violence. See that you excel in this hour of crisis.[57]

Covenanters responded with $16,452.73 [$111,528.45], a quarter of what was solicited. Though the inaugural proceeds fell significantly short of the appeal, the committee was hopeful. In the words of committee chair Nathan Brown, "Thank God, the door is open. The most successful way to do anything is to start small and grow big."[58] In presenting the committee report to the 1970 Annual Meeting, committee member Robert Sloan Jr., alluded to the parable of the mustard seed: though the fund had a modest beginning, over time it could grow and provide needed relief. "I am positive that the seed that was planted will bear fruit to the glory of God."[59] Likewise President Engebretson reflected, "Though the amount received was woefully short of that requested, we grew because we started."[60]

Others were less sympathetic in their interpretation of the fund's inaugural yield. In his *Covenant Companion* editorial of March 1, 1970, Jim Hawkinson claimed that the response "by any objective standard, was a failure." Hawkinson blasted the Covenant for the irresponsibility revealed by its mediocre contributions to the fund:

> 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

[57] Milton B. Engebretson, "See That You Excel," *Covenant Companion* (November 1, 1969): 10.

[58] Quoted in Milton B. Engebretson, "President's Report," *Covenant Yearbook 1970*, 8.

[59] *Covenant Yearbook 1970*, 169.

[60] Engebretson, "President's Report," *Covenant Yearbook 1970*, 8.

> amounts to, and disdain for God-given brothers and sisters appealing for freedom and a fair chance.[61]

While Hawkinson admitted it was unlikely any Covenanter would be *happy* with the results in principle, he insisted that, "insofar as we 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."[62] He concluded his piece and the *Companion* issue,

> 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 ourselves now in Jesus' name. No more is asked of us. No less will ever be enough.[63]

The 1970 collection yielded less than the prior year, only $16,208.96. This limited success was attributed in part to confusion stemming from its collection on the same Sunday as the World Relief fund, in duplex envelopes. The Committee on World Relief reported that the total raised between the two funds was comparable to the prior year's World Relief offering, suggesting Covenanters had simply divided their giving between the two, rather than allocating additional resources to the new fund.[64] This was the second and final year that the fund would be designated exclusively for African American causes. At the 1970 Annual Meeting it was decided to expand recipients to all ethnic minority groups, and Herb Hedstrom, then co-pastor with Richard Carlson of Douglas Park Covenant Church in Chicago, was added as a member of the now-titled Committee for Disadvantaged Americans of Minority Groups.

At the 1971 Annual Meeting, the collection date was rescheduled for

[61] James Hawkinson, "Stones for Bread," *Covenant Companion* (March 1, 1970): 32.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] *Covenant Yearbook 1971*, 110–11.

Race Relations Sunday, the second Sunday in February, in order to avoid confusion with the World Relief collection and minimize competition between the two funds.[65] Publicity material and a sample sermon were also sent to pastors. The 1971 offering was somewhat more successful, reaching $20,307.72 [$129,380.03].[66] At the 1971 Annual Meeting of the ministerium, pastors completed a survey that sought to illuminate the poor congregational response, having ascertained that pastoral leadership "appears to be the major asset for a generous response."[67] Following that meeting, the ministerium as a body contributed $1,000 to the 1972 fund, which totaled $18,484.63.[68] The fund continued to struggle. The 1972 Annual Meeting moved the collection date a second time on recommendation of the Executive Board, with the hope "that more churches will be participating on a date convenient for their local schedule."[69]

These adjustments did little to bolster the fund's success. In his 1971 presidential report, Engebretson wrote, "The questions that stagger and leave me bereft of spirit, are simply: With all of our fine Christian members, why do we not grow? With our degree of affluence and talk of Christian compassion, why did we fall so far short of the mark in our one united opportunity to help disadvantaged Americans of minority groups?"[70] In 1972 Engebretson lamented, "The program is hardly launched among us. Three years have brought in only $59,000. It really could have been $150,000."[71] In fact it would have been $201,000, had the $1 per member goal been realized. Of the twenty years for which specific contributions are recorded in *Yearbook* reports (1969–1988), more than $2.7 million was raised, when each year is adjusted to March 2019 value.[72] On the one hand, this amount just surpasses the original $335,000 the 1969 decision set out to raise [$2,326,712.30], an amount reached in real dollars in 1980.[73] On the other hand, that amount was intended to be raised within five years. World Relief offerings yielded more within a

[65] Ibid.
[66] *Covenant Yearbook 1972*, 226.
[67] *Covenant Yearbook 1971*, 169.
[68] From three hundred churches and individuals. *Covenant Yearbook 1972*, 196.
[69] *Covenant Yearbook 1972*, 226–27, report given by secretary.
[70] *Covenant Yearbook 1971*, 16.
[72] *Covenant Yearbook 1972*, 76.
[72] $2,700,500.16, taking the 1987 offering as $62,000; that year the fund is reported as totaling "over $62,000," *Covenant Yearbook 1988*, 181–82.
[73] In other words, the church raised in twelve years what it had set out to raise in five. Within three years it had raised the $50,000 asked by Holmes. Of course these funds

mere three years: 1973, 1974, and 1975 offerings raised $2,763,659. The 1988 special offering was celebrated as "a record $66,229, also nearly $4,000 higher than ever before."[74] However, when numbers are adjusted for inflation, this represented the sixth highest offering—and the World Relief offering for the same year surpassed it by over one hundred times at $749,524.04 [over $1.6 million].[75]

In 1983 the fund was renamed Hands Extended Lifting People (HELP), "Because the previous name of the Special Committee was long and cumbersome."[76] By 1986 a single person chaired the committee, reporting to the Commission on World Relief, in order to save the expenses of assembling a full HELP committee.[77] The fund was formally moved under World Relief for a single year in 1988, to be moved again the following year to the oversight of the Commission on Urban and Ethnic Ministry.[78] Reporting on the 1990 collection, Commission chair Eric Newberg thanked vice-president Timothy Ek for his assistance in administration of the offering, contrasting this gratitude with a rebuke: "We wish we could offer similar thanks to local Covenant churches for their generous giving to provide funds for the many exciting HELP ministries, but we can't as of yet due to mediocre receipts."[79] Newberg reported the following year that "Giving to the HELP offering decreased significantly in 1991."[80] The HELP fund is not referenced in the 1993 or 1994 Yearbooks. In 1995, the Urban and Ethnic Commission divided into the Commission on Urban Ministry and the Commission on Ethnic Ministry, and the fund was seemingly absorbed into general denomina-

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were not directed to the BEDC, but the portion assigned by Holmes is indicative of the Covenant's small size relative to other denominations approached.

[74] Herb Carlson, "Report of Commission on World Relief," *Covenant Yearbook 1989*, 191.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Aaron Markuson, "Report of Special Committee on HELP," *Covenant Yearbook 1983*, 187.

[77] Author's conversation with Kersten. Cf. David W. Kersten, "Report of Special Commission on HELP," *Covenant Yearbook 1987*, 207–208; *Covenant Yearbook 1988*, 181–82.

[78] Eric Newberg, "Report of Commission on Urban and Ethnic Ministry," *Covenant Yearbook 1990*, 188. The Urban and Ethnic Ministry Commission was established as a special commission in 1980, moving to standing commission status in 1983.

[79] Eric Newberg, "Report of Commission on Urban and Ethnic Ministry," *Covenant Yearbook 1991*, 164.

[80] Eric Newberg, "Report of Commission on Urban and Ethnic Ministry," *Covenant Yearbook 1992*, 163.

tional administration. For the years 1994–1997, the HELP fund appears within a directory of "Programs to Help Congregations," as the appropriate recipient of "Gifts for Ministries of Compassion," under the subcategory of "Whole Life Stewardship and Discipleship."[81]

Outcomes: Response to the Black Manifesto

While President Engebretson was insistent that the Covenant fund established in 1969 did not constitute a capitulation to the demands of the Black Manifesto, he admitted it may have been an indirect response to the issues the Manifesto highlighted.[82] Certainly this is the case: the visibility of the Manifesto and its aftermath made the demand for reparations from white churches and synagogues unavoidable. What does the Covenant's response to the Manifesto itself, if indirect, amount to? And what does this indicate regarding the Covenant's place within American Christianity at this point in its history?

First, the Covenant was unequivocal in its opposition to the revolutionary premises, tactics, and goals of the Manifesto. In all communications, President Engebretson was clear that the Covenant did not support a violent posture toward the US government. This was codified in the criteria established by the fund committee, which specified among other conditions that funds were to be received only by "agencies whose aims and purpose are supportive of the Constitution of the United States of America."[83] Engebretson provided more explicit assurance to one concerned correspondent: "The funds were distributed to organizations to help Black Americans, but each was thoroughly checked out first so as to be sure no funds were given to black militants."[84]

Given this stance, common among white groups, it is notable that Engebretson did not dismiss the Manifesto's central charge of racism. Many Christian groups—and most evangelical Christian groups—simply stopped at the Manifesto's revolutionary language. A *Christianity Today* article reporting on the Manifesto is headlined, "'Black Mani-

[81] In front matter of *Covenant Yearbook 1995*, *1996*, *1997*, *1998*, p. ix in all.

[82] Milton B. Engebretson to Oscar T. Backlund, June 27, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL. Cf. Engebretson, "The Annual Meeting Decision on Aid to Black America," *Covenant Companion* (August 1, 1969): 12, "All the publicity given the Manifesto by news media may have indirectly affected the timing."

[83] *Covenant Yearbook 1970*, 169.

[84] *Covenant Yearbook 1971*, 110–11.

festo' Declares War on Churches."[85] This was a direct quotation from the Manifesto.[86] Yet the very selection of this quote—focusing on the threat to white churches rather than white Christian complicity in black oppression—ignores the Manifesto's central point, indicative of the article that follows and representative of the evangelical response. The mainstream Covenant response is markedly different, following the mainline Protestant pattern.

While Engebretson was consistent in rejecting the Manifesto's revolutionary call, his references to the document are relatively neutral. Rather than focusing on rhetoric, his communications turn quickly to the reality of racism and the church's responsibility to resist it. His 1969 presidential report concluded with an acknowledgment of the church's complicity in the national sins of racism[87] and warned the church against allowing revolutionary rhetoric dissuade it from confessing its true sins and so finding renewal and unity.[88] Engebretson was well aware that the Covenant fund was misinterpreted as support for the BEDC—his files are full of letters expressing this misunderstanding. Even so, he insisted that the risk of misinterpretation did not justify inaction but was an inevitable consequence of any new venture.[89] Engebretson led the Covenant in following Campbell's encouragement to white churches, "Let us react to the need and not confuse the issue by over-reacting to the tactics."[90]

Yet the action the Covenant took was a rejection of the very substance of the Manifesto and not merely its rhetoric. In both private correspondence and private communications, Engebretson indicated clearly that the fund was not a form of reparations.[91] To *Chicago Today*, he stated

[85] Milton B. Engebretson to A.H. Kubli, April 1, 1970. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[86] "To win our demands we will have to declare war on the white Christian churches and synagogues, and this means we may have to fight the total government structures of this country." Lecky and Wright, ed., *Black Manifesto*, 124.

[87] Ibid., 19.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Milton B. Engebretson to Oscar T. Backlund, August 6, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[90] Campbell, "What Shall Our Response Be?," 132.

[91] See private communication to pastors immediately following the meeting ("the word 'reparations' does not apply to this action"), as well as his August 1 *Companion* report ("the word 'reparations' does not apply to the Annual Meeting's action"). Milton B. Engebretson, "President's Newsletter," 3, no. 7 (June 26, 1969), Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL; Engebretson, "Annual Meeting Decision," 12.

even more emphatically, "We are not in sympathy with the language, the philosophy, the tactics, or the ideals of the NBEDC. We do not believe in reparations. We'll not raise funds for the group."[92] Whereas Engebretson corrected many media portrayals as mistaken, he sent this article to concerned Covenanters as accurately representing the church's action and position.[93] I was unable to find any document in which Engebretson offered a rationale for this rejection.

The dominant Covenant response eschewed reparations not only in name but also the reparations paradigm as such.[94] The Manifesto named the American economy as the product of black slavery and ongoing economic disempowerment of African Americans. 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.[95] Engebretson called upon Covenanters to share "from what God has entrusted to our care,"[96] to give generously out of their abundance, with no acknowledgment that this very abundance was symptomatic of the systemic injustices the Manifesto named. This diagnosis is seen further in the parallels frequently drawn between global poverty addressed through World Relief and the Fund for Black Americans.[97]

When official communications hint at a more systemic or particular problem, this is usually framed in passive language. African Americans

[92] "New Black Manifesto Demands," *Chicago Today* (August 22, 1969).

[93] Engebretson, "Annual Meeting Decision," 12. Engebretson to A.H. Kubli.

[94] "The moral logic of reparations is not charity, but justice," Jennifer Harvey, "White Protestants and Black Christians: The Absence and Presence of Whiteness in the Face of the Black Manifesto," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 39, no. 1 (2011): 143; cf. Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2012).

[95] See for example, Milton B. Engebretson to Rev. Oscar T. Backlund, August 6, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[96] Engebretson, "Annual Meeting Decision," 12; cf. Milton B. Engebretson to H.W. Glass, August 29, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[97] E.g., "But we would like the amount to equal what we do for those living in poverty in other countries. We want only to share our affluence which is admonished by word and example in the New Testament." Milton B. Engebretson to H.W. Glass; cf. Engebretson, "See That You Excel," 10.

are described as "one minority group within our nation *long subjected*, at best, to a position of secondary standing in American life"[98]; the problem they face "the burden of indignity *imposed on* black communities in America"[99]; "the poverty in which many negroes live and the indignities which many *are forced* to endure."[100] The frequently used shorthand "poverty-stricken" also captures this passive framing. 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.

The BEDC and NCBC were both abundantly clear that actions such as the Covenant's—managing the money they raised rather than giving it to the United Black Appeal—were a rejection of the Manifesto and a continuation of the power imbalances it sought to correct. That President Engebretson was aware of these arguments is evidenced by a December 8, 1969, letter from Holmes retained in Engebretson's files. Holmes begins the letter by insisting on the reparations framework: "It is critical at this point to remind you that the demands to contribute to the Black Appeal Fund are based on the real needs of the Black Community for self-determination and for relief of the oppression and deprivation resulting from 400 years of prejudice and discrimination."[101] Holmes goes on to insist upon the inadequacy of any program that maintains white agency in mediating funds rather than relinquishing that power. "We insist that the traditional piecemeal tokenism of private and public efforts to alleviate the conditions of Black people are ineffective, insufficient and insulting to the dignity and sense of dignity of Black people."[102]

The resolution adopted in 1969 had, by amendment, placed the fund under the leadership of black Covenanters. The *Companion* contribution of Wesley W. Nelson, North Park Seminary professor of pastoral studies, insisted on the importance of this: "To pay no attention to the demands of the Black Manifesto, to insist on distributing funds without consulting black leadership…would be no less responsible then."[103] Yet

[98] *Covenant Yearbook 1970*, 8, my emphasis.
[99] Engebretson, "President's Newsletter."
[100] Engebretson, "Annual Meeting Decision," 12.
[101] Herman Holmes Jr. to Milton B. Engebretson, December 8, 1969. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Wesley W. Nelson, "Financial Control," *Covenant Companion* (August 1, 1969): 10.

the specificity of both the fund's leadership and recipients was quickly expanded—a logical progression from the Covenant's focus on generic poverty rather than particular historical injustices. At the 1970 Annual Meeting, the fund's scope was broadened to encompass all "disadvantaged Americans of minority groups." Recipients would range from Casa Central in Chicago to the American Indian Council of Santa Clara Valley, California. An expansion of leadership followed, as Herb Hedstrom was added to the committee in 1971.[104] By 1972, two of four committee members were African American (J. Ernest Du Bois and Willie B. Jemison); when the fund was relocated under World Relief, it was overseen by a committee that alternated between predominantly and exclusively white Covenanters. In these ways, ultimately none of the Manifesto's objectives was positively answered—something no official statement claimed to be doing in any case.

Yet alongside these official rejections, many Covenanters *did* support reparations. In a memo to Chicago area pastors following Holmes's first presentations of the Manifesto in Chicago, Worth Hodgin admitted his initial reflexive dismissal of the idea of reparations, but he demonstrated self-reflection and the ability and willingness to consider the black experience that made reparations reasonable rather than unreasonable. "Reparations are a new idea for us. My first inclination was to react to the whole idea as a preposterous hoax. 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."[105] This is important background information for Hodgin's *Companion* article. He modeled to Covenant pastors a kind of conversion, the willingness to consider an alternate viewpoint and reconsider his own reflexive response, even his own framework of what was reasonable.

In his *Companion* piece, Hodgin explained the idea of reparations, commending it as a preeminently reasonable, historically, politically, and theologically. He discussed historical and ongoing implications of white racism and the white church's oppression of black Americans, citing the Kerner Commission report,[106] to conclude that "In face of the

[104] *Covenant Yearbook 1971*, 110–11.

[105] Nelson, "Financial Control," 10.

[106] The Kerner Report was published in 1968 by the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, commissioned in 1967 by President Lyndon Johnson in the wake of racial riots July 1967. The report asked three questions: "What happened? Why

facts the idea of the churches paying reparations is neither offensive nor ridiculous."[107] After offering a series of historical examples of reparations paid, Hodgin concluded with the specifically theological significance of reparations.

> Reparations are an essential part of the idea of Christian repentance….No institution in American society has confessed its guilt as often as the church. It has written ten thousand empty pronouncements regarding social justice. If reparations are really an acceptable form of repentance, then white American churches have the duty to express their sincerity by repaying their debts which have accrued through slavery and black subjugation.[108]

Hodgin was explicit in fully embracing the paradigm of reparations, including its presupposition of white agency and responsibility and the unjust distribution of resources.

> If the involvement of the American churches in slavery and their subsequent exploitation of blacks is fact, and if, despite our theology and ethics of integration, the white religious community was unable to make it work, then a deep spiritual and material injury has been committed upon black people in this nation. The white church cannot push aside the bold fact of its burden of guilt.… The Manifesto calls for reparations from the white churches as an effective redress for their share in the institution of slavery and benefits of black oppression.[109]

He construed the wealth of white Americans as ill-gained and therefore a source of judgment rather than as just possessions to be generously and voluntarily shared. Following the NCBC, Hodgin's conclusion put Forman in the stream of prophets: "It may be that with all his militancy and rudeness, James Forman is being used by God to declare to the churches,

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did it happen? What can be done to prevent it from happening again?" The report's "basic conclusion" was that "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal." Read the full report at http://www.eisenhowerfoundation.org/docs/kerner.pdf.

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

[108] Ibid., 15.

[109] Ibid., 8.

'this night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?'" [Luke 12:20].[110]

Hodgin's article reflects the commitments of a broader group within the Covenant. Most larger denominations with European roots had strong black caucuses of pastors advocating for the Manifesto. No comparable structure existed in the Covenant in 1969. In fact, this is the first period in Covenant history it was even possible to assemble the committee of black Covenanters that gathered October 1969. That black leadership was insisted upon—the only point consonant with the spirit of the Manifesto—evidences the internal influence of a cadre of white pastors who advocated for the denomination's active, informed opposition to structural racism—Douglas Cedarleaf, Dewey Sands, Richard Carlson, Herb Hedstrom, Craig Anderson, Worth Hodgin, and many others.[111] Though marginal, it was possible for this group to shape the denomination's response because space was created in which their voice could be heard, both on the floor of the Annual Meeting and in denominational publications. It is highly significant that Hodgin's "case for reparations" was published alongside President Engebretson's rejection of reparations in the pages of the *Covenant Companion*.

Conclusion: On the Threshold of What?

Milton Engebretson's 1969 presidential report concluded: "If the sobering events of our time are successful in bringing the Church of Jesus Christ to its knees in repentance before God, resulting in the salvation of the lost and reclamation of the needy, we of the Covenant may be standing on the threshold of our finest hour."[112] While the degree to which the church was brought to its knees in repentance is open to debate, there is no doubt that 1969 constitutes a threshold in Covenant history.

Wesley Nelson also placed the Covenant at a threshold moment, in his contribution to the August 1, 1969, *Companion* series on the Manifesto. The aspect Nelson highlighted was the beginning of black Covenant leadership. His point is worth quoting at some length:

[110] Ibid., 15.

[111] Including lay Covenanters. One Covenanter sent a check of $52 directly to President Engebretson to support the fund at a rate of $1 per week rather than year. Record Series 1/2/6, Box 3, Folder 11, CAHL.

[112] *Covenant Yearbook 1969*, 19.

> The Covenant Church now has one of its finest opportunities to enter into conversation with the black leadership. Our immigrant background disassociates us from much (but not all) of the tensions from slavery days. The fact that we are somewhat disassociated from traditional American church life, that we are a small group, and that we have practically no endowments or large commercial holdings, makes us much less of a threat to the black man. It doesn't make us any less racist, but it makes it much more difficult for us to exercise our racism, and we can face the issue with Christian weakness. To work with black leaders in the distribution of fund we have raised could open the doors of mission in a way we have never known before. Here is an area that the Holy Spirit could bless. As we work side by side, God can work and Christ can become Lord and Savior of many people, both black and white, and a whole new relationship could develop. Of course it involves a risk. Faith always involves risk. Shall we take this risk, launch out and permit this to become one of our most glorious hours?[113]

Fifty years after the Covenant's first committee of black Covenanters, how has the partnership begun in 1969 been stewarded?

The committee of black Covenanters that was formed in 1969 to oversee the Covenant fund would not have been possible prior to that decade. But this would change. In January 1970 Willie B. Jemison would begin his three decades of ministry at Oakdale Covenant Church, joining Robert Dawson in the Covenant Ministerium. He and Dawson would be followed in the ministerium by Donald C. Davenport (1978), William M. Watts (1978), Jerry Mosby (1980), Melvin Dillard (1982), Robert Owens (1988), Henry Greenidge (1988), Anton Davis (1988), and Bennie Simmons (1989),[114] with many others following under their collective mentorship.

Numbers offer one metric, but only one. The Manifesto raised pointedly the question of power. In 1992, following consultations called by President Paul Larsen (Engebretson's successor in 1986) in the wake of

[113] Nelson, "Financial Control," 10.

[114] Dates indicate the first year each individual is recorded in the *Yearbook* as holding a Covenant credential.

protests of the Rodney King verdict, the Covenant Constitution was amended to stipulate that every administrative board have at least two members who were African American, Latino, Native American, Korean, or Vietnamese.[115] Also formalized after this consultation was the formation of the Black Pastors' Council, "to support and develop African American Churches and Ministers in the context of its community and culture."[116] In 2004 the Five-fold Test named power sharing as essential to true ethnic diversity, asking "Are the positions and structures of influence (boards, committees, and positions at both the conference and denominational level) influenced by the perspective and gifts of diverse populations?"[117]

This piece of the Covenant's past is not simply of historical interest but presents the denomination with an ongoing challenge, a challenge that our diversity alone does not meet. The Covenant must continue to wrestle with what responsibility demands of us today. This is one of many reasons we've asked a group of respondents to join in communal historical interpretation and reflect on ongoing implications of this history.[118] Fifty years ago, the Black Manifesto called white churches to responsibility. Fifty years later, the call stands.

[115] *Covenant Yearbook 1993*, 2:223. Following a policy that focused Covenant ministry on four ethnic groups, Hispanic, Korean, African American, and Native/Eskimo. This was originally adopted in 1982 as a mission strategy of the Department of Home Mission (which merged with the Department of Evangelism the following year to become the Department of Church Growth and Evangelism), and subsequently ratified by the Commission on Urban and Ethnic Ministry and adopted by the Executive Board. Discussions of the policy repeatedly clarified that this was not intended as exclusionary but as a commitment to providing necessary support: "While this policy will not exclude other ethnic groups, it is intended that deliberate steps will be taken to service these four ethnic groups including some affirmative actions in membership on Covenant boards and commissions, publication of material in languages other than English, and provision of pastoral leadership and fellowship for persons in ethnic Covenant congregations" (Robert C. Larson, "Board of Home Mission," *Covenant Yearbook 1982*, 144). In 1988 Vietnamese was added as a fifth ethnic group.

[116] "Purpose Statement, Black Pastors' Council of the Evangelical Covenant Church," June 22, 23, 1992. Record Series 1/2/7, Box 35, Folder 11, CAHL.

[117] "The Five-fold Test," available at https://covenantcompanion.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Five-fold-Test.pdf, accessed September 13, 2019. This has recently been expanded with a sixth dimension, "practicing solidarity," and named more explicitly "The Six-fold Test for Multiethnic Ministry." See https://covchurch.org/resources/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2011/10/5-Six-Fold-Test.pdf.

[118] See "Fifty Years Later: Commentary on the Covenant's Response to the Black Manifesto," *Covenant Quarterly* 77, nos. 2–3 (2019): 45–74.