CHAPTER NINE

"HOW CAN WHITE TEACHERS RECOGNIZE AND CHALLENGE RACISM?"
ACKNOWLEDGING COLLUSION AND LEARNING AN AGGRESSIVE HUMILITY

Mary E. Hess and Stephen D. Brookfield

I. The challenges we face

Sitting down to try and write a chapter on dealing with race in theological classrooms is not an easy task. As people who live with the unearned privileges that bearing white skin in the American context brings us, there are many places and times in which we hardly feel like we have an appropriate voice to raise in this discussion. Yet, race should not be thought of as a question or issue only for people of color, something that White people need not concern themselves with. Whites need to deal with race as much as any other group and an inability to appreciate this is one more way White supremacy stays unchallenged, even unnoticed. Racism is not going away. The question of how diverse our faculties are, and how that diversity – or lack thereof – affects the teaching and learning process is a very lively one. No matter how regularly other colleagues seek to dismiss the question by arguing the concern is solely a matter of "political correctness" and therefore no longer relevant, our students and faculties, indeed our communities of faith, still live in the grip of the dangerous and destructive currents of

oppression.[1] How has it come to pass that concern for diversity is seen as a marginal issue and of interest only to people of color? Or that engaging issues of race has come to be understood primarily as a concern for appropriate language?

Perhaps in the general run of challenges facing theological educators, dealing with racism evokes a fatigue that feels bone-deep and enduring in a way that suggests there is little that can be done.[2] White theological educators often affirm that racism must be engaged, but can't think of how to do so, or live in deliberate ignorance of its pervasive impact on our classrooms. Theological educators who do not carry the conferred dominance or implicit privilege of "whiteness" often have all that they can do to marshall their own research and teaching within a predominately White context, and have little energy left for engaging these issues.

If one of the key reasons why White theological educators do *not* take up these challenges has to do with this form of fatigue, then that dilemma in turn has to do with having little sense of agency. Years worth of study and writing and research and teaching have led us to a situation in which the "numbers" are still not promising. DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey and Kim, of the *Multiracial Congregations Project*, note that:

> The nation's religious congregations have long been highly racially segregated. If we define a racially mixed congregation as one in which on one racial group is 80 percent or more of the congregation, just 7.5 percent of the over 300,000 religious congregations in the US are racially mixed. For Christian congregations, which form over 90% of congregations in the United States, the percentage that are racially mixed drops to five and a half.[3]

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[1] On the topic of "political correctness," Kathleen Talvacchia has a wonderful section in her book *Critical Minds and Discerning Hearts: A Spirituality of Multicultural Teaching* (2003) where she notes explicitly why a "multiculturally sensitive pedagogy is not political correctness" (4).

[2] Tony Campolo and Michael Battle refer to this feeling as the "politics of resignation" (8).

[3] DeYoung, Emerson, Yancey, Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 2. This book reports, in part, on the results of a multi-year project on multi-racial congregations funded by the Lilly Endowment. More information on the web at: http://hirr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_congregations_research_multiracl.html.

Further, the statistics about faculty at institutions of higher education – and more specifically, of theological higher education – are just as disheartening:

> In 2001, 85% of male faculty at ATS schools were white, as were 85% of female faculty. That number has shifted somewhat, since in 2005 84% were white men, while only 81% were white women.[4]

Given that these numbers *include* all of the faculty at historically Black schools, as well as schools within denominations that *do not* ordain women, they are not numbers of which any of us can be very proud. Yet the very reality that the numbers are being kept, that we have this description available to us, suggests that there is at least some interest in engaging the issues. As Gary Gunderson writes, "what *might* be is embedded in what is, however painful it might seem to be."[5]

Proponents of anti-racism begin from an understanding that racism is a complicated process deeply embedded in human institutions. They draw out clear distinctions between "bigotry" – the practice of holding specific prejudices – and "racism" –the institutionalization and continued dominance of certain prejudices through the exercise of structural power.[6] In this analysis, racism is not entirely – or even primarily – a matter of individual persons and their individual responses to people with differing skin tones. Rather, racism is a complex process of developing structural power that has been inscribed in institutions over hundreds of years, and that grows out of specific patterns of practice, legal definitions, and institutional norms that lead to clear

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[4] These figures are drawn from the Association of Theological Schools data tables, available online at: http://www.ats.edu/resources/fact_book.asp.

[5] Gary Gunderson, *Boundary Leaders: Leadership Skills for People of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) 97.

[6] A particularly compelling example of how this institutionalization has occurred over time is found in Ian Haney López' analysis of the legal construction of race, found in *White by Law* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

benefits being conferred, in unmerited and usually unremarked upon ways, upon people solely on the basis of the social construction we label "race."[7]

Racism is structural, prejudice personal. Racism is embedded within permanent practices and socially learned ways of thinking, prejudice a matter of personal choice. Racism moves in white people whether they wish it to or not. Having several decades of socialization into racism, both of us are aware of how it moves within us, merely by the fact of our skin color. This is one reason for our ambivalence around the praise heaped on the Oscar-winning film *Crash*. Written and directed by a white man (Paul Haggis) the film presented racism in a very white way, as a matter of individual choice that the characters opted into and out of depending on the situation. Although traces of systemic, institutionalized racism could be glimpsed in some of the more painful dilemmas, the primary impact of the film remained for many white people one that was personal, on the level of prejudice. Prejudice and privilege both exist in individuals, but racism must be understood as something embedded within a whole political, economic and cultural system. It follows, therefore, that it is a deeper, more enduring phenomenon than individual prejudice and can only be successfully understood and attacked structurally.

If you accept this argument – even if only for the purposes of this essay – then notice what immediately becomes possible in a theological context. Perhaps the first and most important assertion we want to make is that grasping the systemic nature of institutionalized racism provides a vivid and compelling example of the vitality and resonance – even for White people! – of certain theological claims that Christians make.

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[7] This definition is so common as to become the consensus, and you can find iterations of it throughout all of the books referenced in this essay. In my own teaching, I rely on the specific definition put together by the Minnesota Anti-racism Collaborative (mcari.org): "race prejudice plus the power of systems and institutions = racism." This definition is elaborated upon at some length in the MCARI workshops.

Such an assertion might seem confusing at best or oxymoronic at worse, but consider the ways in which Christianity defines sin, and the persistent conviction on the part of Christians that we are bound from birth into sinfulness, and yet freed from that sin by the loving grace of God. Different denominations will specify how this process works in different ways, but at heart is a common conviction about a reality often labelled "original sin" and the concomitant belief that God's grace releases us, saves us from this brokenness and liberates us into new, more just, relationality.

Language about original sin is often heard by contemporary ears as nonsensical or irrelevant, but when imagined anew in the midst of the systemic and complex nature of institutionalized racism, it takes on new cogency and urgency. Further, keeping in mind that Christianity has at its heart a number of convictions about deep relationality, and about the necessity of kenotic posture – of pouring oneself out in love, of upending typical power structures, of seeing God in the darkness – all of a sudden theological language becomes a new set of powerful metaphors for engaging racism, and particularly for sustaining weary – *and White* -- theological educators in the midst of dismantling it.[8]

Consider, for instance, one of our favorite illustrations of how a "null curriculum" operates. A null curriculum, at least as described by Elliott Eisner, is that which is taught by virtue of not being taught.[9] This is a contradiction of sorts, and hard to illustrate. Yet for many White students, discovering how racism is socially constructed is an excellent example of this curriculum in operation. When we ask White students to consider how race functions in their own lives, most of them have to pause and wonder. For many of

[8] Mary Hess articulates more explicitly the connections between a posture kenosis and teaching in chapter four of this volume.
[9] Elliott Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (Columbus, OH: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2002) 97 ff.

them race is a category they hardly think about, and do not even notice except perhaps in filling out census forms, applying for financial aid, or in news accounts of violent "others" found in "other" places.[10] In all of these instances "race" is a category that slips beneath their view, that eludes their consciousness, that can be defined as "not mattering" except in so far as they might want to make claims about the necessity of multi-racial congregations (without, of course, having a clue how to create and sustain such congregations). Yet students of color usually have immediate, and voluminous, responses to this question; everything is viewed through the lens of race. Race is not a construct they can ignore, even if they want to, because it so thoroughly shapes so many of their experiences.

Using Peggy McIntosh's groundbreaking essay[11] as a jumping off point, eventually White students can come up with a list of the "benefits" of being White in a seminary context:

> Knowing that one's theology will be the norm, rather than the "specialized" or "marginalized" discourse
> Knowing that the research upon which one's primary textbooks are written was done in communities of people that look like you do
> Knowing that the hymns one grew up with are likely to be present in "typical" worship, and don't need to be part of "enculturation"
> Knowing that no one will wonder if you "belong" in the cafeteria when you walk into it, or into the library, or across the campus parking lot

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[10] Melanie Bush documents this reality more substantially with appropriate sociological research (and its accompanying statistics) in her book *Breaking the Code of Good Intentions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004) 65.

[11] Peggy McIntosh, "Working Paper #189: White privilege and male privilege, an account of coming to see the correspondences through work in women's studies," Wellesley Center for Research on Women. Paul Kivel also has a list of white benefits in his book *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1996)32-34.

Clearly these are benefits that anyone would – and potentially, could – enjoy. They are not aspects of a theological education to deplore – except insofar as they are denied to certain students, while promised implicitly to others. Yet they also point to the perpetual, exhausting burdens that students who do *not* benefit from these privileges carry. Our White students – we, ourselves! -- experience both grief and guilt in this recognition.[12] Yet rather than withdrawing into defensiveness, our recognition of this systemic process can give birth to a deeper sense of how God's grace liberates one into energy and action. Paul's exclamation that "I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want" (Rom. 7:19) becomes a more personal affirmation in such a context. Sr. Paul Teresa Hennessee, S. A., quoting Adrian van Kaam, notes that 'the primal act of violence… is the defensive refusal of the potential fullness of our awareness."[13] For White students, *awakening* to the system in which they have been implicated begins to refuse such a refusal, it invites awareness which in turn connects to the deepest parts of Christian spirituality.[14] Sharon Welch suggests that "it is far better to see and empathize with suffering than it is to be oblivious or indifferent to human loss and misery. The ability to care for others is itself a precious gift, one we have received from those who first loved and cared for us."[15]

The issue, of course, is not simply how to illustrate the cogency and coherence of Christian theology. For us, in this essay, our chief question is how might we, as teachers

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[12] James Perkinson writes eloquently of the pain of this process in his book *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 234.

[13] Sr. Paul Teresa Henneseee, S. A., "Violence in the household," in *Ending Racism in the Church* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998) 82.

[14] Norman Peart makes this point in his book *Separate No More: Understanding and Developing Racial Reconciliation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000) 105.

[15] Sharon Welch, "Ceremonies of gratitude, awakening and accountability: The theory and practice of multicultural education," in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, edited by Harvey, Case and Gorsline (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004) 250-251.

bearing White skin privilege, how might we activate learning around this clear challenge while at the same time seeking to transform the very sinews of the bodies we operate within? How do we deconstruct these destructive systems, while working at the same time within systems of power that grant us the authority we rely upon for teaching, and the agency we require for that teaching to function well?

What does it mean to be a "bearer of Christ" in this context?

What does it mean to come into a classroom convinced that one bears witness to a power that is quite different from the primarily hierarchical forms of power that are common currency? Here again theological discourse comes alive, because the notion of *kenosis,* of a power that is experienced in the pouring out, takes on a quite specific vitality in this context.[16] Clearly it means, among other things, a deep and ongoing humility. It means and requires a giving of self that invites a renewed and reciprocal engagement.[17] There is indeed a kind of spiritual discipline at the heart of this set of questions that can enliven the entire enterprise, that embodies theological reflection in the heart of the academic task, that requires a re-membering – a pulling together again of the body of Christ.

This is the humility of the broken, the epistemological stance of bending one's head, the posture of prayer that comes when we are forced to our knees by the depth of our sorrow at the brokenness we inhabit. But that same brokenness, that same sorrow is also the birthplace of joy, the moment in which comes the liberation of knowing that we,

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[16] Lois Malcolm is particularly compelling in her work on this topic. A good place to start is "Teaching as cultivating wisdom for a complex world," in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher,* edited by L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002) 135-154. The language of *kenosis* can also be found written in a specifically feminist tone in Deanna Thompson, *Crossing the Divide: Luther, Feminism and the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).
[17] There are clear connections here to the argument David Lose makes in the second chapter of this book, on teaching with conviction.

alone, can do nothing to make this right – and yet God *loves deeply* and brings to birth freedom and grace in spite of us. In the words of the Lutheran book of worship, "we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves"[18] – but only through the freely given gift of Christ poured out upon us all can we emerge from this brokenness into the glory of God's kingdom.[19] This is a humility that we dare to claim might even be "aggressive" in the sense of being willing to confront the distorting dynamics of racism.

Mark Edwards has written about this kind of discipline in scholarship in an essay about "characteristically Lutheran leanings" where he notes that:

> ..a Christian scholar who views her work in terms of vocation will cultivate a range of Christian virtues that will, in turn, undergird her approach to life and learning. For example, humility in a scholar is expressed in openness of mind and a willingness to believe that she doesn not know everything and can in fact learn from others. … Charity finds expression in the willingness to construe the work of others fairly and sympathetically… serious attempts at understanding precede attack.[20]

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What does it mean to hold off on saying something in order to invite someone else's words into one's heart?

What does it mean to risk "believing in" something very different from what one has treasured, as an effort to imagine something different?

What does it mean to allow oneself, as a scholar and a teacher, to be surprised into a new understanding?

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[18] *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978) 56.
[19] Fumitaka Matsuoka makes this point eloquently in *The Color of Faith: Building Community in a Multiracial Society* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998) 126-127.
[20] "Characteristically Lutheran leanings?" in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology,* Vol. 41, #1, Spring 2002 (8).

Consider some of the questions that emerge for students of color face when they walk into a predominately White classroom:

> Will I be welcomed here?
> Will my distinctive voice be allowed to participate, or must I couch my insights in language that will be acceptable in this place?
> Will I be invited to read texts that bring my experience into the classroom inquiry, or must I make those inquiries entirely on my own, and almost in spite of the classroom structures?
> Will my patterns of practice be honored, or will I find myself hiding them so as not to be ridiculed?
> Will my claims to authority share space with my colleagues, or fall on deaf ears?

Many students of color have learned the habits of "hiding" in plain sight so well, that their passion and vision and commitments will not be activated in a given classroom unless specifically invited to be so. Yet those who have ears to hear and eyes to see can create spaces in which participation is possible, and in which the practice of kenosis, of making room for the other, of exploring power *with,* not power over, is so deliberately invited that lively new insights and engagement *with passion* occur.

There is no way for a person bearing White skin privilege to fully understand what it means *not* to carry that privilege in our cultural contexts. If we start from that position, then pedagogy becomes interesting. If we do not understand experientially the dilemmas of living within racist constructions, how can we teach ways to deconstruct them? What does it mean to learn in such a context? How do we invite inquiry? What are the specific classroom practices that are clues to creating this kind of space? Empathy is at the heart of this kind of stance, and humility of practice is key.

Kathleen Talvacchia suggests that "teaching demands a profound de-centering of self so that we can attend to the learning needs of our students,"[21] and she notes that "empathy for another's experience cannot be an excuse to appropriate that experience and make it our own."[22] In the spirit of her assertion, here are a few such practices that we have stumbled upon, sometimes by accident or sheer serendipity, most often through the graciousness of students who risked sharing their criticisms of classroom spaces.

II. Meeting these challenges head on in practice

In this section we explore a number of specific practices that we have learned through bitter experience. Although we reject the idea of racism as purely personal prejudice, and although we believe racism can only ultimately be addressed structurally, we also think that throwing one's hands in the air and absolving oneself of any need to work individually in anti-racist ways is also not an option. We describe a number of practices below because both of us, located in different institutions and working with different students and colleagues, have found that these behaviors have been commented on favorably by colleagues and students of color.

A. Personal practices on the teacher's part

- Acknowledge your own collusion in racism and how it moves in you

[21] Kathleen Talvacchia, *Critical Minds and Discerning Hearts: A Spirituality of Multicultural Teaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003) 9. Aana Marie Vigen uses similar language of "de-centering of self" in "To hear and to be accountable: An ethic of white listening," in *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*, edited by Harvey, Case and Gorsline (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004) 224.
[22] Ibid. p. 41.

- as a teacher never suggest you are free of racism. If racism is a structural reality – bolstered by ideology – then most, if not all, Whites have learned at an instinctual level all kinds of racist stereotypes. There is no point in denying this – it should be mentioned, almost matter of factly (not as a dramatic confession) since a racist society in which White supremacy is a dominant ideology would mean that of course you have racism embedded in you. Making yourself study why and how this process lives in you should be a teachable moment – best done right in class.

There are different ways this can happen, some fairly superficial, some much deeper. On a fairly superficial level we have both become aware of how using 'black' and 'dark' as negative terms (it's a Black day, that's a dark perspective etc.) is noticed by colleagues and students if color. To white colleagues who say this is political correctness run amok, and that using white and black, light and dark, as something that is totally independent of racial overtones in colloquial speech, we can only say that this view is a very white perspective. As an African-American colleague told one of us "To me everything – everything – is seen through the lens of color." Several times both of us have had students of color come up and thank us for catching ourselves using 'black' and 'dark' as negative terms and talking publicly about this.

On deeper levels White Supremacy moves in us as it does in all Whites. First, our skin color means that for our whole careers we have been used to seeing people who look like us as the gatekeepers in our fields. We have never had to question our right to publish something. Racism – the structural manifestation of the ideology of White supremacy – moves in us in ways that constantly catch us by surprise. A Black pilot enters the cockpit of the plane on which you're traveling and you catch yourself thinking

"will this flight be safe?" – a reaction Nelson Mandela also had and which he writes about in his autobiography, thus illustrating the all pervasive nature of ideological conditioning. In classes both of us have caught ourselves holding back from challenging students of color and realized that our so called 'concern' masked an embedded racist consciousness which says that 'they' can't take a 'strong' challenge from a White person. Clearly, racism moves in us to exercise a double standard in class, to practice what the *European American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness* calls 'withholding.'[23] Withholding is a behavior Whites fall prey to in multiracial environments. It is the self-imposed silencing of self with the intention of creating space for the racial other to speak. Withholding underscores the White center by implying that a white voice is so powerful it will overwhelm all else. It is seen quite clearly by students not as the empathic act of an ally, but as a racist practice. Clearly, white teachers need to challenge students of color just as vigorously, but also as courteously, as they challenge white students. It is deeply sobering, shameful and alarming to realize how strong and enduring is the successful ideological conditioning of White Supremacy.

- Discuss how working with a multiracial teaching team is crucial for being able to model talking across difference and working through racial tensions – this is based on our own experiences in multiple contexts. The team should talk out how their racial memberships manifest themselves in decisions about process e.g. how you ask students to address you, what behavior you regard as respectful, your level of comfort with gumbo

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[23] "A Multiple-Group Inquiry into Whiteness" European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness. In L. Yorks & E. Kasl (eds). *Collaborative Inquiry as a Strategy for Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002.

ya ya (Alice Walker's description of overlapping speech patterns amongst African American students) etc.

- Don't expect colleagues of color to 'teach' you about racism & White supremacy - they already have enough to do trying to combat racism in their own life. Now you're putting a double burden on them of having to educate you. This is your responsibility – you must conduct your own serious learning on this topic.

- Don't ever suggest you understand how it feels to be the victim of racism - to students and colleagues of color race can trump everything. Saying you're from the working class, have suffered under patriarchy, etc. and can therefore understand what students of color experience will come across as naïve and condescending. You lose credibility in an instant.

- Be prepared to be called a racist - it comes with the territory of this work - you may feel you're working with sensitivity and goodwill but as soon as you stir the waters with racial discussions you will inevitably inflame some. As a White person and a representative (in students' of color eyes) of White supremacy you must expect to be mistrusted and not let that get you down. You must also expect White colleagues to accuse you of politically incorrect reverse racism. This is not a sign that you are somehow failing. It comes to every White person in this work.

- Before you open your mouth make sure you have truly engaged with scholarship of color - you expect your colleagues of color to be well acquainted with Eurocentric theologies, Enlightenment philosophers, Greek biases in moral theory, etc. They have every right therefore to expect you to be similarly well versed in Africentrism, the many varieties of African philosophy, the debates between critical race theorists and Africentric theorists, etc.

- Never ask a student to speak for their race - among other things it implies that all people of a particular color think and behave the same way. It would be infuriating for you to have to give the 'White American' or "Anglo-Saxon' perspective on something given the multiple ethnicities, religious, ideological, historical etc. groups and variables in American culture, don't demand it of anyone else.

- Never assume there is a unitary Black/Latino/Asian or other perspective. After all, there is not a unitary White perspective on most issues.

- Point out how race is evident in everything - how we name ourselves, what we consider as respectful behavior, how we think a good discussion goes, etc.

- Be aware that most principles of responsive teaching - the importance of modeling, using the CIQ, etc. - are just as relevant in teaching about race as in other teaching contexts.

B. Creating a syllabus

As we've discussed in earlier chapters of this book, the very first gathering of a learning event – whether the opening session of a semester long class, or an informal bible study – sets the tone and expectations for much that follows. Based on what you know about your students, what kinds of "signals" will help on a syllabus? Consider asking yourself these questions, for instance:

- How diverse are the authors on your reading list? Ensuring that some of the required reading comes from non-dominant authors signals that you are open to multiple voices and begins to lay some foundation for helping your students to begin the process of valuing other voices. If they are already able to do that, then diverse voices provide more room for getting into another space, for risking the transformation of learning.

- What kind of teaching/learning process statements do you include? Incorporate paragraphs that invite students to recognize that diversity in terms of race, class and gender is a gift in the classroom, one to be respected and cherished, honored through civil discourse.[24] Here again, a warm invitation to engagement suggests that these differences are respected, and will provide substance for direct exploration – even as such statements signal that simply asserting difference is not an engagement with it.

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[24] Parker Palmer's articulation of such a stance through the "grace of great things" has become a mantra of sorts in Mary's own teaching. She explores its use in chapter four of this volume.

• How do you provide access to your own person? Many teachers will list office hours, for instance, while others suggest making appointments in advance. How might you signal to students who have been hurt by previous encounters with faculty that your own commitment is to respect and openness? Providing room for email encounters, going yourself to be present at meetings and worship experiences where students of color gather informally, sharing your own experiences of risking engagement (if helpful, and done with appropriate boundaries) are all appropriate.[25]

• Does your syllabus include explicit time within the progress of the semester to engage issues of systemic oppression within whatever content you are exploring? Are terms such as race, class, gender, etc. visible on the syllabus itself? Providing clear acknowledgement that such dynamics will be explored alerts students to their importance.

C. The opening session

As your class actually begins, there are multiple ways to express your openness and interest in facilitating as lively a discussion as possible.

• How is the room arranged? Is everything in straight lines? Is there space for you to walk around and talk with students from a variety of positions in the room? Straight lines of chairs or desks, with a clear presentation of the professor in control in the front of

[25] Stephen writes about appropriate personal sharing in chapter three of this volume.

the room reinscribe notions of authority and power, which in turn can subtly suggest that systemic forms of power are not to be directly confronted, but rather relied upon.

- What quotations or images do you have on the chalkboard or powerpoint as the class begins? Many times it is not the images or words we use that are the problem, but rather the clear *lack* of such images. You may use images of all White people simply because they were close at hand and easy to put together – but the message you are sending to your students could be one that invites them to consider "White" as normal, as typical, and anything else as somehow "exotic" "alternative" or even "deviant."

- Do you begin in prayer? If so, what does that prayer invite? Is there room within it for silence? Do you name your own hopes and vulnerabilities for the class? As you begin a class it is worth keeping in mind the work of organizational consultants such as Edgar Schein who point to the formative character of a shared emotional experience early in the life of a new collectivity – whether that is a classroom of students, a committee of employees, and so on.[26]

- The first session of a class – where often students have not yet read any texts in common – can be an opportunity to introduce your students to a shared experience. Mary often uses a "video reality exercise" to provide a low threshold, high enjoyment way into

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[26] Edgar Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004). Also, Mary further explores issues of prayer in chapter ten of this volume.

collaborative learning.[27] Stephen asks students to reflect on their best and worst previous experiences working in groups and then builds on these to help the group develop norms for how members are going to treat each other. At the same time, these exercises can raise issues of race, class and gender in ways that open up the questions and suggest that it is both appropriate and welcomed to investigate systemic forms of power.

- One of our colleagues, Diane Jacobsen, begins her class via a discussion of women in the wisdom literature; another, Dick Nysse, invites his online course students to consider the ways in which their own interpretations will shape the conversation of the course; yet another, Craig Van Gelder, asks students to imagine the neighborhood around their contextual placement churches, and to see all of the markers of power embedded in the landscape. Each of these opening moments provides an opportunity to invite students into the "meat" of the class right away, and to do so in a way that also names systemic power as an issue under consideration. If such content issues are engaged in a way that invites participation and collaboration in seeking answers, then the initial experience shapes a "norm" for the further continuation of the course.

D. The substance of your course

As we noted above, teachers need to be familiar with the conceptual frameworks that define systemic oppressions before we can design learning environments that seek to deconstruct such dynamics, let alone help our students to learn about them.

[27] This exercise, as well as two others, are detailed in "Seeing, hearing, creating: Exercises that are 'low tech' but that engage media cultures," in *Engaging Technology in Theological Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 133-143.

• In this vein, drawing conceptual frames from your specific disiplinary context that name and describe systemic power structures can be very useful – particularly if they help to draw students on beyond the 'personal discrimination' blame game to more complex and grounded descriptions of systemic power flows. In biblical studies there are many resources for doing this. In the arts of ministry the systemic oppressions can be engaged directly as they impact on specific questions of community and leadership. Here Elizabeth Conde Frazier's work is particularly useful for the way in which it defines a shared hospitality of learning. In history there are several very good examples of texts that explore the ways in which gender has been defined, for instance, or the ways in which race has structured how communities of faith have developed over time.

• It is easy to fall into the trap of using the texts you're most familiar with and comfortable using, only to discover that they're all written by people who carry the same privileges (or lack thereof) that you do. The Wabash Center maintains a collection of Internet resources that are a great place to begin searches – both in terms of syllabi, critical texts, web-based resources, and so on – to broaden your range and depth.[28]

• Taking seriously the notion of "multiple intelligences" provides yet another way into reshaping the classroom to make it possible to engage systemic power dynamics more directly. Most students within higher education are capable readers and writers, they have demonstrated at least some element of what Gardner would term "linguistic

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[28] The Wabash Center Guide to Internet Resources is available at: http://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/guide_headings.aspx

intelligence." Yet an overemphasis on linguistic intelligence narrows learning in any classroom, and can contribute to students experiencing themselves as disadvantaged or unable to contribute from their most fluent and capable gifts. Providing room for kinesthetic learning, for exercises that engage logical analyses, for highly interpersonal engagement, can at the same time provide room to help students understand what it means to feel disadvantaged in one frame, and empowered in another. That in itself can contribute to moving them towards more mature understanding – both in terms of perspective, and of empathy.

- Using a portfolio frame for assignments can help students to track learning over time, and can provide numerous opportunities for tracing their own development. It can also be a framework that invites the kind of self reflection that leads to seeing "power in action" and thus moving beyond simplistic notions to more systemic engagement with various ways of thinking about race, class, and gender

- We have discussed in chapter three some of the ways in which role-playing can help students to learn better dialogue practices. Role-playing has also proven useful in relation to exploration of the dynamics of class, race, and gender. Several good exercises have been developed, with specific instructions, to help classes do this.[29]

- In chapter one (and many subsequent chapters of this volume), we have talked

[29] Several examples would include Jane Elliott's "brown eyes/blue eyes exercise" (http://www.janeelliott.com/), several cross-cultural learning games (http://wilderdom.com/games/MulticulturalExperientialActivities.html), Jean Kilbourne's documentary "Killing us Softly" (http://www.mediaed.org/videos/MediaGenderAndDiversity/KillingUsSoftly3), etc.

about the use of the CIQ process. In this context using the CIQ externalizes power dynamics that people are unwilling to confront directly in class. For example, in groups when there is a racial minority, these students will often sit together for self-protection. White students usually record their frustration with this on the CIQ which is a good opening to discuss different, racially-grounded experiences of higher education.

E. Reflection throughout a course

This entire book is a sustained attempt to support reflective practice in theological education. Engaging in such practice yourself is one of the best ways to support it with others. Here are specific suggestions that could be implemented throughout a course. Our goal here is to provide ways to "see through your students' eyes," and in turn help them to see through each other's eyes.

- Teaching in a classroom where students have several different native languages provides an immediate entry point into discussions of how language can construct experiences of power. Even in a classroom in which only English is spoken, reference to varieties of slang – and the cultural etiquettes developed for using them – can be an interesting entry point for work in systemic power awareness. Try allowing students to write in their native languages, and them simply verbally explain their essays to you, or allow them to summarize in English the learning units they have created in another language.

- One relatively simple way to provide a range of assignment choice in a class – and thereby minimize some of the unequal power that can come with unearned privilege – is to invite students to choose one entry from a bibliography to read, and then have them present it to their colleagues in a way that both shares the material they've learned and demonstrates alternatives for presentation. Opening up the choice of what to read, as well as how to present it, opens up possibilities for yet again engaging the power dynamics.

- For some students, participating in a free wheeling large group discussion is simply not possible given the power dynamics that swirl around them, making it difficult for them to speak. One alternative is to provide asynchronous opportunities for classroom discussion via online technologies. Students who flourish in the give and take of immediate discussion often find such discussions very difficult, while students who have been silenced in the more typical classroom can prepare their responses carefully and feel more able to share them in the asynchronous environment. Here again, once having had such an experience, there is lots of room to "go meta" and discuss the experience of the experience with students, thus leading them to reflect upon the power dynamics.

- Several examples of ongoing assessment have been sprinkled throughout the foregoing chapters, each of which provides yet another means by which teachers can share power with students, and in doing so model and articulate intentionally the deliberate exposure of systemic power, and the ways in which misuse of that power can warp and distort human relationality.

• What is the range of discussion present in your classroom? How have you responded to challenges from divergent theological viewpoints? Often it helps to imagine what questions you could ask of a student, rather than what "corrective" responses you might offer.

• When students experience resistance to specific points you're trying to make, how do you engage it? Simply asserting that they are wrong may make a point about your own authority, but it does not necessarily or even typically invite them into questioning their own beliefs.[30]

• What are your practices of grading/evaluation? Have you made clear the rubrics by which you will evaluate written work? Do you practice consistency with respect to grading, so that students can learn to trust that you will evaluate their work against a clear ruler, rather than in terms of other attributes? To what extent do you consider a wide range of elements of understanding in your rubric?[31]

One of the gifts of this practice of humility in teaching is that it is deeply freeing. It is *not* the kind of "political correctness" that invites one to question one's every

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[30] Two books that have been out for years continue to be treasure troves of useful exercises: *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-racism Training*, by Judith Katz (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1978) and *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice,* edited by Adams, Bell, and Griffin (New York: Routledge, 1997).

[31] Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe have developed a particularly useful rubric for assessing understanding that identifies six facets of understanding: explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy and self-knowledge. For entry points into their work, see *Understanding by Design* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall, 2001).

utterance, but rather the freeing gift of grace which argues (to use the Lutheran formulation as an example) that since we are at one and the same time a saint and a sinner, we are indeed free to attempt to follow Christ – and will be absolved accordingly in all the ways that we fall short. Rather than worrying whether or not we are "passing on the faith" with sufficient regard to its purity and sanctity, we are freed to engage in the messiness of living into that faith. We are, as Robert Kegan notes, able to practice the hospitality of deconstructive criticism that urges us to suspend our claims long enough to enter into another's space.[32] Doing so does not imply that our claims are by definition not true, but it invites deep inquiry of a sort that makes it possible to test such claims with deeper resonance.

III. Engaging systems

Thus far this essay has focused on practices rooted in individual classrooms, practices that have been broached for a specific teacher in a specific classroom, ideas that might create a space that attempts to mitigate some of the more destructive elements of institutionalized racism. But this kind of work is only a first step, and an admittedly small one at that. As the definition of racism makes clear, it is a system built upon and enforced through structures of human institutions that are kept in place by collectivities of people, not simply individuals. It is in this point of the analysis that it becomes crucial to consider how it might be possible to open up teaching, to make a classroom bigger than simply one room with one teacher and multiple students.

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[32] Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey make this point in *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001). More description of how this practice works can be found in chapter four of the volume you are currently reading.

Kenda Creasy Dean makes the point, within her study of youth ministry, that

> … young people are among God's most forthright, frustrating and often unwitting prophets, reminding us that salvation is at stake, for they will not give up on true love until they find it… The adolescent quest for passion reveals a theological aneurysm in mainline Protestantism… For youth, ridding faith of radicalness and transcendence amounted to castration, and rendered Christianity impotent for reordering the self. With nothing left "to die for" in Christian teaching, it became increasingly unclear whether or not Christianity offered something worth *living* for.[33]

It is entirely possible that this same kind of aneurysm has permeated graduate theological education. What if our work leads up to a particular point of transformation, but then we back away from it? What if at the heart of the academic disciplines in which each of us are formed as we move our way through the measured ladder of becoming a PhD credentialed educator, what if in the midst of that process of formation we've lost our way?

What if the spirit of academic formation has become, instead of a path and process by which one retains the humility and self-critical posture necessary to pursue truth, what if instead of that, it's become a structure by which more "worldly" forms of power are kept in place? Consider the myriad mission statements of some of our most elite institutions of theological education.[34] They ring with commitments to fighting racism and sexism, to inclusive communities of inquiry, but often students come away from these programs knowing what they should fight against, but not always knowing what they are seeking to build. Indeed, academic socialization at this level – for a variety of good reasons, given the historical record – has tended to require that scholars hold

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[33] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004) 7, 9.
[34] Vanderbilt Divinity School (http://www.vanderbilt.edu/divinity/viewbook/introduction.htm) and Harvard Divinity School (http://www.hds.harvard.edu/history.html) might be good places to start.

their most intense convictions at arms length.[35] The last two decades has seen an enormous amount of literature published detailing the distinctions between objective, "arms-length" approaches to religion vs. intimate, insider, faith-based scholarship. Yet this very dichotomy has in some cases contributed to a 'passion-less' Christianity, a form of scholarship so disconnected from actual patterns of practice, and so detached from these convictions that it can continue blithely on in concentrated, "super white" forms, without once recognizing the emptiness of its content claims.[36]

To return to the questions we asked at the beginning of this chapter, how is it that communities of faith – in the US in particular – can continue to be so obviously separated by race? How is it that theological school faculties can continue to be so segregated? Particularly when their most central faith claims would lead one to conclude that they ought to be deeply *integrated*?

The spiritual formation of an academic discipline *can* be rooted in a form of inquiry that shapes the task to be one in which one's deepest convictions must risk being challenged, or it can become instead a process by which one is formed *into* a set of convictions not to be challenged. One of the reasons scientific discourse is so powerful right now is that the integrity of its convictions shares a congruence and coherence with the patterns of its practice.[37]

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[35] There is a growing literature questioning the central commitments and processes of graduate theological education. Keeping in mind his particular theological stance and location, Robert Banks' *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) is a good place to begin. See also *Three Fifths Theology: Challenging Racism in American Christianity* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002) 126.

[36] James Perkinson makes this point in more depth in *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 224 ff.

[37] Although of course this is not necessarily true of the technological outcomes to which scientific inquiry is put.

Lee Shulman notes that religious education should include exposure to one of the empirical disciplines precisely so that it invites this kind of self critical engagement.[38] For white educators, engaging racism is both a thoroughly appropriate and immediately urgent instance in which empirical information provides such a vital exposure, and indeed invites us to shape – and critique and challenge – our practices. This is the kind of learning we want to invite our students to share. And it is this kind of learning that can be rooted, founded, indeed *funded* by the spiritual commitments at the heart of Christian practice.

A. Institutional practices

What might be possible ways to move beyond the classroom in engaging issues of racism in theological education?

- The book in which this essay appears grows out of a teaching/learning reflection group shared by junior colleagues in a seminary. Such a group gave us space in which to test our own assumptions, share our "highs and lows" in teaching practice, and eventually, as trust grew, come to real discussion about points of resistance and opportunities for transformation. In the numerous and varied rubrics that have been published to place institutions on anti-racism spectra, most share in common an understanding that anti-racist work must ultimately create and sustain communities of accountability.[39] A reflection group can be a space in which such accountability can be

[38] Hanan Alexander quotes Shulman in *Reclaiming Goodness: Education and the Spiritual Quest* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) 186.

[39] The Minnesota Collaborative Anti-racism Initiative has an organizational rubric that is very useful (http://www.mcari.org/). Also, see the table on p. 165 of *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), and the reconciliation

planted and nurtured. Even if the faculty at your institution is completely white, learning how to open up one's teaching to more shared engagement can be a first step towards learning the habits of heart and mind that make anti-racist work possible.[40]

- Distributed learning is another context in which accountability can grow. Many schools are experimenting with placing courses in distributed – mostly online – environments. An online course offers a context in which teachers can work with students from vastly differing backgrounds who are learning in myriad contexts. One of the first courses Mary taught in an online environment was a course that directly engaged race, class and gender. It was possible to do so primarily because the institution in which she was working valued her ability to teach online to such an extent that they gave her permission to design a course around any content she desired. New technologies can offer such opportunities, but even beyond the opportunity of "newness," that early course gave Mary the chance to invite students into a learning context who otherwise had little interest in the issues. Their experiences in engaging the challenges, in turn, provoked her to look at the materials she was using through new lenses.[41]

- Cross-disciplinary team teaching is yet another opportunity to subvert the institutional structures that have placed constraints around engaging institutionalized racism. "Mastery" of a limited amount of specialized material has, for a long time, been

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continuum described by Norman Anthony Peart in *Separate No More: Understanding and Developing Racial Reconciliation in Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000) 129-142.

[40] Kathleen Talvacchia 's book, referenced above *(Critical Minds and Discerning Hearts*), is an excellent reesource for this kind of discussion, particularly pp. 33 and following.

[41] Mary Hess, *Engaging Technology in Theological Education: All That We Can't Leave Behind* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 79-93.

one route to advancement in the academy. Such a route tends to narrow one's perspectives to such an extent that exploring the impact of institutionalized racism may never even arise, or, alternatively, one might become an "expert" on *only* the ways in which such processes work. Choosing deliberately to work with a colleague from another disciplinary setting – perhaps a biblical scholar and a practical theologian, for instance, or a systematic theologian and a sociologist – provides multiple opportunities to explore new lenses, and/or the ways in which specific disciplinary definitions highlight or obscure how racism functions.[42]

- Shifting the roles of teacher and student from hierarchical "power over" into collaborative co-inquiry is not only "best practice" as defined by numerous recent studies within education, it is also more congruent with a biblical imagination, with certain practices of Christian formation throughout the tradition, and with contemporary notions of theological scholarship. While we've mentioned several ways in which to do this within the section of this essay that considers classroom practice, it's important to remember that classroom practices are to a large extent shaped by institutional structures. Thus, searching for and hiring new faculty with a commitment to such practices provides a good entry point into confronting institutional practice on this issue.

- Shifting the definition of what "counts" as appropriate and legitimated scholarship is also an important, long-term effort in this regard. Several womanist theologians provide excellent examples of ways in which to do this, as they have taken first person

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[42] See chapter seven in this volume for a sustained discussion of collaborative team-teaching.

narrative accounts, women's fiction, and other kinds of sources not ordinarily presumed to be "appropriate" sources of theological reflection and claimed them as crucial *theological loci.* Scholars who work with popular culture materials are another example, and it is not coincidental that many of the theologians who work with popular cultural materials have also directly interrogated issues of race, and other institutional oppressions.[43] Giving students access to this scholarship, and helping them to experiment with new methodologies can open up spaces in the classroom of profound transformation – not simply or solely for students, but for teachers as well.

• Following in that vein, there are clearly many more ways in which to express theological engagement than through written text. More and more scholars are experimenting with inquiry into movement, art, music, and so on. It is not simply within the classroom that "multiple intelligences" can be engaged, but also by shifting and transforming what "counts" as a classroom in the first place. Online formats are perhaps the most obvious example of this kind of transformation, but many seminaries are exploring myriad other ways in which teaching can be *contextualized* by changing its location. Increasing accountability to communities previously marginalized within theological education by shifting teaching into locations that privilege such communities is a concrete and tangible way in which to do so.

All of the ideas presented thus far in this essay are the fruit of ongoing learning. Nothing discussed here is suggested as the *only* response, or even the *best* response, to

[43] See for example, the work of Anthony Pinn, Elizabeth Conde-Frasier, Cornel West, Thomas Beaudoin, Mary Hess, etc.

engaging racism. Rather, we hope that as two white educators seeking to create liberative learning experiences we have presented an opportunity to explore possible alternatives to current practice, and to invite new energy into the process of reinvigorating contemporary theological education. At heart we, as white educators, are committed to healing the "aneurysm" suggested by Kenda Dean as existing at the heart of Christian practice. In doing so we need to take very seriously the wounds and brokenness evident in our sinful attachment to structures of oppression such as racism. We do so in the full and free grace offered by Jesus Christ – not with any self-righteous claim to being able to do so by ourselves, but rather in the graced presence and power of the Christ at whose feet we kneel, and with whom we live into transformation. It is our hope that this essay might invite you into conversation with us, with these practices, and with the Hope that we witness to amidst them.