Chris Rice on Voice of Calvary

Theology and Race Workgroup Meeting
Oxford, MS - February 24, 2001

Chris Rice: Excuse the computer. It is not really because I am high tech, it is because I didn't have the chance to print my notes, which I was working on last night. What I want to talk about and really focus on is embodying reconciliation in community; that is the subject that I want to focus on. The kind of direction that I have in mind when I am talking about racial reconciliation is the image from Ephesians 2, which is that the cost of putting hostility to death between estranged groups in God's death through the curse of the crucifixion. The new humanity, the one spoken of in Ephesians between Jew and Gentile - the Cross - is the paradigm for making that visible in the world and in the life of the church.

So when I say racial reconciliation I am not talking about cheap grace. I am talking about self-emptying, sweat, tears, life in the flesh, laying down lives, a new humanity. This is hope for the world when it happens. The context, in terms of how racial reconciliation was embodied in community for us in Jackson, was within a neighborhood and within a congregation. I am convinced, while that is not the end of reconciliation (and it is certainly by no means the only thing we need to be doing when it comes to racial justice, racial reconciliation, or however you want to put it), I do believe that it is an indispensable building block in communities that embody reconciliation in the life of their fellowship.

This was experienced, and this is being experienced, in a context in Jackson over twenty-seven years. This is still going. So I will be talking about the seventeen years in which I was part of that embodiment from 1981-1998. So I am speaking from the ground of experience and the experience was black and white. Now the last time I was in Jackson it was noticeable how many more Hispanics are in the city. So things were already changing when I left Jackson, in the rural areas of Mississippi, that are now beginning to affect the city. So I think Louis's challenge is very timely. Things are going to change.

Why did we do it? We did it for a lot of the reasons that Dolphus outlined, because we believed it was at the heart of the gospel message. We also believed it is unusual communities with a deep commitment - an intense commitment - that can reveal for the whole body a direction of beliefs and practices that offer hope. I want to underline that the community that I

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am going to be talking about is one of hundreds of this type of community that exists in America, mostly in urban, inter-city neighborhoods. So it is not an isolated story. It is a story of something that is going on within America, which is not always noticed.

Let me talk about what it looked like. The roots of it were in John Perkins' work in Mendon Hall, Mississippi, and all that Dolphus described in terms of his upbringing in Mendon Hall. That was the root of the congregation that I was a part of in Jackson. The founder of that work in Mendon Hall, John Perkins, grew up in a sharecropping family. He had a third grade education; his mother died at birth and his father left the family. His brother was killed by a white policeman when John was sixteen years old. His brother had just returned from World War II and was shot down in a racial incident in the town where John grew up. John left Mississippi, moved to California, and then came back to Mississippi in 1960 and began the work in Mendon Hall, the work that Dolphus described.

It was a work that began very evangelistically in focus, but because I think John was deeply rooted in the whole truth of the gospel, it was inevitable for them to become involved in the civil rights movement. So Mendon Hall became a very activist location for the Civil Rights Movement. The culmination of that was in 1970 when John was ambushed by white policemen in Brandon, Mississippi, which is ten miles outside of Jackson. He and other Civil Rights workers were beaten that night repeatedly by about 15-20 policemen and highway patrol officers. He nearly lost his life. The next morning his wife went to visit him and with her was their son Spencer. I mention that because Spencer would later become very important in my life.

The amazing thing is that Voice of Calvary Jackson was begun three years after the Brandon beating. Three years later John started a new work in Jackson, 1973. So we are talking in the direct aftermath of desegregation in Mississippi where this work is being started with a vision, a duel vision, of racial reconciliation (so you are getting that this is a very costly idea to be pursuing at this time, a very radical idea) and a mission to the disadvantaged and the poor of Jackson. The way that that model developed was as a congregation, as a community development enterprise, and then later as a communal life. That was all part of the same organism: the Voice of Calvary.

It all took place within a neighborhood about the size of a zip code; a transitional neighborhood in the midst of integration famously described as "the first black family moving in and the last white family moving out." That transition would take place over the next fifteen

years completely. At its heart, it was a congregation of 200 people who were living in the same neighborhood, worshiping together in the same congregation, and working together primarily through the community development enterprise.

There was a particular kind of spirituality and discipline. As I look back on it, it was something like a Protestant religious order: a very informal, disorganized, free-floating, seat of the pants, build the road as you walk. But there was a discipline and spirituality at the center, which brought these people together as both singles and families. There is a rule of Saint Francis, a rule of Saint Benedict, and what you could call the rule of the Voice of Calvary. And the Rule of the Voice of Calvary was three things which we called the "3 Rs" (or as John used to say the "3 Ah-rahs"). First, is relocation, which is living incarnationally, living where the poor are. Relocation is not about privileged folks moving in (it is about that), but it is about creating a life together with both the poor and the privileged together. So it is about a common turf. The second R is reconciliation, where reconciliation was about the quality of relationships with one another: first the quality of relationship to God and then quality of relationship to one another. Reconciliation, especially at Voice of Calvary, had meeting in terms of race and class and in trying to tear down that division. Thirdly, Redistribution. We do not exist for ourselves. We are not here to do racial navel gazing. The purpose is mission. The purpose is the poor. That is why we are here. There is a personal, sacrificial engagement of energy, resources, skills that has to happen in terms of fleshing out that purpose.

So this rule produced a congregation that was very mixed racially, very mixed in terms of class. From Charles the white guy who lived in a personal care home, a deinstiutionalized mental patient, who every week his famous question was, "Do you have $0.50 for a cup of coffee?" And you never knew when Charles would stand up during the worship service and share about his latest struggles. Voice of Calvary was a place where you could share in the middle of a worship service. To people like Herb and Sarah Myers: Mennonites from Pennsylvania. He was a physician, they were Democrats. To Angela and Kelly Simpkins who grew up in Mississippi; native, white Mississippians, both lawyers, both famously Republican [laughter... something lost]. To African Americans like Willie who everyone knew was addicted to cocaine because you wouldn't be surprised to pull up to the convenience store in the neighborhood and find Willie asking people for money to support his habit. Also he was very vulnerable about his habit in church. He was coming to church to get divine inspiration and

energy to deal with his addition. He was vulnerable about it. To African-Americans like Lynn Phillips who grew up in Mendon Hall and became a physician. And then to middle-class African-Americans families like Phil and Yolanda Powell who had relocated and become part of the work, both Ph.Ds.

The rule also produced, beside the congregation, the ministries: a community development organization that was doing all kinds of things from a health center, with ten thousand patient contacts a year, to a housing development corporation, to youth work, to the clothing store, to an international study center whose mission was to teach these principles that were being lived out in community together. All this was run under multi-racial leadership with about a million-dollar budget. It was a very exhilarating place to be as a young white college student in the early 1980s. There were hundreds of volunteers, visitors and interns a year - national reputation, etc. What could be possibly wrong with such a picture?

Well in 1983, ten years after the organization was started, came the first great test of this inter-racial embodiment and it went back for me to a question I mentioned the first time we met. My first memory of Spencer, John's son, was when he stood up in a meeting and asked the question, "What are all you white people doing here?" It was a very confusing question to me, because it seemed kind of obvious to me why we were there: to help the poor! But I found out in 1983 that it wasn't only Spencer who asked this question. There were a number of African-Americans who began to speak up in our church and talk about where the racism that we need to deal is...right here at Voice of Calvary!

They organized a series of meetings over the course of the summer - about six - and one of the central issues was the involvement of whites in leadership. Why were so many whites in leadership if this was an organization that was about liberating and empowering the poor, the African-American, indigenous people? It was a time that had church-splitting potential in our life. I remember one meeting in particular, I was walking home and I was pissed because, "Why were these angry black people talking about racism within our church? How can that be? Racism is people who wear hoods and all that stuff." The results of that time were earth shaking for our life as a congregation. There were many people who left the church and the ministries in the aftermath of that. Not only whites, but African-Americans also left. It was a very emotional, very troubling time. There was a lot of pain.

I was one of those who was mentally packing my bags, because I realized that there were two parallel universes even within our own life. I knew that that was true outside of Voice of Calvary: that there were two parallel universes within our embodiment. There was a discourse that was going on within the African-American part of our church and there was a discourse going on within the white part of our church. It was a very different discourse. There was a discourse in the African-American community that led to these meetings, which came to me as an explosion. This is a very important lesson, and yet I didn't quite know what to do with the anger of African-Americans and my sense of displacement.

In the aftermath a lot of things changed. There was a whole group of black leadership that was brought into both the church and the ministries. A lot of whites were demoted from their positions, and fortunately, Spencer was made one of the new elders in the aftermath of this. Through a couple of people, I was invited to become part of a household Bible study group that he had formed. All of us were survivors of the meeting. All of us had a long-term commitment. All of us agreed that we were tired of Bible studies where we nodded our heads about one more nice truth about God. And we went on with life pretty much as usual. We were trying to search the deeper commitment.

We decided that we would try to read scripture communally and that we would try to enact what it taught together and not justify the way we were already living. Now, we were already doing a lot of radical things. This is the kind of people that we were: we were very hard on ourselves. The first thing that we did was we began to tell our life stories to each other. It seemed like a very harmless place to start, but it was really through the storytelling of the African-Americans of the group that I was hearing not about this issue programmatically, but I was hearing about it through the experience of people whose experience was very different from mine. That was a very important moment.

We also began studying the Sermon on the Mount together. Out of studying the Sermon on the Mount together, we began to make commitments to each other. We began to make commitments like we are going to give 10% of our individual salaries to our church; we are all going to tithe. We are going to be good church members. But in addition to that, we are going to give an additional 5% to a household fund that we fund together. We are going to start doing things together as a group out of that. We decided to set up one-to-one meetings together. We

did work projects together and what happened over the course of eighteen months is that we began to form an organism within the congregation.

Now it was through that process as an intense small group that I began to see the racial issue differently than I had. I began to understand that I had privilege. I began to understand that I had options that African-Americans did not have. I could walk away from race whenever I chose, and my life would just be fine. They did not have that choice. I began to see I had blinders on when it came to racism. Racism was something that worked very unconsciously through institutions, not just the Klan. I also began to see that I was a caseworker. I was there to help people. I was there to be a teacher. I was not there to be transformed myself. I underwent what I would call a kind of conversion experience when it came to race.

There were a number of crucial lessons, which I think we learned at this time in the life of our community, as both a congregation and a church. One thing that we learned was that neutrality in such an environment will drift things toward the dominant culture. Neutrality favors the majority culture. Things should not be left on neutral. We learned this thing about institutional structures that, yes, it was true, whites had taken positions of leadership. They had not done so by being conscious racists, they had done so merely by being the kind of white people that we were who were attracted to a place like that. We were go-getters. We were educated, motivated. We wanted to make a difference in the world, to jump in. And we were going to run over people programmatically in doing that, but not consciously. We began to see the practices like having staff raise their personal support favored the white Americans who were there. It disfavored the African-Americans. That needed to be addressed. We saw how outsider whites could come in with good intentions, dominate, and squelch indigenous development.

We had a sense (and this is complex) that programmatic frenzy needed to be slowed down for the sake of our total mission. And there was a big question here whether white do-gooders were going to stay if their opportunities were diminished. There was also a challenge of how do we really make white people allies in the cause of racial justice. It was not enough to be a do-gooder. There is a conversion process. As I began to think about that, the terms that I put on it were that movement from caseworkers on a one-way street of giving to becoming converts. We have to be converted, and finally we become comrades. There is a strong sense of mutuality there, but it is a real mutuality, not a one-way street.

We also learned that it was not enough for whites to be converted. As I look back on it, I think it was an incredible act of forgiveness just for African-Americans to be in the same church with us. In that sense, a deep forgiveness had already taken place. However, the racial reconciliation uprising revealed that there was another layer to the residue of blackness, the residue of oppression, the residue of anger and of unforgiveness. It revealed another layer to that, which had to be dealt with too. The new humanity we are talking about is not a fixed thing. It is a constant process and it requires continuous mutual transformation. So we had to deal with that too.

Bottom line is that we learned there is a difference from being integrated and being reconciled. There is a big difference between an integrated community or church and a reconciled church. A reconciled church is one where every group has power and significant voice in the life of the church, no matter what their size is within the congregation, no matter what there numbers are. There is something about critical mass, but you cannot wait on that if you are going to become a reconciled church. You have got to work intentionally on addressing that issue. And so there is both empowerment and embrace that have to be brought together.

I think that we are very good at embrace up until 1983. Then what we realized was that we were not as good as we thought we were at empowerment. The way I would put it in scriptural terms is that there both has to be the Acts 2 picture of community togetherness but there also has to be Act 6, where you see the grieved widows being overlooked in the distribution of food. There is a power issue going on there, and the way that was dealt with was by creating a new power structure in the church of Greek leaders that became very important, very significant in pushing the church in new directions. Phillip and Steven are very significant in the Book of Acts. So those are some of things that we learned.

Going back to the story of this small community in which some of these discoveries were being made, over those eighteen months, we were studying the Sermon on the Mount together and we came to the conclusion that it was impossible to move forward organically without some kind of a radical lifestyle adjustment. Everybody wanted to avoid this issue, but we all realized that that is where we stood. If we were going to continue to grow, we had to push to a new plateau together. That plateau that we were brought to was the idea of forming a colony, forming an intentional community. Four reasons: one, because we wanted to move inter-racialism to the deepest level of intimacy, cooperation, and a shared culture together. Secondly,

because we wanted to enact more deeply the lifestyle we saw chiefly proposed in the Sermon on the Mount. Thirdly, that we felt that we could pursue this issue of justice for all more effectively by pooling our resources together. We knew that we would then dare to reach out in ways, which we would not do more individualistically. Fourth, we wanted to do that as privileged and not-privileged together, seeking to level the ground between us.

So we had people from Gloria, who was a single African-American mother who grew up in Jackson as a foster kid. At one point in her life she got so desperate that she was finding meals out of garbage cans. She was one of our group members. All the way to Donna, who was a white girl who grew up in Southern California in the suburbs. This is the diversity of those who made the decision in September of 1986 - eleven of us - to leave our homes. We bought a six-acre property with two houses in our target neighborhood. We renovated it: twelve bedrooms, six bathrooms, and common purse. We found quickly that though we were going to share money, we were not going to share bathrooms. So we made as many bathrooms as we needed to [laughter]. There is such a thing as too much community! We ended up eating together every night around a dinner table that my wife and I wound up building. When we were building it, people thought it was a boat.

We developed practices of living and growing together over the first three years. We developed practices of living and growing together through the common purse. The idea there was to free people up. We were able to do that. We were able to free up one of our members, Derrick, to do full time youth work in the neighborhood. We shared a common meal, which was kind of our "town square" every day where we came together. We made vocational decisions together. The significant life decisions were made together. We didn't have to consult when we wanted to have children, so there were some lines drawn. However, raising children was a cooperative enterprise. We were able to free up one of our members to do childcare. We had children come into our midst by birth, by adoption; African-American, Anglo-American, bi-racial. We also had to deal with the departure of five of our original members within the first three years.

We didn't have a clue as to what we were doing basically; we were just doing this. It was Jesus... Book of Acts... us... nothing in between. No wisdom to draw upon, no experience, no tradition. We were figuring out things as we went along. But somehow it worked. Somehow amazing things happened: a ministry of hospitality, that was enormously enriching and

dangerous, having inmates both who were in prison and released for a short periods of time or were just out of prison who lived in our home with us, both white and African-American. A redneck guy named Cecil McKinley from Sommeral, Mississippi ... picture the potbelly, the beard, the stereotype that was Cecil. All the way to Perry Davis who was kind of a Schizophrenic, addictive liar, who I allowed to live in a house with my kids. That was a significant friendship for my family.

There were very troublesome, difficult people to live with, but that is why we did it.... unwed mothers, teens, and a lot of young white kids who had come to volunteer with us. That communal experiment lasted much longer than an experiment, it lasted for twelve years, with as many as nineteen people in one house. I have no idea how we did that. We ran a summer program for fifty neighborhood kids out of our house during the summer. Through that experience in community (I am showing different layers to this racial embodiment) Spencer and I developed a close friendship and decided to begin working together using Antioch - that was the name of our community - as the base for racial reconciliation work over the next eight years. We did that working through the Voice of Calvary study center. We did that through a national magazine, which we started with Spencer's father, called Urban Family Magazine. And later we did that through a non-profit organization we started called Reconcilers' Fellowship.

Our lives were completely synchronized: teaching, writing, living together, bringing people in and teaching them the principles and lessons learned through Voice of Calvary's life. The focus of our work was really the work of conversion, what I would call persuasion. So it was not political advocacy and legal advocacy, which is extremely important. We saw our calling in the area of going community to community and leader to leader seeking to persuade them, primarily from the Scriptures, from our life together, and from the lessons we had learned, to lead them through the same conversion we had gone through as African-Americans and white Americans. To led them into a mission together. The metaphor that Spencer and I coined was "yokefellows," because we were yoked together for a mission, not just for relationship, but to do something in the world. Our work was trying to get different races in the church to yoke together to form inter-racial coalitions organized around areas of common interest.

We were criticized often for our relational focus, but that was the wisdom that came from our experience. If you are going to convert people, it is through relationships, t is through persuasion, it is through committing to them over a long period of time. So our thought was the

more relationships, the more justice there is. The more transformative relationships there are, the more we can transform white businessmen like Chris Mango who owns a huge highway construction company in Raleigh, North Carolina. Through his conversion he began to make hugely significant changes through his company, scouring it for different treatment towards African-American and white employees. He brought in outside consultants to make significant changes in their practices. The more we can do that, the more justice there will be.

I would also mention that because of our opportunity to travel through that ministry, Spencer and I learned a lot of things that we wouldn't have learned if we had just stayed in Jackson or in Mississippi. We began to learn that the racial landscape was significantly different and changing outside of Jackson in ways that we had not experienced. As we went to campuses we saw significant numbers of Asian-American students in particular, many times out numbering, not just African-Americans, but the whites in the groups we were talking to. We began to see, in cities like Chicago, communities like La Vita where, when I went jogging and I got lost, I couldn't find a person who spoke English. This was a big paradigm shift for a boy who had been in Mississippi for seventeen years. So we began to see we had to stretch for a language in dealing with that and I don't think that we really did that very successfully. We were beginning to wrestle with that.

Another phenomenon we saw was a large growing number of bi-racial children who we believed were going to have a significant effect on the racial conversation in America because they were not in the mentality that they had to choose. They did not have the binary idea. They had the mentality that my mom is white and my daddy is back and I am not black or white I am black and white. I am bi-racial, and I do not want to have to choose. They had a passion for racial reconciliation, because of the experience of being bi- racial. That was something that we saw.

We also saw something that Dolphus mentioned: there was huge resistance in the white community to the message of racial conversion (and again I am going back to the picture of reconciliation in Ephesians which is costly), but there was also huge resistance in the African-American community. The language for speaking to the issue in the white community was much more articulate than the language for speaking within the African-American community. Trying to motivate African-Americans about why they should be interested in reconciliation, we heard, "that is for white folks, they are the ones who need to bring justice here." We were beginning to

reach for some language. This whole experience became rather intense: nineteen people under one roof, Spencer and I co-directors.

We often described our relationship as one of constantly submitting to one another. We had a lot of financial problems within our non-profit work, neither of us were gifted fundraisers. Antioch had freed us up to do this work - it would not have happened without the cooperation of the community, but it was putting stress on Antioch financially. When you live in community you become very wary of each other's shit, you know each other's shit, you get tired of talking about each other's shit, you'd rather just not deal anymore with each other's shit [laughter], and so you accommodate yourselves to it.

I think another problem we faced was that basically we had a theology of trying harder. Our theology was that when you meet a problem it is really a matter of trying harder and gutting it out. God is a demanding God and we need to be demanding people. Well, Spencer and I stood on the verge of crisis in our relationship and he talks about it in our book in the last chapter. The breakthrough that was made is that someone helped us understand (and this was a big shift for us, though it might seem simple to you): the gospel in essence is not about our love for each other or about our love for God. In essence the Gospel is about God's love for us, that is unearned, undeserved. Without doing anything, we are beloved. Without doing anything, Jesus was called "beloved." Before His ministry ever began, the Spirit descended, "this is my beloved Son." Well, we didn't understand that. As we began to understand that, we began to understand that only as we are filled with that unconditional mercy and grace, and as we are changed by grace and God can we offer ourselves back to each other. The reservoir of grace has to come from God. That is what we give to a world in pain. Not only is it a paradigm of what God does for us, it is the paradigm for what we are supposed to do to each other. We are supposed to give that kind of love back to each other not through a demanding life, but through a life of grace. We began to talk about a culture of grace and to reach for new practices of grace in our life.

That was not an easy thing; it was like learning a new language. We might as well have been learning Swahili or French when learning how to practice grace with each other. There are practices of doing that; practices of serving one another regardless of the credit we get, regardless for whether the person is a jerk-face or not. There are practices that can encourage that. We began to try to do that with help from people outside who knew a lot more about this than we did. Our work began to move to a new level both locally and nationally.

In a nutshell we saw the need to move our work to a deeper level, a more intense level strategically. We began to do that through strategic things like an event we call "50 Under 50" in Jackson. It was 25 African-American leaders, 25 white leaders, mixed in terms of gender and spheres of influence in the city, all people who were Christians. We brought them together for an off-the-record conversation about race. We thought that it was very important that it be off-the-record. Most of the time in public settings, white people in particular will note talk honestly about race. One of the reasons we did this was because we wanted very strategically to be complimentary to what Mission Mississippi was doing. We were at that time somewhat frustrated with the lack of moving things to a deeper level, so I really was encouraged to hear that they are thinking more about that direction.

One of the things that happened with that, which I learned a lot from… Just a little anecdote about Spencer's sister Joney: After their father was beaten in the Brandon jail they went to visit him in the hospital. We she saw him with his scars and his bruises (he had a huge knot about the size of a softball on top of his head after the beating), she ran outside of the hospital room and said, "I will always hate white people, I will never forgive white people." Well, Joney forgave a lot more than she gave herself credit for, because she was part of this whole church. She was a member of the Antioch community and I lived with Joney for twelve years. At that meeting, "50 Under 50," Joney was there (she was a lawyer) and she passed me a note the first night. Her note said, "I am so glad that I am here, that I decided to come, I almost didn't come, maybe I can finally forgive white people." This is someone who has worked hard to forgive white people - t is obvious by her life commitment - yet the reservoirs are there. How do we touch that?

The last event that Spencer and I did, before he died suddenly of a heart attack in 1998, was something we called "College Ethnicity and Reconciliation" that brought together about three hundred leaders. Spencer preached a message to that group - we preached it together - and the text of that message is in our book. I would encourage you to read it. He talks about the idea of moving towards a culture of grace.

Let me just touch on a few other dynamics. One is this whole idea that these embodiments, while I believe they offer places of great hope, they also have the potential to become places of great disillusionment with one another. How do we deal with the disillusionment? That became a crucial question for us. Why make all these sacrifices of being in a church with these white

folks, with these black folks, with these jerk-faces? Once you are around anyone long enough, you know that everyone has their dark side. Why sacrifice a certain way to doing church, my tradition? You have got to have a common vision that is able to rally people together.

[Tape flipped]

...tough inner city neighborhoods, where if you put aside the racial stuff, you have communities that are very broken places. It is not that the suburbs are not broken places too, but there it is a lot more visible. It is a stressful environment. There is crime: your household is being broken into repeatedly, your bikes are being stolen repeatedly, people are being killed, neighbors are being killed repeatedly. How do you sustain this over the long haul? This is messy and it stays messy. It is not some romantic journey into exotic lands. It is not an event. It is not a bandwagon. I know half a dozen leaders who were involved at the front lines of this kind of work who died an early death: heart attacks, murders, etc. I don't think it is a coincidence. It is very stressful.

It is difficult to put language to this, but I would also say there is an unseen dimension of evil that is involved. If you think about the idea of principalities and powers that have a huge stake in keeping people separate and keeping the witness of Ephesians 2 from happening. There are principalities and powers that have a huge stake. I always felt that in my relationship with Spencer, there was some force that was attacking us. I could put language to that sometimes: in my ego problems, in my problems with jealousy, competitiveness. There was an aspect to that which was very insidious, that I can't quite put my finger on. An idolatry of activism doesn't get at that very well.

I have only come to realize this since leaving Jackson, but I think there are practices that I would call restful practices of church life that are fundamentally important in sustaining these kind of embodiments. In seventeen years at Voice of Calvary, I never heard a sermon about the Sabbath, about Sabbath keeping, about rest, about stillness, about the difference between God's activity and our activity. I think also these communities tend to be free-floating, entrepreneurial efforts, that are often not connected to a denomination and they lack sacramental life that might point people to God's grace. Their strength is their entrepeneurialism; their weakness is that they don't tie into a tradition. So we literally did a movement of Jesus... Acts... us. We overlooked Saint Francis; we overlooked his deep commitment to the poor, which was something that he saw as something that pointed you to God. By encountering the poor, you encounter God. By

no means do you go out and feed the poor without being rooted in daily worship life. His whole pneumatology, his whole love of the Spirit, and love of creation, his whole wasteful, playful preaching to the birds... This is not practical, productivity kind of stuff, and there is something in it which I think is extremely important. We overlooked Doris Day. We overlooked the Civil Rights Movement in many ways. The whole singing side, a very intuitional side... that whole side of things... we just so emphasized the pragmatic.

Finally, how do you apply Antioch elsewhere? Well, it is being applied elsewhere, as I said in the beginning. There are really hundreds of inter-racial congregations and inter-racial embodiments (the world I am familiar with is within the church) that show what is possible and that show in their beliefs and practices much that we can draw from and learn from, in terms of what is being done well and what is being done poorly. Where there is a very explicit internal discourse of race that goes on within them - very honest, very explicit - that does not ignore issues of inequality and injustice within their communities. Where leadership is shared, and where there is the inter-racial communal study of scripture within the context of perseverance. I think that is extremely important. It has to be about coming to the table together and expecting to be changed by the process. Communities like this know they are never going to be normative, but their influence is disproportionate to their numbers. I just think of the hundreds of thousands of people who were touched through the work of the Voice of Calvary in various ways: by coming and through books that were written. There are communities, places of deep conversion, places where the creation of allies is happening, places where Christians are learning not so much how to solve race but how to be truly church. I think there is a lot of power in that. That is it.

Stephen Ray: Those communities really are few are far between. Where I live at in Louisville the idea of an integrated church is a white church with about four or five black families. That is an integrated church. And there are those of us who have no interest in that at all. But there is a way in which even while we find the practice of our faith within monochromatic communities fulfilling and life giving, we know that there ought to be something more. What do you do when you find yourself in that situation? When you are looking for, and maybe yearning for, something like you are talking about that is just not happening. What do you do in that situation if you don't have the option of just going someplace and becoming part of a ministry?

CR: Well, I think we are facing that question for the first time as a family because we are in a city where you have to choose now. So I am shocked. We are joining basically an all white church and it is kind of embarrassing [laughter]. Not because I have something to prove, but because that is who I am. I have been changed by seventeen years in Mississippi. I am not satisfied as a Christian being in that kind of a church. Now we wouldn't have chosen that church if we didn't think there were leaders there who really have a heart, a desire (though they are very clueless in not understanding the cost at all for this PCUSA church to move in that direction). I would always get that question when I was on the road, so now I have to work it out. Now I have to live out what I told people, which is if that is your congregation and that is what you are called to do (and I am not saying every congregation need to this but I think many more need to), you are going to take a long-haul, patient approach of building a core group of people from within, finding allies, building from within, and trying to influence your congregation. The most you may be able to do is to get that congregation to develop a significant partnership with a church that is not a white church. To develop a partnership that is meaningful not just in terms of being together or having a meal together or having an event together, but one that begins to impact what you have shared together which is the city, no small thing to share. And that is why I think IAF is so significant. IAF offers a model as an alternative way for churches to have a significant inter-racial aspect to their mission. I have never had to do that within the church - what you are talking about - so I speak out of luxury in a sense.

Ellen Armour: I wonder if it is worth distinguishing between racial reconciliation - mindful of the things we said about it and mindful also of the theological point at the beginning (I wrote it down, "the cost of putting hostility to death between estranged groups is God's death and the crucifixion") - if it is worth making the distinction between work on racial reconciliation and work with racial justice? They can certainly feed each other, but that one can also engage in one without the other. There are dangers in that. That is cheap grace in terms of racial reconciliation. There can also be cheap grace if you want to talk about racial justice.

For example, there is talk in Memphis right now (one thing we hadn't mentioned yesterday) there was an attempt several years back to start a multi-racial Easter service [everyone just holds hands... it is a big event... this is Love Your Neighbor... is that it?]. They have done it

at different times and they stopped doing it. And there was an article recently in the newspaper about it because they had hoped that it would turn into something that would be more of an event. But small little things happened and that was it. But the final paragraph in the newspaper story was the pastor of a UMC church saying that one of the things that we are hoping we will do eventually is a Habitat for Humanity kind of development.

On one hand, that would be something. That would accomplish something for Memphis and it is something it is not nothing. Maybe out of that something else is going to come when people get out there hammering nails together. Maybe something else will happen, but I get very hopeless in some ways. On one hand, I think that that is something good, they can go out and that is great people can hold hands and feel better, but I am not going. It may make people feel better for five minutes

CR: It makes white people feel better.

EA: That is exactly my point! It makes white people feel better. That whole rhetoric of reconciliation, I think really is a way of making white people feel better in the same way that George Bush getting up there and having twenty-five people, every Republican who is of a different color, stand up on a platform with him - that didn't do a damn thing for minority people. What it did was make white people, Republicans, feel better. I can't vote for Republicans…

I wonder if it is worth taking those things apart in some way to talk about them in distinctive ways. What is required theologically to work at those two tasks and to think about those things somewhat separately? I think what you illustrate here, and certainly what you talk about in the book, is a level of engagement that is not easy to do. It is not something that many people are going to want to take on black or white because of the pain, cost, whatnot, that is there.

Barbara Holmes: As it turned out some of the students in our seminary were in leadership with Love Your Neighbor, and not to shift the conversation, but that is such a major failure in Memphis. As you were talking about your intentional community, it beame clear to me why it was such a major failure: two passengers at the101 Reconciliation level got together out of huge churches and brought it together without any of the groundwork being done, without any of the

conversations, without any basic relationship building. And so it could not hold together. Most of the African-Americans involved expressed a great deal of anger about the way in which it was being done. The whites that were involved expressed the fact that everything they thought they had known about blacks before was true. Because what they would do was bring teenagers into their churches, then their cell phones would all disappear out of choir lofts [laughter], and they would say see they all steal. There wasn't enough work done at the basic, foundational level.

Michael Cartwright: Chris, I want to flag something that I don't think we can talk about now…It is a source of wonderfully generative analogies that we can talk about with respect to ethnicity and so on and yet my experience after our last gathering I stayed on to work with Peter Ochs on a project we are doing called Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited. It was just a wonderful time for two and a half days: a Jewish theologian and a Christian theologian talking about texts and reading texts together. Peter and I both came away from it almost in awe because at moments it felt like an end-time thing to read scripture together. Living in his house for two days, sharing a table with him, and living out our own practices, so that when we read scripture together I could say, "This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God." That was both natural and unnatural. The issue is that the Jewish-Christian reality of Ephesians 2, when appropriated in the ways in which you and I want to appropriate it, can lead to the erasure of Jews. I think it is just extraordinarily tricky.

CR: See I would say, right. There is an explicit image even which is one, new humanity. At Voice of Calvary, we were trying to create a new culture. A culture that was neither African-American nor white and hopefully embracing of the whole city eventually. The life under the Cross both affirms and critiques ethnicity and culture. The ways in which it is affirmed, we offer as gifts to each other. I am a deeper, more spiritual Christian because of African-Americans. I hope that I enrich their life too, in all my whiteness. There is a heritage that I bring too, which is mutually enriching. There is no way you can enter that without being changed.

So I think we do need to get at that idea of the new culture under the Cross. That is a difficult process to negotiate in community, but we were always negotiating that. Spencer never stopped being a "Black Brotha." After seventeen years together and twelve years living in community, he was still a Brotha. He didn't stop being African-American, but he was a different

person. At the beginning at Voice of Calvary, conflict was automatically viewed as being racial by African-Americans. Most of the time it was but not always. But that was the level of introduction. After twenty-seven years together, that is not the case. We are able to better dissect what are racial issues, what are cultural issues where we need to respect each others' differences, and what are issue of truth where there is a truth at stake that trumps both of us and leads us to something higher.

I thought of something in response to your question Stephen. One of the things that I have been thinking about - that I spoke of a lot in the year before Spencer died - is that, I think this whole idea of integration is really what white people have in mind. Maybe the alternative to forming reconciled congregations is white Americans joining minority congregations. I mean we don't know what it means to be in a minority situation and there is a tremendous learning experience that goes with that. Why not white people joining ethnic minority churches, submitting themselves in servanthood, submitting themselves as learners under the authority of ethnic minority leadership. Now there is a lot of work that has to be done in the ethnic minority side, because we will mess up those churches. They are not going to be able to remain the same if white folks join them. But to ask the question, "What is God already doing in ethnic minority communities? Well, God is already at work there! How do we join with what God is already doing there? I think that is an alternative that really needs to be looked at in addition to the idea of inter-racial congregations.

SR: Well, you know that was a challenge I raised to the conference staff of our local conference. ACC is dedicated to being a multi-cultural, multi-racial. I said, "All of you are transplants but not one of you joined the black church. You didn't even visit one to consider being a member of one. You join the local, big white church then you come visit us as part of your circuit that you are doing of all the ACC churches. If you were serious about it, what you would do is you would specifically go join one, because that would say something about what you envision the future to be.

MC: There are people who are doing this and there is a similar short tenure. I don't know if there is a pattern, but of the friends of mine, who I know have done this, the crisis point typically happens when they have children. When their children's needs don't get met and when the

parent's needs don't get met... that is the crisis point. But I do know some people who have done that for as long as eight years.

SR: Just one point. This is a conversation Charles, Chris, and I were having in the car is that every black person in that congregation says, "See I really didn't want them to stay, so screw it." [laughter] The way of empowerment is that if it happens again it is going to take sixteen years before people to figure that maybe they are here to be a part of this community. It takes a few of those sorts of situations, compiled with everyday indignities, [something lost]...I think this is the sort of thing that Chris was talking about earlier, not just that first level sort of unforgiveness but the second and third level of unforgiveness which are the ones you have to peel away.

BH: One of the things that I found really interestingwas your reference to the Powell's. I find Walter Wake's work very helpful because these institutions - which he talks about in Revelation - Jesus talks to the Angel of the church to reform it. He doesn't attempt to deal with the leadership; he doesn't attempt to deal with the social structures. He speaks to the spiritual entity that is keeping the church moving in a direction it ought not be going. Once the church moves away from its vocation, or its people do, it is fallen but can be redeemed. Only if our very Enlightenment views fade a bit and we move towards a pneumonis and start talking about what does it mean to be a system that is supposedly linked to something you cannot see. But you have completely blocked it out because it makes you nervous.

The other thing that I want to say is that if white people begin to join black churches one of things that is never factored in is that without their knowing it they bring dominance with them. They don't mean to be dominant, and I don't mean their activities or practices. I mean they are perceived so that those who welcome them alter subtly almost everything they do because they have been socialized not to present a picture of themselves that fits into stereotypes, that aids mythology. So they are not free anymore, particularly in Pentecostal contexts. They are no longer free, because if they behave in certain ways, the message is, "Yeah, they really do that when we are not here."

MC: I have seen that happen in St. Alfonse, an African-American Catholic church in Washington, D.C. Ten years ago white, liberal Catholics started joining. It became 70%

African-American and 30% white. Of course, whites thought that was great. And today it is now 30% African-American and 70% white, and it is dying. I have worshipped there on several occasions; I have friends who are part of the congregation. You can walk in there and be part of the service (it is kind of a jazz band mass service) and at the time of the prayers you will get the white, liberal, Catholic kind of praying against injustice. Immediately afterwards there is an African-American woman praying in a very different language, in a very different discursive practice, praying against demonic forces. Is almost like a trump, counter- trump prayer. It is very jarring. It is a highly unstable situation.

Peter Slade: Even with that awareness of when you go into a situation where you are the racial minority, you are still coming from the dominant culture and you change that situation. I am very aware of that because of the gospel choir here. Actually, Andy and I have spent many hours arguing about what was actually going on because Andy was a fellow choir member with me. At the same time, I think in terms of that conversion experience that you talk about as necessary. White people do not know what it means to be in an ethnic minority, they don't know what it means to not be the person with the answers or in charge or in that leadership position. The gospel choir was a great kind of visual aid because I was really de-skilled; the tongue has to stick out to make sure you are moving at the right point so you don't look like an idiot. That is an experience that a lot of people don't have. In my thesis, the numbers went up to about five. They have all gone.

What was interesting was that some whites were so confident that they were in their space and that everywhere was white space that they could even go into the gospel choir and not be aware that they were out of that culture. When, you are in a white majority culture where everywhere is white space. That has been their experience to such an extent that even going into a gospel choir where you haven't done this before, you are entirely reliant on another culture, they still don't get it. One person got it when they were in a Pentecostal church in the middle of Mississippi and suddenly people started shouting and this very fat member of the choir next to him fell on top of him [laughter]. It took that for him to realize that this was something really different. But the blindingness of being part of the dominant culture is a very hard conversion experience. From my experience in the Gospel choir, watching that is realizing quite how difficult that is for people.

Luis Pedraja: I think that is a really good point, because as a minority I am always aware of the others. I think a lot of white people (and it is interesting because I thought of myself as white until I went to college and seminary and all that) but I think that a lot of Anglo-white people do not have that consciousness of the other. Sometimes it is a shock, but in a lot of cases the only times they become aware is when the other intrudes into their space or when they find themselves driving in a black neighborhood and start rolling up their windows, or in a Latino neighborhood and get all nervous because they are confronted with that. But they are still not aware of all that.

Charles Marsh: That is an interesting point. Maybe we can stop here for lunch and then pick it up again at two. What you say, Luis, makes me want to press an issue, which has come up several times in the context of the passage from Ephesians 2. Given the history of having one's space invaded, one's private zone invaded, how do we understand this notion of self-emptying in a way that doesn't seem like yet another layer of oppression? I mean, it is easy, well, perhaps not that easy, but it is plausible for whites to think about this is in admirable ways. But what does it means to talk about this as part of the process of reconciliation? Miroslav Volf talks about making space for the other as part of the story of embrace, but if your space has been constantly invaded by the other, this is a very different story than God of the open arm, waiting, embrace, and letting go. So maybe that is one among other things we can pick up.