



INTERFAITH
ACTION OF GREATER
SAINT PAUL

Building the Beloved Community Public Safety Project A Christian Curriculum

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Overview

Thank you for your involvement in this initiative, designed to provide members of Minnesota's faith communities an opportunity to help formulate policies and legislative proposals to make public safety procedures more equitable and conducive to the wellbeing of individuals and communities throughout our state.

Stages of the Project

The following steps form the basis of this project:

Step 1: Commissioner of Public Safety John Harrington meets with participating clergy and presents a hypothetical moral dilemma that deals with a serious challenge likely to be faced by public safety officers. The dilemma is composed in such a way as to encourage reflection and discussion in the clergy members' congregations about very real and troubling quandaries that can arise in the course of maintaining public safety.

Step 2: Clergy present Commissioner Harrington's dilemma to their congregations. This can be done as part of a sermon, an education session, or in other ways suitable to the congregation. Presentation of the dilemma is followed by an initial discussion in which congregants reflect on the dilemma in light of their own experience and best judgment.

Step 3: The dilemma presented in Step 2 is reexamined and discussed in light of sources drawn from the congregation's religious tradition. This second discussion should take place after an intentional, intervening break from the initial discussion (Step 2 above), so that participants are given time to further reflect on the complexity of the dilemma before grappling with authoritative texts.

The traditional sources included in Section II of this Guide are provided for use during the second discussion (Step 3 above). These curricula have been composed for multiple faith traditions and are intended to enrich and extend discussion of the dilemma in light of the

tenets and norms of the congregation's religious community. Which sources to use – whether chosen from those provided in the Guide or found elsewhere – is at the discretion of discussion leaders.

In planning for the dilemma discussions, the following points should be kept in mind:

- A.** Discussions should include opportunities for participants to reconsider their initial approach to the dilemma. One way discussion leaders can encourage participants to do this is by helping them to view the dilemma from the viewpoint of each of the persons mentioned in the story, along with other implicit or otherwise pertinent perspectives. Asking participants to take up this challenge for one another, rather than relying on the leader to identify and describe perspectives, can prompt more active participation in the discussion, promote careful listening, and evoke relevant personal experiences to be pondered and shared with the group. In the process, the odds that participants will feel comfortable moving from a foregone conclusion to more careful reflection is likely to increase.
- B.** Dilemmas present circumstances in which simply affirming a particular value or ideal may come up short if, having affirmed that value, further discussion suggests that it collides with another principle one would also choose to affirm, e.g., individual rights vs. social responsibility, abiding by the law vs. reaching out to someone who is suffering, responsibilities to those with whom one has a special relationship vs. duties toward all people, etc. Discussion leaders can help participants to see these potential conflicts, and to grapple with them. What-if variations of the dilemma can be helpful in this regard, e.g., what if you were related to person A in this story? What if you were related to person B?
- C.** Three points should be kept in mind regarding the inclusion of sources from a congregation's sacred tradition in a discussion:
 - a. Each of our congregations is heir to a long and rich tradition devoted to articulating the mission of the religious body of which the congregation is a part. Our project is situated in congregations in the hope that our reflections, discussions, and conclusions might help to extend this ongoing process, within us, and among us.
 - b. Study of traditional sources can expand the range of perspectives represented in the group. In this respect, the intercultural dimension of this project begins, to some degree, *within* each tradition, in as much as traditional texts, when originating in circumstances different from those shared by the discussants, not only informs but expands the circle of voices heard in the discussion.
 - c. Whichever sources a discussion leader may choose to introduce, their intended role isn't to end discussion, but to deepen it.

Step 4: After reexamination of the dilemma in light of the congregation's sacred tradition, congregants assist in composing a report to Commissioner Harrington on issues raised by and reflections on the dilemma. It is recommended that each congregation appoint a Learning Coordinator to ensure this step is completed; a short job description for this role

can be found at <https://interfaithaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IFA-Learning-Coordinator-Job-Desc-final.pdf>. A written summary is submitted to project evaluators Charmagne and Michael Patton.

Step 5: Steps 2-4 are repeated for each dilemma presented by the Commissioner. Reports are prepared following each cycle.

Step 6: Project evaluators Charmagne and Michael Patton integrate pertinent observations and recommendations in the reports from the congregations into a single, publicly available report for the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

Goals of the Project

From principles to concrete applications

- *To move beyond abstract principles to actionable input that might prove of value to the DPS;*

An inclusive conversation

- *To involve hundreds, perhaps thousands of people in these exchanges statewide, with the potential for intercommunal conversations and ongoing dialogue with the DPS;*

Reasoning together

- *To provide a platform for diverse faith communities to engage in thoughtful reflection on how best to approach current issues in public safety in light of their own experience, their best judgment, and their particular faith tradition;*

Listening to our faith traditions as we listen to one another

- *To bring the faith communities' distinctive values and text-based input to the civic table shared by all Minnesotans;*

Faith communities and the common good

- *To further integrate the faith communities into the civic infrastructure of our state;*

Faith communities helping to build community

- *To build a habit of mind in the faith communities of bringing the full strength of their hearts and minds to bear on the most pressing issues in our civic life.*

Introduction

“Jesus is Lord.” Whatever else we say about ourselves, this confession lies at the center of our identity as Christians. What it means to follow the way of Jesus Christ has led to a variety of responses from our communities.

If we follow the way of Jesus Christ, we must acknowledge that the shared Passion narratives among all four Gospels depict Roman soldiers—employed by the state—as the primary members of the force who arrest, brutalize, crucify, and witness the death of Jesus. It also cannot be forgotten that our Scriptures, which include those shared by our Jewish siblings, frame a fundamental choice for our Israelite ancestors: that choosing a king and civil infrastructure inevitably sets up a contest for allegiance to God above all else. As Mennonite scholar Andy Alexis-Baker puts it in his article, which offers a quick history on the evolution of policing in the United States:

The history of Israel’s attempts at security through a centralized “state” is narrated as an utter failure. In fact, 1 Samuel 8 makes it clear that from the beginning the Israelite call for a “king like the Gentiles” ultimately rejects God himself. The rest of the Old Testament is commentary on this initial warning. From the most spiritual of kings (David) to the wisest (Solomon), the Hebrew Scriptures narrate a succession of wars, murders, rape, enslavement, and idolatry.¹

If we follow the way of Jesus Christ, we must also acknowledge that we make choices about those portions of Scripture and tradition we emphasize for our common life. These choices have led to significantly different ways of interpreting who we are before God, and how we are called to be neighbors to one another.

Finally, if we follow the way of Jesus Christ, we are called to seek new life coming from the complex histories of our traditions and our nation. It is incumbent on us, as people who witness to the resurrection of Christ embodied in the Church, to perceive and nurture those new things springing forth in our midst:² new ways of being with one another that nurture a beloved community, new ways of inaugurating the coming of God’s kingdom on earth, and new ways of understanding the impact of our personal decisions in difficult moments.

In that spirit, we join our siblings across religious traditions as we bring our witness to these real-world situations, and we offer the below as options for engaging in these conversations about difficult scenarios in public safety.

Historical Resources on Policing in the United States

¹ Andy Alexis-Baker, “The Gospel or a Glock? Mennonites and the Police,” in *The Conrad Grebel Review* 25, no. 2 (Winter 2007), <https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/publications/conrad-grebel-review/issues/spring-2007/gospel-or-glock-mennonites-and-police#2>, accessed 9/24/21.

² Isaiah 43:19.

1. "Black and Blue: Black Women, 'Law and Order,' and the Church's Silence on Police Violence," <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/12/10/886>
2. "The Invention of the Police," <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/07/20/the-invention-of-the-police>
3. "The Gospel or a Glock? Mennonites and the Police" <https://uwaterloo.ca/grebel/publications/conrad-grebel-review/issues/spring-2007/gospel-or-glock-mennonites-and-police>

Primary Sources (HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV)

Exodus 2:11-15a

One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?" He answered, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "Sure the thing is known." When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh.

Romans 13:1-7

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rules are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear of the authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive its approval; for it is God's servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! It is the servant of God to execute wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, busy with this very thing. Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.

Luke 22:49-53

When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, "Lord, should we strike with the sword?" Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him. Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, "Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!"

Matthew 27:27-31

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right

hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

Matthew 5:38-41

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile."

Luke 10:29-37

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 23:44-47

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent."

James 1:27-2:9

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world... Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

James 3:13-18

Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

Acts 2:43-46

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

Secondary Sources

St. Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae - Law and Political Theory*. Edited by Thomas Gilby 28. Vol. 28.

London: Blackfriars, 1975.

-----, *Summa Theologiae - Justice*. Edited by Thomas Gilby. 37. Vol. 37. London: Blackfriars, 1975.

-----, *Summa Theologiae - Injustice*. Edited by Marcus Lefebure 38. Vol. 38. London: Blackfriars, 1975.

St. Thomas Aquinas provides what has become one of the most influential understandings of divine and human law and their respective implications for Christians in the world. Central to Aquinas' understanding is the concept of "natural law," found in Question 94 of the Second Part of the *Summa*. Aquinas' natural law theory, put in its simplest terms, takes a positive view of humanity, understanding humans as basically good. Furthermore, humans have been bestowed with a natural internal governance by means of the ability to reason, bestowed upon them by God. This "natural law" governs humans through their own reason, pointing them towards activities which work towards a virtuous good: "there is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society: and in this respect, whatever pertains to this inclination belongs to the natural law." (vol. 28)

He continues:

"...man has a natural aptitude for virtue; but the perfection of virtue must be acquired by man by means of some kind of training. ... Certain beginnings of these he has from

nature, viz. his reason and his hands; but he has not the full complement, as other animals have, to whom nature has given sufficiency of clothing and food. ... Consequently a man needs to receive this training from another, whereby to arrive at the perfection of virtue. ... Now this kind of training, which compels through fear of punishment, is the discipline of laws. Therefore in order that man might have peace and virtue, it was necessary for laws to be framed" (vol. 28)

"As Augustine says (De Lib. Arb. i, 5) "that which is not just seems to be no law at all": wherefore the force of a law depends on the extent of its justice. Now in human affairs a thing is said to be just, from being right, according to the rule of reason. But the first rule of reason is the law of nature, as is clear from what has been stated above (I-II:91:2 ad 2). Consequently every human law has just so much of the nature of law, as it is derived from the law of nature. But if in any point it deflects from the law of nature, it is no longer a law but a perversion of law." (vol. 28)

You may also consider looking at volumes 37 and 38 of the *Summa* which focus on Justice and Injustice.

St. Augustine

Augustine. *The City of God. Books I-VII*. Edited by Etienne Gilson, Vol. 8. The Fathers of the Church: A

New Translation. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008.

St. Augustine of Hippo's *City of God* was written in response to the sacking of Rome. Augustine examines two cities, the City of God, and the City of Man. He creates a vivid cosmological tableau describing the origins and divine construction of these cities; most relevant for our purposes is the relationship between the two cities. The City of God is a divine city, a city where people "live by the spirit", seeking to live faithful, virtuous lives in the eyes of God. The City of Man, by contrast, is a city in which each person lives "by the flesh", living for themselves and their own whims. For Augustine, individuals, or ruling states, can be representative of these cities in the world. It relies on how we carry ourselves, again whether we live by the spirit or the flesh:

"On this earth, therefore, rule by good men is a blessing bestowed not so much on themselves as upon mankind. But the rule of wicked men brings greater harm to themselves since they ruin their own souls by the greater ease with which they can do wrong. As for their subjects ... whatever injury wicked masters inflicted upon good men is to be regarded, not as a penalty for wrongdoing, but as a test for their virtues". (Augustine 2008, 194).

"In the absence of justice, what is sovereignty by organized brigandage?" (Augustine 2008, 195)

Augustine argues that authority depends on just conduct. Just action begets legitimate authority, and unjust action surrenders the legitimacy of authority. Just action is representative of the City of God, while unjust action is representative of the City of Man.

Martin Luther & John Calvin

Luther, Martin, and John Calvin. *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority*. Edited by Harro Hopfl. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Luther

Luther's essay *On Secular Authority* draws heavily on Augustine's two cities framework. Luther considers the question of whether or not Christians owe obedience to secular governments. Luther begins by separating humankind into two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. Now, Luther says that those who reside in the kingdom of God, that being true Christians, have no need of secular authority. However, those who reside in the kingdom of man, being those who are unjust, require secular authority to restrict them from their own worst inclinations and vices. Luther, however, makes sure to point out that true Christians are few and far between, if any humans could be said to be one at all. Thus, Luther works towards an understanding that until we are able to become fully justified through faith, we are called to follow the laws of the state.

Luther goes on to examine how far secular authority extends into our lives. He warns against both a state which is allowed too much freedom to assert itself on its people, as well as a state whose scope is too narrow and leaves injustice unpunished:

"When (secular government) is given too much freedom of action, the harm that results is unbearable and horrifying, but to have it confined within too narrow a compass is also harmful. In the one case there is too much punishment, in the other too little. But it is more tolerable to err on the side of the latter: it is always better that a villain should live than that a just man should be killed"
(Luther & Calvin 1993, 22-23).

Luther asserts that the role of the state is limited to governance of bodily action, but cannot claim authority over the mind or soul of its people. Luther's conclusion in this work lands close to Augustine's. If a prince (or ruling body) acts justly in the ways Luther describes more fully in this text, they are owed the obedience of their subjects. However, if a ruling body acts wrongly, Luther says: "Are his people obliged to obey him even then? No, because no one has a duty to act unjustly; we must obey God (who will have justice prevail), rather than men" (40).

Calvin

John Calvin, in his essay *On Civil Government* also incorporates a two cities or two kingdoms approach. Calvin understands the "spiritual and internal kingdom of Christ" (49) to be just that: a spiritual kingdom which is distinct from the physical reality of the world. As for the secular state:

“The end of secular government, however, while we remain in this world, is to foster and protect the external worship of God, defend pure doctrine and the good condition of the Church, accommodate the way we live to human society, mould our conduct to civil justice, reconcile us to one another, and uphold and defend the common peace and tranquility” (Luther & Calvin 1993, 49).

Calvin breaks his work into three sections:

1. magistrates,
2. laws, and
3. the people

On magistrates, Calvin points to Scripture to argue that magistrates (or earthly rulers more broadly) are divinely instituted. He argues that these positions of leadership and power are to be followed with obedience, as God has placed them in these positions in order to enact justice and act as careful stewards of the people.

In regards to laws, they must be judged against, first, the “law of love” (67), which Calvin holds as transcendent to any other law; and second, if the law promotes equity which provides justice to all people, not just a select few.

As for how the people are to regard the authority of their ruler, Calvin differs from Luther. Calvin concludes that the people are duty bound to obey both just and unjust rulers. This is because irrespective of their requisite moral standing, they remain divinely instituted:

“Those who govern for the public good are true examples and signs of (God’s) goodness; those who govern unjustly and intemperately have been raised up by (God) to punish the iniquity of the people. Both are equally furnished with that sacred majesty, with which (God) has endowed legitimate authority” (Luther & Calvin 1993, 76-77).

Calvin offers one significant exception to this call to obedience of the state, which is that true obedience is reserved for God, and a Christian cannot act in a way which places obedience to their earthly ruler over their obedience to God.

Calvin departs significantly from the conclusions made by Augustine and Luther, however it is clear that this two kingdoms theology is foundational to the way many Christian thinkers viewed and continued to view the relationship between Christianity and state authority.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *A Testament to Freedom: The Essential Writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Edited by

Geffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.

What makes Bonhoeffer's work on the issue of state justice and authority compelling is how his views developed throughout his life, as well as his collaboration in the failed plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Bonhoeffer's early views on how Christians are called to live in justice are perhaps best laid out in his 1937 work *The Cost of Discipleship*, where Bonhoeffer states clearly that the central call for Christians is a real, tangible call to follow Christ through active participation in the world. To be Christian is to surrender oneself to Christ and love of the neighbor completely, with "single-minded obedience" to this call.

Bonhoeffer then speaks much more decisively than Luther, whose work he examines in *The Cost of Discipleship*, on how the laws of the world relate to the call to follow Christ:

"The elimination of single-minded obedience on principle is but another instance of the perversion of the costly grace of the call of Jesus onto the cheap grace of self-justification. By this means a false law is set up which deafens people to the concrete call of Christ. This false law is the law of the world, of which the law of grace is at once the complement and the antithesis" (311).

This idea is developed further in Bonhoeffer's posthumously published *Ethics*, where he again seeks to examine the role of human law in the lives of Christians, first exploring the limitations of law in the face of extreme human necessities and then clarifying his understanding of the relationship between divine and human law:

"In the course of historical life there comes a point where the exact observance of the formal law of a state ... suddenly find itself in violent conflict with the ineluctable necessities of the lives of humans; at this point responsible and pertinent action leaves behind it the domain of principle and convention, the domain of the normal and regular, and is confronted by the extraordinary situation of ultimate necessities, a situation which no law can control" (370)

"Because the commandment of God is the commandment which is revealed in Jesus Christ, no single authority, among those which are authorized to proclaim the commandment, can claim to be absolute. The authorization to speak is conferred from above on the church, the family, labor, and government, only so long as they do not encroach upon each other's domains and only so long as they give effect to God's commandment in conjunction and collaboration with one another and each in its own way. No single one of these authorities can exclusively identify itself with the commandment of God" (371).

Bonhoeffer's commitment to nonviolence, finally, is curious. In *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer speaks against violent forms of resistance against suffering, going so far as to say: "The only way to overcome evil is to let it run itself to a standstill because it does not find the resistance it is looking for. Resistance merely creates further evil and adds fuel to the flames" (317). And yet, Bonhoeffer's own life offers an interesting tension in this regard. His

commitment to nonviolence as a principle is juxtaposed with his role as one of the primary conspirators in an assassination plot to kill Adolf Hitler, which led to his imprisonment and execution. Bonhoeffer's letters during his imprisonment make clear the complexity of his feelings on his previous work and how he now understands the Christian call:

"I thought I could acquire faith by trying to live a holy life, or something like it. I suppose I wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* as the end of that path. Today I can see the dangers of that book, though I still stand by it. I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith ... By this-worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world - watching with Christ in Gethsemane" (510).

James Cone

Cone, James H. *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011.

In *The Cross And The Lynching Tree*, James Cone offers a strong critique of how white theologians have widely ignored racial violence throughout the history of the United States as an issue worth addressing theologically.

Specifically, Cone examines the horrors inflicted upon the black community in the United States through lynching, the extrajudicial killing and torture as an act of terrorism designed to assert white supremacy, and control through violence. Cone holds these horrors alongside "the terrible beauty of the cross", a similarly horrific killing through which Christ shows solidarity to the suffering of the oppressed. Furthermore, on the cross Christ shows victory even in the face of horrific suffering, the ability to resist and defeat the evil of his crucifixion and death.

Cone's critique of white theologians centers on the fact that black voices have long been able to see Christ's suffering in the suffering inflicted by racial violence and white supremacy, but white voices have largely remained willfully ignorant, choosing to stay silent on issues of racial violence. Cone warns against the "safe" theology practiced by white theologians (e.g. theology proclaimed from the safety of a seminary office), and emphasizes the danger inherent to the Christian call in such a "safe" theology.

Instead, Cone understands the Christian life as a call to act against the suffering and oppression of the neighbor, to put oneself in harm's way in the fight for justice. He quotes Bonhoeffer in saying "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die:"

"Both lynching and Christianity were so much a part of the daily reality of American society that no black artist could avoid wrestling with their meanings and their symbolic relationship to each other. Christians, both white and black,

followed a crucified savior. What could pose a more blatant contradiction to such a religion than lynching? And yet white Christians were silent in the face of this contradiction. Black poets were not silent. They spoke loud and clear." (96).

Cone goes on to lift up a plethora of black voices who each in turn offer insight into the relationship which Cone highlights between the suffering of Christ on the cross and the suffering of racial violence. Through these voices Cone builds a body of work which shows the unique theological perspective black voices are able to elucidate through the experience of living the tension between the salvific promise of the cross and the horror and violence of the lynching tree.

Kelly Brown Douglas

Douglas, Kelly Brown. *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015.

In *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, Kelly Brown Douglas gives a rich analysis of the historical and theological roots of white supremacy which influence our understanding of justice today. Douglas describes the ways American exceptionalism has, since the founding of our country, been inherently tied to "Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism," which deifies both whiteness and the nation itself as a "chosen" nation. Douglas also examines the construction of the "guilty black body", which she describes in detail.

Douglas speaks to the theological roots of this issue, which she identifies as St. Thomas Aquinas' natural law theory. Her argument is that Aquinas' theory—which says that humans are bestowed the ability to govern for the common good through God's gift of human reason—when combined with Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, allows white Americans the ability to reason their way into theologically justifying the commodification of black bodies into "chattel." Once black bodies were no longer something to be owned, then, they became something to fear:

"Free black bodies have to be guilty of something. In fact, according to the web of discourse and knowledge spun by America's grand narrative of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism, they are. They are guilty of trespassing into the white space. They are guilty of betraying their divine creation. Free black bodies transgress both natural law and eternal law. Unless controlled, as the discourse of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism has asserted, free black bodies are bound to revert to their more "savage" nature and commit a crime." (53)

Douglas then turns to consider where theology can help us think about justice in the face of white supremacy and the horrors of racial violence. First, she describes the power of "black faith." This faith was a key means of resisting the atrocities of slavery, and remains vital in resisting racial violence. Faith allows belief in the God of the Bible, a God who led the Israelites out of slavery, and hopes for the freedom of all people from suffering. Faith allows those

facing racial violence and oppression to create a “counter narrative” to challenge and dispute the theological claims of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism.

Douglas lifts up Trayvon Martin’s killing—the driving force behind the writing of this book—and dwells deeply in the comparison between Martin’s death, and the death of Jesus on the cross. Douglas uses this comparison to emphasize Jesus’ solidarity with the “crucified class”, not only in his crucifixion, but in life as well. Jesus’ life was lived in, amongst, and for, those who were pushed to the margins. What’s more, through the cross Jesus knows their suffering as well: “Just as black people identify with the cross of Jesus, the cross of Jesus means he identifies with them.” (105).

Martin Luther King, Jr.

King, Jr., Martin Luther. *“Letter from Birmingham Jail.”* Birmingham, Alabama, August 1963. Accessed

November 10, 2021. <https://www.csuchico.edu/iege/assets/documents/susi-letter-from-birmingham-jail.pdf>

Martin Luther King Jr.’s *Letter from Birmingham Jail* is one of the most influential and oft-quoted works on civil rights and racial justice in the United States. Here King responds directly to white church leaders who criticized the timing and nature of his civil rights work in Birmingham.

To the critique of his work in Birmingham being “untimely,” King calls for urgency of action for racial equality, emphasizing that they had already postponed the protests to accommodate for multiple other concerns:

“We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have never yet engaged in a direct-action movement that was “well timed” according to the timetable of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word “wait.” It rings in the ear of every Negro with a piercing familiarity. This “wait” has almost always meant “never.”” (2)

On the critique of the willingness of protestors to break laws, King quotes St. Augustine in saying, “An unjust law is not law at all” (3). To differentiate between just and unjust laws, King relies on St. Thomas Aquinas, who says that just laws are rooted in the eternal and natural law of God, while unjust laws are purely human constructs and carry no relation to divine or natural law: “Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust” (3). Segregation, he says, is clearly one of these laws which degrade human personality.

King goes on to make another differentiation between just and unjust laws: a law is unjust, King says, if it is a law written by a majority to be imposed upon a minority without the minority's consent or cooperation in writing the law. He also uses biblical stories and the examples of the earliest Christians to show that civil disobedience is not new to Christianity, but in fact one of its earliest practices.

Lastly, King closes by expressing the lack of support the civil rights movement had received from white faith leaders, whom he had expected to be some of the strongest allies he would find. He laments the willingness not to act he has seen from white moderates. He urges that direct, urgent action is needed, there is no time to wait. He reflects on being portrayed as an extremist by asking:

"Was not Jesus an extremist in love? -- "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice? -- "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the gospel of Jesus Christ? -- "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist? -- "Here I stand; I can do no other so help me God." ... So the question is not whether we will be extremist, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate, or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice, or will we be extremists for the cause of justice?"

(4)