



## THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

### Weekly Reading List (Revised)

Week 1: July 26 - Complicit or Courageous Christianity

Reading: Chapter 1 and Conclusion

Community Covenant

Discussion Questions

Week 2: August 2 - Making and Institutionalizing Race in Colonial America

Reading: Chapters 2, 3, and 4

Discussion Questions

Week 3: August 9 - A War Over Slavery That Continued On

Reading: Chapters 5, 6, and 7

Discussion Questions

Week 4: August 16 - The Civil Rights Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right

Reading: Chapters 8 and 9

Discussion Questions

Week 5: August 23 - The Age of Black Lives Matter

Reading: Chapter 10

Discussion Questions

Sunday Book Groups - August 23

Reading: Chapter 8-9

Week 6: August 30 - The Fierce Urgency of Now

Reading: Chapter 11

Discussion Questions

Sunday Book Groups - August 30

Groups do not meet

September 6 - Sunday Book Groups

Reading: Chapter 10-11

Supplementary Resource: A [video series for \*The Color of Compromise\*](#) available on Amazon. These videos coordinate with the chapters of the book, are about 15-25 minutes, and are available for free for Prime members



# THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

WEEK 6

Week of August 30

Chapter 11

## READING NOTES:

### Chapter 11: The Fierce Urgency of Now

Tisby writes chapter 11 as a “response” to the history lesson that Chapters 2-10 is of the Church’s complicity with racism—it’s compromise of the gospel. He concludes that Christians’ actions—“in some cases, they actively constructed ideological and structural impediments to equality”—has resulted in the fact “that large segments of the American church have lost all moral authority to speak prophetically against racism” (p. 211). But Tisby is not without hope! He writes, “many Christians today say they would have been active participants in the civil rights movement fifty years ago. Now, in the midst of a new civil rights movement, is their chance to prove it” (p. 210). He invokes M.L. King, Jr.: “Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sun lit path of racial justice” (p. 192).

To frame his call for our movement toward the path of racial justice, Tisby borrows from the Reverend William J. Barber, Jr., by pleading for the Church to create a “third reconstruction” (p. 208). Across the chapter Tisby notes multiple ways that another “civil rights movement” could address issues such as mass incarceration, criminal justice reform, de facto school segregation, funding for Black churches and clergy, the removal of Confederate monuments and flag, reparations, and voting rights. Much of this, Tisby argues, can emerge as the white church learns from vibrant Black Christians who, as they have lamented and rejoiced across American history, “have somehow found a way to flourish because of faith.... [who] endure and struggle against present-day forms of racism” (p. 203). To this end, he recommends that Christians, first, increase our awareness of racism, second, develop meaningful cross-racial relationships, and, third, make a commitment to action (ARC). Though Tisby starts with awareness, he adds, “no matter how aware you are, your knowledge will remain abstract and theoretical until you care about the people who face the negative consequences of racism” (p. 195). Thus, he argues for the need to “care about the people who face the negative consequences of racism” (p. 195). Tisby continues that “developing awareness and relationships may create a burden for the struggles of others, but does that burden move you to act?” (p. 196). Specifically, he asks Christians, “are you willing to set aside preferences and prestige to take the side of the marginalized and the despised? More to the point, are you willing to address the systemic and institutional aspects of racism rather than solely work on an interpersonal level?” (p. 196). He notes that “many of the solutions proposed, solutions that actually might prove effective in changing the status quo, are often dismissed as impractical....are deemed too inconvenient to pursue” (p. 193).

But, again, Tisby is not without hope. Tisby’s prayer for the church “is that as people learn about how deep and far reaching the problem of racism is, these ‘radical’ solutions will start to seem more reasonable” (pp. 193-4). A final frame that Tisby presents for us, the church, is the call for “ecclesiastical reparations” (p. 199). Building on Matthew 5:24, he calls on us to consider “the obligations that the faithful have to one another in light of historical injustices” (p. 199). He adds, “much of the American church has not yet considered racism to be a serious enough sin to interrupt their regularly scheduled worship, at least not much beyond conversations and symbolic gestures, to repair the relationship” (p. 199). We, the church, and specifically First Pres, have a moment to interrupt our regularly scheduled worship so as to repair relationships with our Black sisters and brothers!



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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Borrowing from King—whose words are as prophetic in 2020 as they were in the 1960s—Tisby asks, “When it comes to opposing racism, have we as a nation overdosed on ‘the tranquilizing drug of gradualism?’” (pp. 192-3). In light of what you’ve read, how would you respond to this question--about our nation, the American church, First Pres Berkeley?
2. As you read Chapter 11 and you consider Tisby’s ideas for how racial justice might be enacted, what solutions seem too “radical” and “too inconvenient to pursue”? Why?
3. ARC: Awareness, Relationships, Commitment. As you ponder Tisby’s entire book, assess your “ARC.” Where have you grown? Where do you need to continue to grow? In reading Tisby’s book together, we are corporately growing our “Awareness”. In what ways can we, First Pres Berkeley, continue to grow our ARC’s moving forward?
4. As part of our [Renewed Commitment to Fight Racism](#), where do you wish to see First Pres intentionally and collectively create “ecclesiastical reparations?”



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WEEK 5

Week of August 23

Chapter 10

READING NOTES:

### Chapter 10: Reconsidering Racial Reconciliation in the Age of Black Lives Matter (pp. 172-191)

Tisby concludes this chapter on “racial reconciliation” with the note that “centuries of racism in the American church cannot be overcome by ‘pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities’ that ignore the deep social, political, and cultural divides that persist across the color line” (p. 191). Tisby’s analysis begins with the observation that white and black Christians see their faith through radically different “cultural tool kits.” He argues that “because their religious beliefs reinforce accountable individualism, relationalism, and antistructuralism, many white Christians wrongly assume that racism only includes overt acts, such as calling someone the ‘n-word’” (p. 181). In contrast, Tisby concludes that while black Christians “agree that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is necessary for a saving faith.... they also recognize that structures influence individuals and that addressing America’s racial issues will require systemic change” (p. 176). He documents this “divide” by citing scholars of religion in America. He notes how whites and blacks hold radically different viewpoints on “justice” regarding, for instance, the death of Trayvon Martin. He reports that nearly half of all whites were “satisfied” that justice had been served in the acquittal of George Zimmerman, while only 5% of blacks shared this assessment. Tisby adds that for many black Christians, “the reality that yet another unarmed black youth had been killed and no would face legal penalties communicated a message that black lives could be extinguished with impunity” (p. 179). In similar fashion, he notes that the “divide” between white and black Christians is evident in the Church’s response to the concept and movement that “black lives matter” (as opposed to the embrace of the particular organization named Black Lives Matter). Tisby argues that for the black church, “Black lives matter served as a rallying cry for protests, but it also acted as an assertion of the image of God in black people” (p. 179). Tisby adds that the black lives matter movement offers the white church the opportunity to affirm that “the existential equality of black people” as a profound statement of racial justice. Tisby, borrowing from Soong-Chan Rah, our ACC speaker in 2013 and 2017, adds that the idea that “black lives matter is also a lament against “the racist patterns of devaluing black lives in America’s past” (p. 179). In this context, Tisby notes that “black lives matter presents Christians with an opportunity to mourn with those who mourn and help bear the burdens that racism has heaped on black people” (p. 180). Tisby’s assessment, however, is that the white church’s response to black lives matter is one of a “reflexive rejection.” He argues that the white church has often framed the idea of black lives matter as “playing the race card” and “creating division” by speaking of race and racism. (p. 181). He writes how the church’s contemporary response echoes a sentiment of the American evangelical church’s historical idea that speaking of “racial justice somehow indicate[s] a drift away from the ‘true’ gospel” (p. 182). And in a similar vein, Tisby notes that white Christians have responded to black lives matter with the phrase all lives matter (p. 191).

In sum, he notes that “the American evangelic church has yet to form a movement as viable and potent that addresses the necessary concept that black lives do indeed matter” (p. 180). He concludes that “those supposedly most equipped for reconciliation [evangelicals] do not see the need for it” (p. 184). Accordingly, Tisby calls the church to action! He borrows from the Southern Baptist Convention noting the church must “lament and repudiate historical acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest” (p. 172). Continuing the book’s discussion of “Christ and Caesar,” Tisby asks the



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church “Why did so many white evangelicals support Trump despite his obvious racist tendencies?” (p. 187). And, he finishes with the challenge: “if the church hopes to see meaningful progress in race relations... then it must undertake bold, costly actions with an attitude of unprecedented urgency” (p. 191). The actions or “solutions,” he notes are “not easy” nor are they “popular!” But, “not matter their difficulty or distastefulness... they are necessary in order [for Christians] to change the narrative of the American church and race” (p. 191.)

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. One response that is often heard among Christians is that the white Church must “listen” to the black faith leaders on issues of racial justice. As you consider Tisby’s analysis of how white and black Christians see racial justice differently, what can the white church, namely First Pres, learn from Tisby’s framing of the black church? In other words, how can our beliefs about faith and justice be expanded by listening to our black sisters and brothers?
2. Since the killing of George Flyod, black lives matter—as a concept and a movement—has been ever present in the media—traditional and social alike. How have you “heard” and/or “read” the meaning of black lives matter? How does Tisby distinction between the concept/movement and the particular organization enable you to expand your understanding of “the existential equality of black people” and of the need for “lament”?
3. Tisby argues that the Church must undertake “bold, costly actions” to move away from complicity and compromise with racism, so as to move towards courageous racial justice. Where have you witnessed the seeds of change with which you could join? Where might First Pres, as a white church, embrace these “bold” and “costly” actions?



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WEEK 4

Week of August 16

Chapters 8 & 9

### READING NOTES:

#### Chapter 8: Compromising with Racism during the Civil Rights Movement (pp. 130-151)

In Chapter 8, Tisby continues his contrasting of leading Christian figures, namely Billy Graham and Martin Luther King, Jr., while focusing our attention on the civil rights era. He does so in an effort to describe “two approaches to religion and justice” with regard to the Black community (p. 132). Once again, Tisby notes that while Christians were involved in civil rights activism, others continued to promote a reading of the Bible that upheld racial segregation as God’s will. He thus concludes, “precious few Christians publicly aligned themselves with the struggle for black freedom in the 1950s and 1960s” (p. 132). In his review, Tisby notes Graham argued “the heart of the problem of race is in loving our neighbor,” a continuation of a theology of early America of fighting racism “one friendship at a time” (pp. 134-5). Tisby shifts from his analysis of Graham to the view of “moderate” Christians, namely those who opposed King’s civil rights “activism.” Tisby concludes that the thesis of eight religious leaders who wrote to King revealed “the underlying problem of complicity with racism”:

This letter from white Christian moderates illustrates the broader failure of the white church, a failure to recognize the daily indignity of American racism and the urgency the situation demanded....They were overly cautious when the circumstances demanded a measure of outrage and courageous confrontation....promoting a gradual approach to resolving racial issues and minimizing the suffering and hardship of the marginalized, who had been waiting centuries for justice” (pp. 137-8)... A ‘trust the system’ mentality of demanding that the black community ‘patiently waiting for transformation’ (p. 142)

Tisby’s most clear contrast of Graham and King is their respective responses to the riots of the 1960s. Tisby cites Graham: “the rioting, looting and crime in American have reached the point of anarchy” (p. 141)... and are a “dress rehearsal for a revolution” (p. 142). In contrast, he cites King: “I think we’ve got to see that a riot is the language of the unheard. (p. 141). In short, Tisby notes how each faith leader saw the plight of the Black community through radically different lenses. Tisby notes that Graham “held back from making bold public proclamations of solidarity with Black citizens and from demonstrating alongside activists” (p. 149). And, thus, Tisby notes, that Christian “moderates,” those “who played it safe, refusing to get involved in the civil rights movement” (p. 132) “were complicit with the status quo of institutional racism” (p. 135). Tisby closes the chapter with a critical insight on King. He describes King as the “quotable King,” one who is framed by his famous “I Have a Dream” speech from the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Tisby writes that “King has been endlessly reproduced and selectively quoted, his speeches retain their majesty yet lose their political bite” (p. 148). He concludes that for many white, and even for some Black, church leaders, King’s “direct-action campaigns” were “radical,” such that he and other activists were labeled as communists. In sum, Tisby notes that only “a couple of decades after his death, white evangelicals finally came to recognize King’s contribution to American democracy and biblical justice. During his lifetime and the height of the civil rights movement, a large segment of the American church derided King” (pp. 150-1).

#### Chapter 9: Organizing the Religious Right at the end of the Twentieth Century (pp. 152-171)

In Chapter 5, Tisby outlines how the church sought to separate “Christ” from “Caesar.” In Chapter 9, in contrast, he documents how the “Religious Right” committed to a worldview that inextricably linked Christ and Caesar. Tisby references, for instance, Falwell’s belief that the idea of “religion and politics don’t mix was invented by the devil to keep Christians from running their own country” (p. 166). To frame his thesis, Tisby documents how “many politically and theologically conservative Christians strayed away from the use of



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WEEK 4

Week of August 16

Chapters 8 & 9

READING NOTES CONTINUED:

explicitly race-based language and appeals.... [and] supported presidents and legal policies that disproportionately and negatively impacted black people. They accepted a color-blind rhetoric that still utilized racially coded messages" (p. 171). He posits that evangelicals could, thus, "hold positions on social and political issues that disproportionately and adversely harm racial and ethnic minorities, but they can still proclaim their own racial innocence" (p. 153). . A classic example of this approach was the identification of the "welfare queen," a "judgement against 'lazy blacks' who lack initiative and had no work ethic" (p. 170). This ideology stood alongside the "drug war," which encompassed a set of policies that "intentionally focused on areas of high poverty where there were a high concentration of racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 169). Tisby notes that also during this period the creation of the "Southern Strategy," a "racial backlash against the civil rights movement" by which disaffected white voters, including evangelicals, could be mobilized within the political sphere. A critical element of this strategy is the articulation that "America had been founded as a 'Christian Nation'" (p. 158). This grounding of America as Christian, in turn, emboldened the "suburban warriors," those who Tisby notes in previous chapters where part of "white flight" from the cities, to create private Christian schools as a means to maintain de facto racially segregated residential communities and schools. In sum, as Tisby argues in previous chapters, white supremacy in the church does not disappear but rather adapts. He concludes, "the American church's complicity in racism has been less obvious, but it has not required as much effort to maintain. Nowadays, all the American church needs to do in terms of compromise is cooperate with already established and racially unequal social systems" (p. 160). As Tisby writes:

After more than three centuries of deliberate, systematic race-based exclusion, the political system that had intentionally disenfranchised black people continued to do so, yet in less overt ways. Simply by allowing the political system to work as it was designed—to grant advantages to white people and to put people of color at various disadvantages—many well-meaning Christians were complicit in racism (p. 171).



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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. If you have not read Martin Luther King, Jr. "[Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#)," please do (here is a link to a [PDE](#); and a link to the Alabama Clergymen's [letter](#) that prompted King's response). How does a close reading of Chapters 8 & 9 and these two letters provide insight into the Church's complicity with racism-- the maintenance of systems of privilege for white people in America that also "intentionally disenfranchised black people?" How do you "sit" with this complicity? And, a separate, but related question... how do these two letters specifically frame "two approaches to religion and justice," especially for the Black community?
2. Ponder your time at First Pres (or in other Church communities of which you have been a part). How has First Pres, intentionally or unintentionally, been a "moderate" church, one that, as Tisby argues, "played it safe?"
3. As you survey social media and the events that have taken place since the Pastors' June 2nd letter, "Our Renewed Commitment to Fight Racism," what "bold public proclamations of solidarity with black citizens" would you desire First Pres, as a predominantly white church, to make?





## THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

WEEK 3

Week of August 9

Chapters 5-7

### READING NOTES:

#### Chapter 5: Defending Slavery at the onset of the Civil War (pp. 70-87)

Tisby concludes chapter 5 by noting “the Civil War paints a vivid picture of what inevitably happens when the American church is complicit in racism and willing to deny the teachings of Jesus to support an immoral, evil institution” (p. 87). It is to this end that Tisby unpacks the “theological crisis” that slavery represented to the American church on the eve of, and throughout, the Civil War. While Tisby notes that portions of the Church advocated for the abolishment of slavery, he concludes that “countless devout Christians fought and died to preserve it as an institution” (p. 71). For Tisby, a critical focus of the Civil War era was “the question of Christ and Caesar” (p. 79). For Tisby, “Caesar” had clearly declared that enslaving Black humans was acceptable (see Chapters 2-4). For instance, citing the majority opinion of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case, Tisby documents that “black people were of ‘an inferior order’... [and] that the Constitution did not have black people in mind when it outlined the rights and duties of citizens.... [thus] black people ‘had no rights which the white man was bound to respect’” (p. 73). He adds, that Lincoln “made it clear that abolitionists who opposed the institution of slavery could also be anti-black and even racist” (p. 74). Parallel to Caesar, Tisby documents the Church’s articulation of “Christ” through a review of the splits in mainline churches, chief among them, the Presbyterian Church. Within his thesis, Tisby reviews three main arguments made to “justify” slavery. First, he notes how the Church interpreted the “curse of Ham,” a story from Genesis, as a Biblical “truth” that “slavery had been a regrettable but necessary reality ever since Ham’s transgression” (p. 83). Second, Tisby notes (as in previous chapters), that the church saw its evangelical mission as one of bringing enslaved blacks, a “morally inferior” race, “into close relations to a nobler race,” whites (p. 81). And third, Tisby states that “the American church set up dualities between physical and spiritual, moral and political, ecclesiastical and social.” Accordingly, a critical theological lens of the day was that “the church can merely assert what the Bible teaches and must remain silent on that which the Bible is silent” (p. 85). And since the Church could not cite a specific passage of scripture that forbid slavery, church leadership argued that the church was to “remain silent.” Accordingly, Tisby concludes, that “in one stroke of dubious demography, slavery became the right and proper place of Africans” (p. 83). In summarizing the Civil War era, Tisby writes “the war decisively ended slavery, but the fighting did not end. The bullets of competing biblical interpretations continued to ricochet across the country” (p. 70).

#### Chapter 6: Reconstructing White Supremacy in the Jim Crow Era (pp. 88-110)

With the end of the Civil War and the emergence of Reconstruction, Tisby posits, as he did with each preceding era, that “Reconstruction could have been the start of a new America where black people enjoyed the full promises of liberty” (p. 89). And though Black people did see a meaningful increase in access to civic life, especially via the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, Tisby concludes “the dream was short-lived” (p. 91). Tisby documents, through the development of the Lost Cause narrative, Jim Crow laws and customs, and the Ku Klux Klan how America and the American church created a new social order designed “to reinforce the inferiority of black people in America” (p. 89). Tisby discusses how the “Lost Cause,” an alternative “narrative” of history, was constructed to frame the pre-Civil War South “as a virtuous, patriotic group of tight-knit Christian communities” (p. 94). In particular, Tisby notes that “the Lost Cause provided the model for segregation that the southern churches accepted” (p. 94). He adds that many, especially southern women, orchestrated efforts to raise Confederate monuments that “not only memorialized Confederate soldiers, but they also inscribed white supremacy into the landscape of public spaces” (p. 95). He adds that churches celebrated



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WEEK 3

Week of August 3

Chapters 5-7

### READING NOTES CONTINUED:

"Confederate Memorial Day." He adds that white "redeemers," those inspired by "God's plan to save people from their sins and make them into a holy nation," used their power to block Black people from civic life, including voting (p. 96). He concludes that the work of the "redeemers" was an "overt appeal to white racial resentment" and "brought back the clouds of oppression to obscure the bright rays of freedom" (p. 97). Tisby adds that the rise of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction was a "toxic ideology of hate" that fused Christianity, nationalism and white supremacy" and crafted a vision of a "white Christian America" (p. 100). To this mix, Tisby highlights the construction of Jim Crow laws and customs as a system to "reinforce the racial hierarchy" and the "social order" of slavery (p. 103). Throughout Reconstruction, Tisby notes that Christians failure to unequivocally condemn lynching, for instance, "poisoned the American legal system and made Christian churches complicit in racism for generations" (p. 109). He adds that "it's not that members of every white church participated in lynching, but the practice could not have endured without the relative silence, if not outright support, of one of the most significant institutions in America--the Christian church" (p. 109). Tisby closes the chapter with a brief, but important, mention of the writings of James Cone. He does so to speak of how the Black church made sense of lynching through Christ's suffering. Cone writes, "the cross helped me to deal with the brutal legacy of the lynching tree, and the lynching tree helped me to understand the tragic meaning of the cross" (p. 11).

### Chapter 7: Remembering the Complicity in the North (pp. 111-129)

Chapter 7 is a unique chapter that does not focus on a particular era in American history. Rather, Tisby focuses on the mythology of the North vs. the South. He writes:

Christians of the North [and the West and East coasts] have often been characterized as abolitionists, integrationists, and open-minded citizens who want all people to have a change at equality. Christians of the South, on the other hand, have been portrayed as uniformly racist, segregationist, and antidemocratic. The truth is far more complicated (p. 129).

Tisby adds, "the very conspicuousness of white supremacy in the South has made it easier for racism in other parts of the country to exist in open obscurity" (p. 129). It is this truth, the reality that "compromised Christianity transcends regions," that Tisby unpacks. Tisby opens the chapter with a discussion of the church's "wrestle with racism." He notes the continued racism of white Catholics and Protestants as he expands his earlier thesis to include the church's engagement with the social gospel--the church's efforts to ameliorate the "overcrowding, inhumane working conditions, pitiful wages, and chronic health issues local residents endured" (p. 115). While he notes the Catholic church's support for the "everyday" life conditions of the poor, Tisby notes that the Protestant church responded with a "rebuke" "to those who are crying for equality and opportunity and improved material conditions" (p. 116). He concludes that, once again, the church insisted that "converting individuals to Christianity was the only biblical way to transform society" (p. 116). Parallel to the white church, Tisby documents how the black church continued to evolve in response to America's racism. He writes, "Black Christians might take a more traditional or a more progressive stance, depending on the issue. While they often exhibited conservatism... they also applied their religious beliefs to questions regarding the spiritual, political, and social equality of black people" (p. 116). Tisby notes how the emerging fundamentalist strain of Christianity was a leading voice within the church. He notes the view held by "conservative white Christians that public education promised only to inculcate their children with liberal social values and teach concepts that ran contrary to their interpretation of the Bible" (p. 121). To this Tisby highlights the development of



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WEEK 3

Week of August 9

Chapters 5-7

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### READING NOTES CONTINUED:

Pepperdine as a unique form of Christian response, one that was once again “complicit in racism.” He concludes, Pepperdine, and other schools like it, “indoctrinated a new generation of white Christians with ideas that would lend educational and ideological support to an individualistic approach to race relations” (p. 122). As part of Tisby’s critique of the “innocent” North myth, he chronicles the violent riots of the Red Summer, a response to the increasing concentration of Black people in the North following The Great Migration. He chronicles how as Black activists began to openly resist racism, white Americans responded with violence. Tisby’s focus on America’s racism beyond the South is also captured in his analysis of residential segregation. He chronicles how racist practices attached to the GI Bill, “redlining” in the mortgage industry, and “restrictive covenants” in the real estate market led to residential segregation. To this reality Tisby adds the phenomena of “white flight” as indicative “of the way racism has adapted to changing social conditions” (p. 127). He writes, “in many cases, churches not only failed to inhibit white flight but actually became co-conspirators and accomplices in the action” (p. 127). He adds, “rather than stay and adapt to a new community reality or assist in integrating the neighborhood, many white churches chose to depart the city instead” (p. 128). Tisby shatters the “innocence” of the North by reflecting on the experience of Martin Luther King, Jr. in “Slumdale,” a neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago. Seeking to protest segregated housing, King was confronted by counter protesters who waved Confederate flags. Tisby cites King: “I have never seen such hate. Not in Mississippi or Alabama. This is a terrible thing” (p. 128).



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### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Throughout chapters 5-7, Tisby argues that maintaining a “distinction” between Caesar and Christ was critical to the American Church’s theology and subsequent actions. How do you see this paradigm of the “two worlds” of Caesar and Christ embodied in contemporary American society? The American church? How do “the bullets of competing biblical interpretations continue to ricochet across the country”?
2. Tisby argues that the mix of Christianity, nationalism and white supremacy created a “white Christian America.” How do you see the Church, and First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, living into this “white Christian America?” What alternative vision is God calling us to, and how might we live into this calling?
3. Lynching, residential segregation, and voter suppression are a few of the scars that Tisby argues are results of either the American church’s silence or outright support. What other scars can you name?
4. Tisby’s deconstruction of the “innocence” of the North (and all of the non-South) is, in part, an effort to challenge the “narratives” of the “good” North and “evil” South. How does this reassessment of the historical record cause us to reassess our own “innocence” with regards to racism, inside and outside the church?
5. Tisby focuses on the Black church’s embrace of the cross as a way to “make sense” of lynching. He also notes that the Black church has focused on “the spiritual, political, and social equality of black people.” What lessons can the white church learn from the Black church about suffering, redemption and equality before God?



# THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

WEEK 2

Week of August 2

Chapters 2-4

## READING NOTES:

### Chapter 2: Making Race in the Colonial Era (pp. 25-39)

Tisby concludes Chapter 2 with a nod to Martin Luther King, Jr. (who is a central focus of Chapter 8). Tisby writes, "'the fierce urgency of now,' to borrow a phrase from Martin Luther King, Jr., demands a recognition of the ways Christians, from before the founding of the United States, built racial categories into religion" (p. 39). This, then, is the focus of the chapter. The ways in which racism, which Tisby argues was not "inevitable," was inscribed into the social, political, and religious spheres of American life through the "immoral" choices and actions of the "explorers" and colonial settlers. Tisby notes that:

The human cost in terms of suffering, indignity, and death caused by this commerce [the transatlantic slave trade] can never be fully comprehended, but the experience is often misunderstood or downplayed in the present day. The appalling nature of Christian cooperation with slavery cannot be understood apart from a description of bondage and its effects on Africans (p. 29).

He adds that this "process of dehumanization" of African slaves (and Indigenous peoples) occurred as "Christianity became identified with the emerging concept of 'whiteness' while people of color, including indigenous peoples and Africans, became identified with unbelief" (p. 39). In this manner, Tisby frames how race in the Americas was (and is still today) a "social construct" (p. 27). Systemic racism (see Chapter 1) was constructed by "Europeans, including Christians, [who] wrote the laws and formed the habits that concentrated power in the hands of those they considered 'white' while withholding equality from those they considered 'Black'" (p. 27). He adds that "if people made deliberate decisions to enact inequality, it is possible that a series of better decisions could begin to change this reality" (p. 27).

### Chapter 3: Understanding Liberty in the Age of Revolution and Revival (pp. 40-55)

Across this chapter, Tisby uses the lives of renowned evangelists George Whitefield and Jonathan Edward and the period of the Great Awakening (1730s-1740s) to narrate America's emerging institutionalization of slavery. Tisby notes that within the era of the Great Awakening, "evangelicalism focused on individual conversion and piety. [Thus,] within this evangelical framework, one could adopt an evangelical expression of Christianity yet remain uncompelled to confront institutional injustice" (p. 50). As such, while the Church affirmed the idea of "spiritual equality," it did not translate this to "social equality," or "earthly liberation" for African slaves. In fact, Tisby concludes, the Church--as documented through the example of the Baptist Church--articulated a belief that slavery was "a civil issue outside of the scope of the church.... [such that] the topic was an issue for the state, not the church" (p. 52). In short, what one sees in this era of American history is the separation of one's personal faith from one's obligation to "live out" one's faith in the world. Thus, the white church focused on the "souls" of African slaves all the while it "learned to rationalize the continued existence of slavery" (p. 55). Tisby notes, however, that within this historical period that Black Christians believed:

Christianity also held out the hope of freedom. Enslaved people connected spiritual salvation with earthly liberation. They believed that spiritual equality might lead their white slave owners to see them as full human beings deserving of emancipation (p. 45).

About this period of history, Tisby concludes that "not even Revolutionary ideals of independence and equality or the religious transformations brought on by the Great Awakening could deconstruct the foundations of the social pyramid" (p. 55).



## THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

WEEK 2

Week of August 2

Chapters 2-4

READING NOTES CONTINUED:

### Chapter 4: Institutionalizing Race in the Antebellum Era (pp. 56-69)

Tisby continues his review of American history in Chapter 4 with an examination of the “founding fathers” construction of the US Constitution. Tisby notes that while the US Constitution does not use the words “slave” or “slavery,” some scholars argue that it can be viewed as a proslavery document” (p. 58). He notes that “the nation’s political leaders used Black lives as bargaining chips to preserve the union of states and to gain leverage for other policy issues” (p. 59). Tisby, then, rhetorically asks: What about the church? His conclusion is clear: “the American church made similar compromises at critical junctures to preserve the status of slaveholders and to justify the uniquely American manifestation of slavery” pp. 59-60). He adds that, “rather than defending the dignity of Black people, American Christians at this time chose to turn a blind eye to the separation of families, the scarring of bodies, the starvation of stomachs, the generational trauma of slavery” (p. 62). Tisby’s history lesson continues with the naming of “slaveholder paternalism” within American Christianity. He writes that these paternalistic attitudes viewed “the enslaved as perpetual children incapable of adequately making their own decisions, dependent on white people for guidance and protection” (p. 67). As such, Tisby notes that during the Second Great Awakening (1790-1840), white Christians, like Charles Grandison Finney, were “outspoken abolitionists” but not “proponents of black equality.” Accordingly, they “advocated for emancipation,” but not for the “social integration of the races.” (p. 68). Tisby notes, once again, that the theology of the Great Awakening: led to a fixation on individual conversion without a corresponding focus on transforming the racist policies and practices of institutions, a stance that has remained a constant feature of American evangelicalism and has furthered the American church’s easy compromise with slavery and racism (p. 69).



## THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As you read Chapters 2-4, reflect on your public and/or private school education on race and racism in American history. What do you remember being taught? How, if at all, was race framed across American history? (In the colonial era? Revolutionary America? Antebellum America?)
2. Similarly, reflect on your religious education (e.g. Sunday school, Bible study, book reading, a college religious studies course). Where, if at all, has the history of the church's role in the construction of race been part of the development of your faith journey?
3. During the Great Awakening, the church came to focus on individual conversion and piety, as opposed to "earthly liberation." How do you see this focus being lived out today? Consider the ways that Black lives are "at-risk" across every major index of social harm and/or trauma (e.g. incarceration, school drop out, morbidity from COVID).
4. Drawing on Chapter 4, how do you see slaveholder paternalism--which advocates for emancipation, but not for social integration--as the seeds of a segregated society? How do you see this relating to our life together in the church, particularly when "the most segregated hour in American life" is 11 am Sunday?
5. As you reflect on these three periods of American history, let the weight of the Church's passive and active support of racism (e.g., the institutionalization and maintenance of slavery, the dehumanization of African peoples in the Americas) sit with you. How does Tisby's telling of the American church's history impact you? How does it shape your relationship to the church today?
6. Finally, how have the events of the spring and summer of 2020 called for "religious transformations" (p. 55) in us so that, individually and collectively, we can "deconstruct the foundations of the social pyramid" of racial hierarchy? Where have you seen these "transformations" in progress?



# THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

WEEK 1

Week of July 26

Chapter 1 & Conclusion

## READING NOTES:

### Chapter 1: The Color of Compromise (pp. 13-24).

In this opening chapter, Tisby frames three critical ideas:

First, he addresses why read *The Color of Compromise*. He argues that as the church we must be a people who are reconciled, specifically across the lines of racial division--and these lines of racial division exist within First Pres as well as outside our doors. For reconciliation to take place, the church must repent! But, to repent, Tisby argues, the church must confess. And, he adds, that in order to confess, we must, first, know the truth about the church's complicity with racism. Tisby argues that if we--the American church and First Pres in particular--do not do the "hard but necessary work of examining what went wrong with race and the church," we are in danger of holding "simplistic understandings of the past and superficial solutions to racial issues in the present" (p. 20). To this process of moving from "truth telling" to reconciliation, Tisby adds another critical point. He describes his hope that our reading of the American' church's complicity with racism will also create a greater sense of empathy within us. That we will cultivate "the ability to weep with those who weep" for this, he concludes, "is necessary for true healing" (p. 23).

Tisby's second frame is that Christians and the church were complicit in the construction of race and racism—white supremacy--before and at the founding of the nation (Chapters 2 & 3). That racism didn't have to be the reality that in 2020 feels so inevitable. Tisby continues by arguing that the church's complicity with racism continued through the Antebellum Era, the Civil War, Reconstruction (Jim Crow) and the Civil Rights Movement, in "the South" and "the North" (Chapters 4-8). And finally, Tisby notes that the church's complicity with racism exists today (Chapters 9-10). Specifically, he writes that Christians fail(ed) to "decisively oppose the racism in their families, communities, and even in their own churches."

Tisby's third frame are essential definitions for racism and white supremacy. Racism, he notes, is "a system of oppression based upon race" (p. 16, emphasis added). It is "prejudice plus power." And, Tisby defines white supremacy as "a concept that identifies white people and white culture as normal and superior—even if they claim people of color as their brothers and sisters in Christ" (p. 16). He notes, rather somberly, that "the malleability and impermanence of racial categories help explain how the American church's compromise with racism had become subtler over time. History demonstrates that racism never goes away; it just adapts" (p. 19).

### Conclusion: Be Strong and Courageous (pp. 213-215)

Though this is the book's closing chapter, we are electing to have you read it at the start of this book study. We suggest that this chapter establishes a frame for how we should read *The Color of Compromise*, as well as engage with subsequent action. Tisby's book, a "history lesson," documents how fear too often "holds the church back from more aggressive action to bring about justice" (p. 214). And, as he notes, this fear—and indifference and apathy—limits and undermines the church's voice in the world. In contrast, Tisby, invoking Joshua 1, commends us to be "strong and courageous." We acknowledge, as with Tisby, that the reading and discussion of *The Color of Compromise* is, for some, a risk. But, as Tisby notes, "standing for racial justice involves risk." Accordingly, we thank you for choosing to be "strong and courageous" as we collectively wade into the water to fight racism.

<sup>1</sup>A renewal which could build on the words and ideas of a few of our most recent All Church Conference (ACC) speakers, Enuma Okoro, Soong-Chan Rah 2017 (and 2013), and Sandra Van Opstal as well as the collective voices of the speakers in the 2018 Summer Colloquium Beloved Community: The Church's Call to Racial Justice.





## THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As you read Chapter 1, how does Tisby contrast “complicit Christianity” with “courageous Christianity” (p.17)? Tisby cautions us that to read and discuss this book will be, for many Christians, an act of courageous Christianity; readers will find many reasons to “object” to the book’s thesis. He asks us, nonetheless, to continue reading and discussing our shared history and responsibility to live out the gospel. What feelings did you have as you read this first chapter?
2. Borrowing from Beverly Tatum, Tisby defines racism as a “system” of oppression--one of “prejudice plus power.” How does this definition relate to and differ from your own understanding of racism? How do you hear others defining racism? And, how do you “sit” with a term like white supremacy, especially in light of Tisby’s definition?
3. Tisby posits that many Christians in America don’t know how bad racism really is. How has the killing of George Floyd caused you to see racism/white supremacy in America differently? What other events and experiences have awakened you to the reality of racism in America?
4. Tisby explicitly notes “the goal of this book is not guilt” (p. 22). As you ponder recent declarations that Black lives matter, calls for the end of white supremacy, the June 7th Service of Repentance, and other items in the news and your conversations with others, have you experienced guilt? If so, where do you feel that guilt is coming from? Why might guilt be a harmful response to these events? What might be a more productive response?
5. As you move into the primarily historical content of Tisby’s book and into conversation with others, what fears do you have as a reader and as one who will share this journey with others in the First Pres family? How might these fears prevent growth for you, your group, and First Pres Berkeley?

<sup>2</sup>Additional introductory readings about race and racism, and what it means to be anti-racist, include *So You Want to Talk about Race* by Ijeoma Oluo and *How to Be an Anti-racist* by Ibram X. Kendi

<sup>3</sup>Additional readings on whiteness, white privilege and white fragility include *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by Peggy McIntosh and *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo (article & book).



## THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

### The Color of Compromise Book Group Member Covenant | Summer 2020

We begin this discussion group experience with a posture of engaged learners and intentional and incarnational listeners. As we grow in our awareness and understanding of our shared history of racism in our country and in the church, we open our hearts and our minds to God, one another, and our neighbor and to the transforming work of the Spirit. We move forward on this journey of repentance and transformation as a congregation in "a renewed commitment on the part of pastoral staff and our church to fight injustice and racism." (Letter to Congregation 6/2/20)

#### VALUES

We hold the following values as essential to our life together this season:

##### CURIOSITY | Try It On

We agree to be open to engaging others' perspectives. We will practice considering ideas from a posture of curiosity before critiquing, defending, etc. As we read, we will seek to understand the narrative and definitions Tisby offers on their own terms before moving to dismissal, skepticism, etc., asking "what might this mean for me/us if this were true?" We commit to staying curious about our own ideas, perceptions and emotions. Our goal is not to walk away with one "right" answer but to learn with and from each other.

##### PARTICIPATION | STEP UP, STEP BACK

We will be aware of group participation dynamics. If I am someone who tends to be a listener in group settings, I will consider stepping up to share my perspectives or questions. If I am someone who tends to talk a lot, I will consider stepping back to create space for others. (Think "three, then me.")

##### RESPECT | Hold Good Boundaries

We agree to practice respectful listening by not interrupting or talking over others. We agree to practice respectful sharing by speaking from our own experience ("I" statements) and refrain from giving advice, unless it is requested.

##### CARE | "Oops" and "Ouch"

We agree to assume positive intent in others while also acknowledging potentially negative impact. Anyone can say "ouch" if hurt or offended to stop the process from continuing and explore what's happening and why. Anyone can say "oops" to acknowledge their assumptions and/or to respond to another's "ouch."

##### PRAYER | Seek Understanding

We agree to commit to pray for our conversations before beginning and as needed throughout our time together. We affirm we can seek the Spirit's guidance through prayer if conversations trigger pushback, heightened emotions, or unearth sensitive areas in need of healing.

##### CONFIDENTIALITY | Share About Ideas, Not People

We want to process and discuss our learnings with others. However, we agree all sharing should be about concepts and experiences in the group, not specifics about what others have shared.

##### ADDITIONAL GROUP COMMITMENTS? | Other insights to support one another in the journey?



## THE COLOR OF COMPROMISE

The Truth about the American' Church's Complicity in Racism

### Introduction & Discussion Guide July 2020

On June 2, following the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, the pastoral staff shared a letter (Our Renewed Commitment to Fight Racism) detailing their prayer for us, First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley, "to begin a renewed commitment... to fight injustice and racism." The pastors noted that, individually and collectively, we--followers of Jesus Christ:

*Have witnessed such injustice too many times. We have been shocked by terrible events too many times. We have watched our cities burn in frustration and despair too many times. We have had conversations too many times. We have returned to our busy lives without doing the hard, sustained work of changing systemic racism too many times. Enough is enough.*

Accordingly, the pastors called for us "to wade into vulnerable and uncomfortable waters" and fight racism.

To facilitate the development of our hearts and minds as anti-racists, the Racial Justice and the Church Working Group, along with the Departments of Christian Formation and Mission Outreach, now invite you to wade further through our corporate reading and discussion of Jemar Tisby's *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American' Church's Complicity in Racism*. Our collective prayer is that we will read and discuss the book as a church body--in the context of trusted relationships with family or friends, with our Community Group or as part of a book group. And, in so doing, we surrender ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit for our own individual reflection, insight, and transformation that will contribute to First Pres' collective reflection, insight, and transformation.

To that end, the Racial Justice and the Church Working Group has designed this guide to support your individual and collective reflection and dialogue on the American church's complicity in racism. The guide provides a snapshot of each chapter and a series of questions and/or prompts to help you reflect on Tisby's book, the news and events that are unfolding in our nation and across the globe, as well as your own life.

On the heels of the public killing of George Floyd there has been an expressed desire, inside and outside of the church, to act. Action is essential if we, as a church body, are to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and help dismantle racism and white supremacy (see chapter 11). We believe, as Tisby argues in Chapter 1, that one of the first acts that the church can and must do is to learn about its history with racism. To come to see that we are the inheritors of a racist past which shapes our racist present. Having learned more deeply of America's original sin, our prayer is that we will collectively reflect on what this history--as well as this present moment--is teaching us about our "particular responsibility and conviction" as persons of faith.

Listening, learning, reflecting, and developing hearts of greater compassion and justice is part of our missional formation. Thus, we invite you to wade further into "vulnerable and uncomfortable waters" through the reading and discussion of *The Color of Compromise*--that, by God's grace, they may become baptismal waters of repentance, renewal, and reconciliation.

The Racial Justice and the Church Working Group  
Christian Formation  
Mission Outreach