

“Unsettling Truths”

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A synopsis of each chapter, written by various member of the Racial Reconciliation, Healing and Justice.

A Synopsis of Chapter 1: *The Doctrine of Discovery and Why It Matters*

The Doctrine of Discovery emerged from a series of fifteenth-century papal bulls, which are official decrees issued by the pope, that allowed European Christians the right to claim lands and exploit the inhabitants therein.

On a visit to Washington, DC, Mark was surprised to see a celebration for Christopher Columbus a man who had never set foot on continental America.

Chapter 1 describes how European Christians used ‘The Doctrine of Discovery’ to legitimize colonialism and slavery. The European Christian church claimed that what benefited the European colonial powers would benefit the church. From the 15th century to the present day this doctrine has had severe consequences for African and Native American people.

The chapter concludes with how the ‘doctrine of discovery’ stands in direct opposition to the teachings of the New Testament. The teachings of Jesus do not allow for the identification and exclusion of others.

A Synopsis of Chapter 2: *The Power of Narratives and the Imagination*

The dysfunctional Christian theology of the Doctrine of Discovery has had a significant impact on the social reality of Western society, leading to the narrative of white supremacy and the social imagination of “otherness.” This happened through the social system process of externalization (an individual’s values and perspectives are externalized into and help shape the system), institutionalization (those values and perspectives take on a life of their own beyond that of the individuals who introduced them), and internalization (whereby individuals take on and internalize the values of the external objective reality of the system). In this way, the Doctrine of Discovery originated from the externalized worldview of European Christians, became institutionalized in European colonization, and was internalized by those conquered by European powers.

Social systems are also constructed through the power of social imagination, which helps us make sense of the world around us. Social imagination can be expanded and supported by theological imagination. The theological imagination, however, can become corrupted by a sense of arrogance and privilege. Christian theological imagination has often tragically asserted that the Christian has the capacity to know what is best for the rest of the world.

Social and theological imagination are more deeply impacted by metaphors than by logical reason. While Jesus used metaphor to spur the imagination of the potential of the kingdom, many white Christian leaders in the U.S. have stoked fear and anxiety and emphasized the false narrative of potential persecution. This leads to evangelicals supporting political leaders that tap into metaphors that serve the retention of Christian empire.

Dysfunctional social and theological imagination generated and supported by metaphors rooted in fear and anxiety result in narratives that have a significant influence on systems and structures. These dysfunctional narratives fuel our dysfunctional systems and have the power to persist even after specific institutions of those systems are abolished. In this way, the dysfunctional narrative of white supremacy continued through the dismantling of slavery and Jim Crow to fuel the current system of mass incarceration and disenfranchisement. Such narratives must be addressed so that all levels of social reality are confronted.

A Synopsis of Chapter 3: *The Kingdom of God is About Relationship not Empire*

Chapter 3 focuses on the testimony of Scripture conflicting with the dysfunctional narratives that have been used to oppress Native and other non-white peoples. Charles states that “Narratives have the power to shape both positive change and negative change. A theological basis for the enslavement of Africans and Native Americans was needed to justify the acquisition of land, wealth, and power. Chapter 3 uses Hebrew Scripture to explore a theology of relationship, broken by the actions of Adam and Eve and how God has always desired a connection with God’s creation. The role of Jesus, from a New Testament point of view, is seen as the restorer of broken relationships through his understanding of the human drive for earthly empire and God’s wish for a relationship with creation. The role of Jesus teaching that earthly empires are temporary while the kingdom of God is eternal is explained. To be a disciple of Jesus is to know persecution, suffering, and death. Being a “successful” disciple is not measured by wealth, power, or prosperity, but instead, “success” will be measured when the disciples are rejected, insulted, and even persecuted. This chapter will lead the person to wonder how humankind has traded a positive narrative of a right relationship with God and creation for a negative narrative based on earthly power that distorts God’s intent for a right relationship.

A Synopsis of Chapter 4: *The Rise and Defense of Christendom*

In 306 AD, there were three reigning Roman Emperors; Maxentius, Licinius, and Constantine. Constantine claimed to have had a vision that instructed him to “conquer” his rivals through the power of the cross. He defeated first, Maxentius, and later, Licinius to consolidate the entire Roman Empire under his rule. Christianity was then established as the state religion of the empire with its own need for security and the supposed responsibility to protect its people. In backing Constantine, Eusebius of Caesarea would promote the idea of “just war”, which would then be more organized by Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas. This would eventually justify war to our present time.

A Synopsis of Chapter 5: *A Dysfunctional Theology Brought to the New World*

Describes how the “Doctrine of Discovery “, whose set of legal principles governed the European colonizing powers, allowed Native genocide to be understood as a holy act of claiming the promised land for settlers. It justified the enslavement of African people and the ethnic cleansing and removal of Indian people. Europeans discovery of the Americas was regarded as a God-ordained act that set the stage for Christian exceptionalism and Anglo-Saxon (White) superiority. They would become the “chosen people” ordained by God to tame the savage world, and lead to American exceptionalism resulting in the building of the Nation. Embedded over the years in American psychics it has become a political rally cry in the “Make America Great Again” campaign.

A Synopsis of Chapter 6: *Exceptionalism and the Founding Documents of the United States*

It can be said that the Doctrine of Discovery was the foundation on which the United States was formed and is governed. From the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution to American’s domestic and foreign policies the document of discovery has been used to justify possession of lands and the abuse of human rights. The doctrine created the assumption of white supremacy in the European Christian minds. Amendments and Articles have been written to address the shortcomings of the Constitution and other documents. However, the false narrative and myth persist in nearly all sectors of America’s society.

A Synopsis of Chapter 7: *Dysfunctional Theology and the Spread of Settler Colonialism*

While the Thirteenth Amendment ended the racist institution of slavery, the diseased narrative of white supremacy gave rise to Jim Crow and fueled the ethnic cleansing and genocide of Native people in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Doctrine of Discovery found new expressions in American Christianity and exceptionalism expressed as “Manifest Destiny,” the belief that this young nation had the God-given right and destiny to rule the entirety of the North American continent, as expressed in the lyrics of “America the Beautiful.”

As the United States expanded westward, a series of laws and legal decisions relied on the Doctrine of Discovery as the rationale for enshrining European, Christian narratives of superiority and sovereignty over Native peoples. *Johnson and Graham’s Lessee v. M’Intosh* established that only the United States government had the right to extinguish Native peoples’ interest in their lands. The United States government thus had a monopoly, enabling it to manipulate the land market and suppress land prices. Chief Justice John Marshall, writing for the unanimous Supreme Court, argued that ‘Christian people’ had ‘discovered’ the land of North America and that this event had given Christian Europeans ‘dominion’ over and ‘absolute title’ to the lands of ‘heathens.’ This laid the groundwork for the forced removal of Native people from all lands east of the

Mississippi, as Andrew Johnson signed the Indian Removal Act in 1830, leading to The Trail of Tears as tribes were marched out of the ancestral lands, suffering disease, malnutrition, and exposure which decimated their populations.

Even as Native peoples were removed from east of the Mississippi, they faced enslavement and massacres as the Gold Rush fueled western expansion by White people. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the US population ballooned from 5.3 million to 76.2 million, while the Native population dwindled from 600,000 to 237,196. The displacement, decimation, and destruction of Native lives and communities was sanctioned and carried out by the US government in the Indian Wars due to the narrative of white American exceptionalism rooted in the Doctrine of Discovery.

A Synopsis of Chapter 8: Genocide, the Impact of a Dysfunctional Theology

God continues to want to be in relationship with his creation. But it seems humans thwart that possibility. The authors outline in the Bible a connection between a people and their land that is in harmony with the relationship of God and God's people. Chapter 3 examines the understanding Native peoples had about the land as something shared and how the English colonists viewed land as property to be owned. How does a human take "God's place in creation and determine and judge what is good and what is bad from a godlike authority rooted in white supremacy? The answer to this question becomes essential in understanding Richard Pratt's 1892 speech and its implication in the cultural genocide of Native peoples. Pratt, famous for his quote, "Kill the Indian in him and save the man," founded the first Indian boarding school that has negatively influenced Native communities for more than a century. Genocide is not only about the physical killing of a people but can also refer to the killing of a peoples' psyche. Central to Pratt's philosophy is "The lie of white supremacy [that] elevates the image of God in one people group and diminishes the image of God in others." This kind of thinking is the basis for a dysfunctional theology. The idea of white privilege is discussed as well as the continuation of the Doctrine of Discovery used as legal precedent in cases involving land once owned by Native peoples. The chapter also discusses the issue of immigration and the notion that without Native peoples being a part of immigration reform, no substantive change can occur.

A Synopsis of Chapter 9: Abraham Lincoln and the Narrative of White Messiahship

Abraham Lincoln proves not to be the hero many of us have thought him to be. In his debates with Stephen Douglas, he declares that he has no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery where it already exists. Lincoln made known his beliefs that white (men) were far more superior to blacks in every way including intelligence. He would go on to repeat his position on race, including in his inaugural address. He was careful in respecting the limits of his authority therefore, the Emancipation Proclamation was applied only to the Southern states in rebellion. Lincoln furthermore promised in debates and speeches that blacks would never serve on a jury, would never become a judge or never have the right to vote. A system of a second-

class tier of citizenship would be maintained by the signing of the Thirteenth Amendment and would be used as an effective constitutional tool to preserve white supremacy. While credited with tearing down the evil institution of slavery, Lincoln perpetuated the narrative of white supremacy.

A Synopsis of Chapter 10: *Abraham Lincoln and Native Genocide*

Describes the hidden legacy of President Abraham Lincoln and the role he played in the “Manifest Destiny” that resulted in the removal and genocide of the Plains and Western Indians. It is the flip side of his actions to bring about the Emancipation Proclamation leading to the freeing of the slaves. A dark side in the killing and uprooting of Native tribes to make room for the expansion of the western lands for white settlers, and clearing the land for the transcontinental railroad.

A Synopsis of Chapter 11: *The Complex Trauma of the American Story*

In this chapter the authors explore how our understanding of trauma, both individual and prolonged, and how we understand the American narrative regarding our nation’s history around race relations affects our understanding of, and conversations about, racism, healing, and race relations with people of color. The authors stress that a common understanding of the traumas experienced by affected people is crucial for anyone who wants to engage in conversation designed to move toward racial healing and improved racial relations. This is true whether the trauma is associated with systemic events or trauma related to individual acts.

They discuss the implications of traumas associated with three basic groups of stressors and stressful events, and how understanding these in relation to racism or race relations discussions, can affect how one hears those conversations.

- **PTSD/C-PTSD** (post-traumatic stress disorder): a mental health condition triggered by a terrifying event. The effects of this over longer periods are more complex and referred to as C-PTSD, i.e. being a victim, survivor of, or witness to a violent or abusive act etc. .
- **HTR** (historical trauma response): refers to the cumulative trauma that occurs over one’s lifetime or across generations, i.e.: slavery, ethnic cleansing, Indian boarding schools, internment, etc.

The authors also make a case for seeing whites as a traumatized people based on the feeling that white Americans could not perpetuate. 500+ years of dehumanizing injustice without traumatizing themselves.

- **PITS/C-PITS** (perpetuation induced traumatic stress): the symptoms that are caused not by being a victim, but being the person(s) who were active, participants in the causing event. i.e.: soldiers, executioners, law enforcement, etc. or passive non-response.

A Synopsis of Chapter 12: *The Christian Worldview and Failure of Re-conciliation*

Many of the issues with the American Christian worldview are rooted in the dysfunction associated with American exceptionalism and are so deeply embedded in our corporate and systemic narrative that the type of meaningful conversation and change required would be challenging. Furthermore, the trauma of white America often goes undiagnosed because it is frequently only seen in terms of individual sin, i.e.; lying, sexual, assault, murder, etc. This then often prevents American Christians from acknowledging the impact of our society's collective corporate sins, i.e.; stolen lands, broken treaties, systemic injustice, white supremacy, which are often ignored or outrightly rejected but contribute to the related collective trauma.

The current American Christian worldview has often used the Bible to justify racism and race relations. The authors explain that any justification for our racial history has no basis in Scripture. In fact, the OT narrative, where Americans might see themselves as Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, in reality, Americans should see themselves the citizens of pagan nations; or, in our being and doing the NT narrative, i.e., treating one's neighbor as we want to be treated, taking on a servant mentality, or seeing everyone being equal. The authors conclude by explaining that a proper response to this scenario can be found in the book of Lamentations which calls for an "acknowledgment of this sinful reality and a lament which confesses and repents from this reality"

A Synopsis of Chapter 13: Conclusion: *Truth and Conciliation White American Christendom. The proper response*

The authors summarize the need for conversation with a quote from George Erasmus (an aboriginal Leader in the Dene people of Canada), "Where common memory is lacking, where people do not share the same past, there can be no real community. Where community is to be formed, common memory must be created."

The authors conclude that the US needs a national dialogue to develop this common memory. A conversation is comparable to the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa. Rwanda or Canada was mentioned. This conversation must be inclusive and not take place in individual silos. They call for the church to participate, not lead because the Western Church wrote the Doctrine of Discovery and the American church has accepted and embraced the heresy of the Christian Empire as opposed to seeking to find the promised kingdom.

And to close the chapter, and the book, they explain the story of Hosea and Gomer this way,

- Jesus is the prophet
- The Western-American Church is Gomer.
- Our adultery is with the empire.
- And our only path to healing is through lament and learning how to accept some very unsettling truths.

This then becomes the work we have to do!