

White Too Long - Chapter 3

Believing: The Theology of White Supremacy

This chapter aims to describe the historical roots of the theological world of white Christianity, “illustrating how white supremacy not only drove the actions of white Christian leaders, churches, and denominations, but also how white Christian theology was diligently constructed to protect and justify it.”

Thesis: “A close examination of key theological doctrines such as the Christian worldview of slaveholders, sin, and salvation, the centrality of a personal relationship with Jesus, and the use of the Bible reveals how each was tailored to resist black equality and protect white superiority, and how this legacy dramatically limits the moral and religious vision of white Christians today.”

Rev. Basil Manly Sr. and the compatibility of slavery and the White Christian worldview in sermons preached throughout the South. His understanding of slavery is set in a larger patriarchal theological framework of divinely ordained roles for persons.

Fredrick Douglas and the Confounding Influence of Christianity on White Supremacy: “I am filled with unutterable loathing when I contemplate the religious pomp and show, together with the horrible inconsistencies, which everywhere surround me. We have men-stealers for ministers, women-whippers for missionaries, and cradle-plunderers for church members.”

The Religion of the Lost Cause in the aftermath of the Civil War and in the contemporary setting.

Eschatology: shifting conceptions of history and human responsibility in the theology of premillennial dispensationalism. Billy Graham’s response to MLK’s “I Have a Dream” speech: “Only when Christ comes again will little white children of Alabama walk hand in hand with little black children.”

Individualist conceptions of sin and salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus served to restrict the moral vision of many white Christians to the personal and interpersonal realms while screening out institutional or structural issues.

The Bible and the Social Status Quo: Christianity is primarily about redeeming people for life in the next world rather than about changing the present.