

# OpenTheo

## #115 Part 2: NT Wright, Esau McCaulley & Tim Mackie on race and the church

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### Ask NT Wright Anything - Premier

Hear the audience Q&A that followed NT Wright and Esau McCaulley's conversation on race and the church, hosted by Tim Mackie of The Bible Project. Broadcast with permission of Together PDX.

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## Transcript

[MUSIC] The Ask Nty Anything podcast.

[MUSIC] Welcome back to the podcast that brings you the thought and theology of New Testament scholar and former Bishop of Durham, Tom Wright. I'm Justin Brierley, Head of Theology and Apologetics for Premier Unbelievable.

And of course, the show brought to you as usual in partnership with SBCK and NT Wright online. Today, we're continuing to hear audience questions from a special event that happened last year when Tom sat down with Esau McCauley, an Episcopalian minister in the US and the author of Reading Wild Black. They came together for a time of teaching and discussion on race, the Bible and its impact on the church.

Last week, we heard the first part of their conversation and now we're going to hear the

audience Q&A facilitated by Tim Mackey of the Bible Project. This presentation was co-hosted by Portland Seminary, Seattle Pacific Seminary and Regent College. You can find a link to the original show on YouTube with today's podcast.

Just a reminder though that you can find more shows from Premier Unbelievable at our new website, including Unbelievable, the CS Lewis podcast with Alistair McGrath, The Big Conversation and more. You can also subscribe to our newsletter and that'll give you access to the link to ask a question yourself of Tom for this show. That's all at [premierunbelievable.com](http://premierunbelievable.com). And of course we're launching Premier Unbelievable on a new footing on just a couple of weeks on Saturday the 14th of May, helping you to unmute God at our conference.

Rediscover your authentic voice in a confused and divided world. Do go and check out our list of speakers, the seminars and topics at [unbelievable.live](http://unbelievable.live). You could come in person if you'd like to at the British Library in London. It's fully catered for the day.

It's going to be a fantastic day. We're going to be in the beautiful auditorium of the British Library. Or you can attend from anywhere in the world.

It's really easy. And we're doing it at a time that suits lots of our listeners in the US and Canada. 9am Eastern is when we'll be beginning it, if that's where you are in the world.

You can interact with the 10 speakers throughout the whole day if you're coming online and there's lots of ticket options too. Again, that's [unbelievable.live](http://unbelievable.live). We would love you to be part of this year's conference. So let's get back into the second part of this Q&A now between Tom Wright and Esau McCauley.

[MUSIC] All right, welcome back everybody. We're just going to dive right in again. This is part two.

So in this part, we're going to be taking these biblical perspectives and using them to reflect on the history of these issues, especially in Europe and America, and also like the situation on the ground current time. So Tom is going to kind of share first in the session and then Esau, just feel free after Tom finishes to continue. And then again, I'll moderate a discussion time after that.

Great, thanks Tim. And thank you all for allowing us this break, which when you're talking a lot, it's actually quite good to stand up and walk around and yes, have a drink of something. I have been fascinated in both intellectually, just because it is an extraordinary story, but also with a certain amount of horror, looking on the history of this question as best I can.

This is not my special subject, but because I'm passionate about the biblical vision, which I was trying to expound in the first half, I have naturally asked myself, how did we get to the point where we didn't even notice about this, where when I was growing up, it was

just assumed that this church was basically a white western thing, and we were being very gracious and letting other people join in and have part of what was really our party. And I have had to come to terms with this, particularly because ever since the reformation, something has been going on, which again, I would support, but which I think has had very dangerous spin-offs, because there was a great division in the church a thousand years ago, when the Eastern Church and the Western Church divided technically over the question of adding one word to the creed, *Filioque*, that's proceeding from the father and the son, but actually Rome and the East were pulling apart in all sorts of ways politically, as well as obviously geographically, and that word in the creed was a symptom. But already there was a sense that this is Roman Christianity and that is Greek or Eastern Christianity, as though you could have two Christianities, and that's been a problem ever since.

But then with the reformation, one of the great watch words of the reformation was to have scripture and liturgy in your own language, because if you'd always only heard scripture in Latin, and if you'd then had somebody have to explain, "Oh, this is what it really means," without you being able to read it for yourself, and if all the prayers in church had been in Latin, I'm thinking obviously of Europe for hundreds of years, then, and it wasn't your own language, and you were only vaguely aware of what it might mean, then there's something enormously liberating about being told, "Guess what? You can speak to God in your own language, and we're going to translate the Bible into your own language." One of my great heroes, William Tyndale, devoted his life and indeed died for the principle of having scripture in the vernacular, and it really was vernacular with Tyndale, the King James Version, which comes a bit later, and borrows from Tyndale but makes it a bit grander, a bit more upmarket, and Tyndale was quite earthy in his language, like Luther was with his German. So that was a great thing. But then as Christianity expanded and as the reformation went out in different directions, so the principle of worshipping and having scripture in your own language generated, I think, quite accidentally, the fact of having different churches that were from different countries and so on, so that in a melting pot like London, even in the 16th and 17th century, people came from all over to London, you would have in the 16th and 17th century a Polish church and a French church and a Portuguese church, and a listen of that and the other.

With nobody saying, "But hang on, in this Bible that we're all reading in our own languages," it says that you're all one in Christ. It's as though, because throughout the Middle Ages, the great question of Christianity was, "How do you get to heaven or how can you know that you're going to heaven?" People hadn't noticed that actually the biblical emphasis, which isn't about going to heaven when you die, it's about God's new creation, the new heavens and new earth, that the biblical emphasis was on all those who believe in Jesus being part of the same family now. And the miracle of Pentecost is not to say, "Therefore we can all speak different languages so we can go our separate

ways," but we are all telling the same mighty works of God, the differentiated unity.

It's difficult, of course it is. Differentiation is quite easy if you don't care about unity. Unity is quite easy if you don't care about differentiation.

Doing them together is tough. But then as this developed through that period, you got the age of imperial expansion in the 17th, 18th, 19th centuries, and with this very odd hermeneutic where some people really told the story of Israel coming out of Egypt and going to the Promised Land, and there were people who went to the New World, to New England, or indeed New France and other new places as well, telling that story, and therefore casting themselves as the chosen people inheriting the Promised Land, and therefore having a right to dispose of the people who happened to be living there at the time. I know that's an oversimplification, but I've seen it in various contexts and I've read about it in various settings as well.

But then with all of that going on and with people not really noticing about the imperative to a unity across ethnic boundaries, and particularly a unity across ethnic boundaries as part of the sign that God was doing the new thing, the new creation in Christ, then you get in the 18th century particularly the rise of Deism and Epicureanism, which says, "God, if there is a God, he's a long way upstairs, and he doesn't get involved in this world so that this world makes itself by itself, and that is the primitive theories of evolutionism, not strictly speaking biological evolution, but everything in the world just happening without intervention from outside." That's an 18th century idea long before Charles Darwin ever got on a boat and wrote up his specifically biological evolution theories. And then out of that there is a sense, well, if the different animal types have developed, maybe there are different human types so that within the human race, when do we first start using that word in that way? I'm not sure. There are different human races, and again if somebody had said, "Hang on," according to Act 17, there aren't different human races, there is only the human race, but nobody as far as I know did or tried, maybe they did and I don't know about it.

Then people got the idea, well, we've explored to this part of the world and that part of the world, and they're a completely different race. They look different, their faces different, their skin color is different, they behave differently, they cook different things, and it was very easier then for people to say, "Ah, there are these different races rather than the one human race." It fitted with the emerging social Darwinism of the time. It's very ironic that some of those who are most opposed to Darwinism in some respects seem to have bitten the poisoned apple or whatever you do of social Darwinism in a big way.

And that's the point particularly where you get the invention of the category of whiteness. Now, I've said again and again, this is ridiculous. The only time you actually see somebody who is white, white, the color of this piece of paper, I wasn't scribbling on

it, is when they're either dead or at least looking as if they're a pretty well, pretty well moribund.

Because we who are technically called white are actually either yellow or brown or pink or whatever it is. We are multicolored. Why were we ever to be called white? Well, I looked it up in the big Oxford English Dictionary and the use of the word white to describe basically Western European Caucasian ethnicity people.

It grows up with the exploration of Africa where people say, "Oh, they're black." And guess what? That must mean we're white and it's the creation of a binary of a two-tone system where you're either the one or the other. And it becomes ridiculous because of course there are people of many different colors. And we now talk about black people and brown people and maybe yellow people, etc.

Well, it's fairly ridiculous that that creation of a category of whiteness. And I know this is something people have written PhDs about and so on. And I haven't read them, but I've just reflected on it and looked up the words in the dictionary.

That's something which has then generated a world with which we have all colluded even though it was actually nonsensical. And the result is that Western European Christians in the 19th century liked to think that they were the ones who had evolved. One of the reasons social Darwinism was popular was because of the rise of a more upwardly mobile middle class.

"Oh, we are evolving. We are the developed people." And then the division of the world into the developed world with all that sense of superiority and the developing or even the underdeveloped world, poor things, the sheer dripping patronizing feel of that. It's hard for me even to say it because it's pretty disgusting really.

And that these false evolutionary models which were enabling the idea of white superiority. First calling it white in order to signal some sort of superiority and then developing out of that. And here's the tragedy, my friends, that the churches didn't even notice that this was a blasphemy against the goodness of God's creation of humans in his own image.

The Romans 15 imperative had dropped off the back of the letter to the Romans as long as you understood how to get to heaven according to Romans 1 to 8. You didn't need to worry so much about the Jews in 9 to 11 and you didn't need to worry so much about ethnic unity in Christ in Romans 12 to 15. But of course that is a travesty that destroys the whole point of Paul's argument. And now when I have said this in various contexts, people have said, oh, you and the Church of England actually at the moment is having a thing about racism.

And it's just you're getting on the bandwagon of all this woke agenda where suddenly

the church thinks, oh, we better dance to these secular tunes because people are saying that we are now being sinful. And the problem here is that the church had left out part of its own God given, structural Jesus authenticated message. And when that happens, don't be surprised if other movements see that there's a big vacuum and come rushing in from another angle to fill it.

So when I got an email, oh, a month or two ago from somebody I know saying, oh, you're just siding with those black lives matter people. Don't you realize they're all Marxists, they're all anti family, they're all this, they're all that. And I said, well, this is like when Jesus says in Matthew 11, the Kingdom of God is breaking in and the violent people are trying to break in on the act.

In other words, people see there's something there and now we're going to join in. But that doesn't mean that Jesus was wrong to preach the Kingdom. And the fact that people with quite other agendas to an authentic Christian agenda are saying that there is this problem of racism and it's pretty terrible doesn't mean that we Christians shouldn't have been saying this sort of thing all along.

It's that if we have left the vacuum, it's shame on us if other people come in and fill it, because it may look into many people in my own country. And it looks as if it's a secular human rights movement, and that that is sort of taking over the church. And the answer is no, the church mustn't address it like that.

The church must expand justification by faith as it is in Romans with its full significance of a coinonia of fellowship of faith, where the only thing that we have in common is the one thing that matters, namely Jesus, and Jesus crucified and risen. And our faith in him. So you see, on the one hand, the modernists have said, Oh, we're all identical.

And that is a very patronizing thing, because often as we've said before, this is white people saying to the rest of the world, you're all identical with us. You're like honorary whites. And then at the moment we're in full swing with the postmodern movement, which says almost everybody has their own identity, according to whatever they feel or think or imagine about themselves, and so on.

And I claim my identity as this my identity as that which must be respected. And then the whole thing falls apart. So the modernist wants to cram everything together as everybody is identical, the postmodernist wants to pull everything apart to deconstruct everything.

And we as followers of Jesus have to stand for and to implement a differentiated unity. That's what you have in Ephesians four, the many ministries which contributes to the unity of the body of Christ. It's what you have in in 1 Corinthians 12, where the body of Christ has the eyes, the feet, the hands, everything.

And but they're all there for the good of the whole. And this image of ecclesiology must be recaptured and recovered. And I regret that sometimes when I say this kind of thing, some people say, Oh, you're stopping to preach preaching the gospel.

You're just doing the stuff that social workers do. That is simply not true. If the church retreats into a private sphere, a private platonic sphere of how do I get to heaven.

And by the way, it is a form of Platonism that sees humans in a hierarchy with different kinds of human superior to other different kinds of you. Beware of the platonic influence on the gospel even today. But if we are if we have to avoid that and embrace the biblical vision, then this comes straight out as out of Isaiah, out of the Psalms, out of Genesis, etc, etc.

Yes, here is God's purpose going ahead and the purpose is to sum up all things in Christ. But it is this glorious polyphony, this polychrome polyphonic community with every voice mattering, every voice doing its own thing. And yet within the harmony of the single vision of all one in Christ Jesus, so that the world may see that there is a new way to be human, a different way to be human, a Jesus shaped way to be human, a cross and resurrection and spirit animated way to be human.

And if we're not doing that, then why should anyone believe us when we say this person Jesus died for your sins and rose again. But if we are even beginning to do it, then that message will mean what it was always supposed to mean. There, that's what I intended to say.

I haven't gone for my full 20 minutes but I hope it makes sense. That is that is okay Tom because I may speak for beyond about 20 minutes and hopefully feel free. Okay, so I'm going to do two things, some of which would deal with some of the material the Tom himself is already addressed.

I'm going to tell you two stories. First of all, and obviously that means I have to skip over a lot of stuff I'm going to spend about five to seven minutes. I'm going to go over this I think you've heard it a thousand times before, but after I cover that 250 years of history I'm going to rewind the story.

I'm going to start again. I'm going to tell that exact same story from the perspective of African American so this is not a universal narrative. This is a particular narrative of the kind of African American experience in the development of what I've often called African American Christian interpretation and why it's important.

So first, modernity. As you all probably know and Tom spoke about it is the age of reason what we now call modernity the age of reason, beginning with the early modern period and 17 18 century years ago during this age of reason as Tom was already said, there's the value, there's the dynamic of miracles, the high emphasis on reason and the distrust

of authority. One of the debates at least in the United States context, centered around the super supernatural aspects of the Bible, think about Jefferson and the one who edited you know all of the miracles and turn Jesus into this great teacher.

And then the first thing I want to say is that the Bible is to remake Christianity in a way that was acceptable to modern man. And in this context modern man meant white Western Europeans. Now let's in this context and forgive me because you have two people who are involved in biblical studies here.

The biblical studies kind of finds its footing. And the biblical studies which was to deep throw in the church. If you can take theology from the hand to the church and the state and the people who are in power and take the Bible and examine the Bible, just like we're examining the rest of the world in light of reason, we can get at the real Jesus and oftentimes the real Jesus who people are trying to get at was the Jesus who was once again acceptable to modern man.

And one of the strange twist of history is that biblical studies which has this is if I can talk about what's going on in Germany. And the destructive origin is actually the discipline has been mostly embraced by evangelicals who loved the Paul the authority of the Bible but you know history has strange twists and turns we can't get into today. So you have in the same context what actually it comes along later.

We need to mix into this what eventually becomes known as the Industrial Revolution, which created mass inequalities, including suffering which leads to things like child labor labor laws. So you have these two things happening at the exact same time. On the one hand you have the increase in what we call secularization and the removal of God and Diaz and from the public square.

And the increase in what they see the drop in morals. And at one time the Christian response to these things could be seen together, especially in places like the United Kingdom, where there's an emphasis on things like the temperance movement and social action in Christian context. Now, as an open simplification again you got to enter in what happens I can speak what happens in Europe, I can speak what happens to America enter into this social gospel.

And the question is this one. In light of the Industrial Revolution and the mass inequalities created by the increase in technology. What is the role of the Christian in the public square.

What should the question to do. In this question of what the Christian should do is being asked at the exact same time, the critical question about the Bible historicity in miracles and being off and asked these two things are happening together. And so what you get in an American context is what becomes the fundamentalist modernist debate.



Well, the fundamentalists say one look there are certain things that we cannot negotiate with the virgin birth the resurrection of Jesus, the inspiration description these things are essential to what it means to be a Christian. And you have the modernist who say, you know what we need to revise some of these things in light of new understanding. Now the evangelical becomes evangelicalism in the United States context comes out of fundamentalism.

It's like, okay, evangelicals are engaged in the world. And for a variety of reasons we can't get into here. In a white Christian context.

The social action people who who agree that we need to do things in society to help the poor the needy are also the people who agreed to with the revision of certain central ideas in the Christian context. And what becomes evangelicalism are the heirs of the people who maintain certain central truths of Christianity, but also reject the social action. And so you end up with you forward to the modern period, you now have kind of mature evangelicalism and you have the white mainland tradition where these two things are clustered into two different groups.

On the one hand you have evangelicals who uphold the authority of the scripture and the resurrection and the virgin birth on one side, who have an instinct to distrust of social action as manifesting liberalism. And you have on the in the mainland tradition, a strong emphasis on social action and transformation of society. But as a general rule, not in every case, the revision of certain ideas is related to Christian truth and practicing.

And this is the story that we tell that the evangelicals on this side and the mainland tradition on that side. Now that's the story that I learned in seminary and in one sense is true. But the one thing that you will notice is you can tell that entire story and never mention any black people.

If black people are mentioned in this story, we show up in the 1960s during the rise of liberation theology that begins somewhere else and some black people say and then black people become a manifestation of white progressivism this is kind of how we're put in the theological story you can read most systematic theologies in black people are mentioned phrase with James Cohen in the introduction of liberation theology. The other thing, the question I want to, what I want to pursue the rest of the time that I have is, is what happens if you rewind that story and telling it, instead of telling it from the story of the European who comes to the United States and encounters in the Industrial Revolution and he encounters the Enlightenment. What happened if you tell that that same story from the perspective of the enslaved people.

And you see, and this is the hard part I will kind of give away the game here. Some of the people who are heroes in the evangelical story are the villains in the black story. And what I mean by it is, and this is a part of history that you just have to own some of the same people who are holding the inspiration of scripture and the fundamentals of the

Christian tradition, we're also holding a racial hierarchy, supporting segregation, and the ongoing and enslavement of black people.

And so this is a complicated story to tell when you realize this is the harp or for even fellows to get their hands around, is it, they used to tell them the story in which they are the heroes, and some of those same characters who are heroes often become the villains. And we often say, and this is this is this is like this is all pretty cool maybe I won't even get to my main point in my talk. So let me just man the time well hold on, there were literally Christians who are yelling over and over again don't do things this way.

So now I'm going to tell a little bit of the story from the African American Christian tradition. So it's always good to start with kind of the initial evangelization and we're going to leave aside Christianity in Africa we're going to pick up when the enslaved people arrived in the United States will leave aside African indigenous religions. And then we came over might have been actually Christian we'll leave that to the side, we also lead to the side early African Christianity, that's just a different conversation for a different day.

So I like always start with my own tradition there was an Anglican who goes down into Virginia and he's evangelizing the slaves and this is what he says to them, they have to agree to before they can be baptized when I say England can I mean church of England coming over before the revolution. And this is with the slave enslaved had the greedy before they were baptized, you declare the presence of God, and before this congregation that you do not ask for holy baptism out of any design free yourself from the duty that you owe to your master. And while you live immediately for the good of your soul into partake of the grace and blessings promised to the members of the church of Jesus Christ, in other words, in order to be baptized, where you can become a Christian, you have to accept a certain ideology around the word of your body and so in other words, you have to agree that Jesus cares about your soul, but not your body, and they have this thing in the African American Christian context called the body soul problems, and there's two ways in which were described in this period.

Either we're souls without bodies, in other words, all God cares about is your soul so we can do you can do what you want with your body. And so we're defected human beings, since our souls were normal human souls, they could do what they wanted to our bodies in other words, there was always a dualism attached to the person, instead of seeing us as who we were. Wonder of wonders that method of evangelism was not super effective.

And so you don't have a large scale in conversion of African Americans during what they enslaved during this period. And so, you see a very good beginning of a mass conversion of African Americans, you see it during the Great Awakening, interestingly enough, and here is where evangelicalism, believe or not, intersects with the early, the early

foundation of the black church, because the evangelical tradition, even though they didn't know it at the time they didn't articulate this this time, they preached a doctrine of justification by faith, and the doctrine justification by faith has as its fundamental principle, the essential equality of all people the ideas that we're all saved before God on the same basis, even though the evangelical was so they didn't always articulate some did but not all did, the idea that we're all saved by the blood of Jesus, indirectly speaks to the essential equality of black people, so it's great evangelicalism, we can be basically equal, we will go this way, and see we can see the mass conversion of African Americans. The other thing that happens though, the polities and the ones who are most effective are the Baptists and the Methodists, because they get the as a Baptist you need no one to ordain you get to start your own church, and see the rapid expansion of black churches that got to choose their own leadership.

Now it's important in this context to understand what these black Christians did when they became Christians so okay then now we're starting off in our own tradition, we're not apart of these other churches, it's what black theology is, it's what these Christians believe it's almost like effectively the futuristic era of black Christianity, I'm going to tell you a couple of stories the first one is the foundation of the AME in 1787. This is what Richard, this is the story of Richard Allen in the form, in the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1787 the color people belong to the Methodist Society in Philadelphia, convened together in order to take into consideration, the evils under which they labored, arise from the unkind treatment of the white brothers, the white churches were treated them poorly, what did they do? Who considered it a nuisance in the house of worship, and who pulled them from their seats in an active prayer, so in other words the black people came down to the front, and they kneeled to pray, and they said no you need to leave that space they dragged them out and said you have to go to the color section.

For these and other various acts of un-Christian conduct, we consider that our duty to devise a plan to build a house of our own to worship God under our own vine and fig tree, and to help the world. The black Christian tradition did not form and in the attempt to be separatist, they said that they can't function as Christians, their brothers are not walking in a straight line in accordance with the gospel, so they only have them to function as Christians, and to actually practice neighborly love is to have some separation. So what kind of confessional statements do these black Christians draw up? This is an important question, because there are no societal benefits to adhering to traditional Christian belief.

So whatever these black Christians say about Jesus must arise from their own felt convictions, the African Methodist Episcopal Church adopts a confessional statement that is basically identical to the Methodist with a few additions. Here's one of them. This is a part of their catechism.

In order to be baptized in the black Methodist tradition, this is what you say. What should we do for the extermination of slavery? That's the question in the catechism. Answer.

We will not receive any to our society who are slaveholders, and we have to be told the slave holding us wrong refused to emancipate their slaves. So in other words, they rejected a version of Christianity that said that God only cared about your souls. And they have embraced the form of Christianity.

This is the God cares about your body and your soul. If I can kind of use that, that new miklejor. We'll pick up the black Baptist tradition.

This is from my buddy, William J Simmons. He writes this in 1887. And once again, keep in mind what's going on in the other story that we told around this, the late 1800s and the early 1900s with a fundamentalist monodism debate in the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.

God has permitted us and through him he's implanted in us a vigorous and God spiritual tree and since freedom house has been growing and since freedom we have out of our ignorance and funerary they didn't have these things before they were free. They built thousands of churches started thousands of schools, educated millions of children supported thousands of ministry ministers of the gospel. And so in other words, what do we do when we founded our churches? We both release missionaries for evangelization.

We educated people and we cared for the needy. The African American Christian tradition begins with emphasis both on the transforming power of the gospel and the need to care for the felt needs of people because that was the context in which it occurs. And it was also at the front of the beginning inescapably political because slavery was not just a moral issue.

It was a legal issue. So the black Christian who comes into being during this period has to answer this question. What does the Christian faith have to say to the disinherited.

In the African American Christian tradition says this is this is this is a Christian nation in theory right. Well then the God of the Bible that we all agree to is a God who cares about the experiences of people and the God who made us all equal. So what do you see coming out of this early period of African American Christianity there's four strands will become the black Christian tradition.

The first one is what I would call the transformational strand is interesting that that Professor Wright mentioned the acts 1726 because this becomes a foundational text in early black abolition is literature. What Paul says, at least in the King James time Professor Wright was correct and saying that we're not sure this is the best reading, but this idea that from one blood God has made it all mankind. And so reading this passage they say and this is another example, the African method is Episcopal Church has as this

motto, God our father humanity our brother Christ our, I mean, God our father humanity.

God our father Christ our brother humanity our family. In other words, they're reading at 1726 and saying, we can be a part of one family. And so the primary strand of what comes out of the African American Christian tradition is what I would call the brotherhood and critique tradition.

In other words, it's the possibility of unity. There's also this critique of injustice and society, the second string that you see coming into being at this exact same time, is what I would call the accommodation of the stranded black Christianity, in which because of the racist oppression and some of them are actually writing them in period of slavery. They're kind of in their kind of internalizing some of the negative perceptions of blackness that are going on in the majority of culture, and they're kind of repeating the talking points of saying, let's just trust Jesus and not worry about freedom.

The tradition that is most widely known and in the public, is what I would like to call the back black radical tradition, black radical tradition that doesn't just begin in the 1960s he goes back to this early period. Believe that the only way for black black liberation is to kind of reform central aspects of the Christian tradition. And then last one I would say is black patriotism accepts racism but kind of doesn't really battle it but it kind of focuses on holiness and the sweet by and by.

So my claim then is that if you look at the early black Christian tradition, you see that it, and you can do this like Google the confession statements the seven major black denominations. You will see, they stand out for the commitment to historic Orthodox they believe the Trinity, they believe in you know the inspiration and scripture of Christology, the things that Christians will always believe, because they arose out of the context of slavery and systemic oppression. And this is a social action, and the link between social action and Christian faith, as you don't see in other traditions.

In this tradition, at least in the United States is often out of whack with both white evangelicalism, the white mainline tradition, and the black progressive or radical tradition, which is exist there but like I said, it is one offshoot out of at least four or five different branches. And then we may consider black theology comes from and I'll probably have to stop here, and we can have some conversation later about some other things. Black theology comes out of the James Cohen is probably one of them, the major proponents with in it is what now because black academic theology should be seen as a manifestation of the black radical tradition that has been there from the beginning.

And then the majority was like one strand and James Cohen picks up that strand and articulates it for the public square. Now the interesting thing about this is the James Cohen at the time is at a place called Union Seminary, and Union Seminary is once again a mainline institution. And so James Cohen is that Union and you have the proliferation of black PhDs and so black theology becomes just this one thing that has this origins house

and a mainline seminary.

So why don't you hear a lot about the transformation of strand of the black Christian tradition. Why is that not often seen as in print as what becomes a black radical tradition. And here's the reason.

And this is once again what the hero is having to become the villains. If you're in the 50s to 60 to 70s in the 80s, and you're a black Christian who has traditional theological beliefs, and you're pushing back and a person in a significant way about sins in the culture. So American or very few American white even jolical institutions will end up in a hurry.

So there was no place for black intellectual life to be to be traditional black intellectual life that carries both a strong critique of culture, and an affirmation of the person to work with Jesus Christ and the authority of scripture. That is not a friend in the Academy so where do we go we go into the black pulpit. And so what I call black ecclesia theology is this habit of Bible reading that that emphasizes both the transforming work of the gospel and allows individuals and society in the context of orthodox belief is largely confined to the black pulpit because there's not a huge in road to an academic spaces.

So what I mean then is that evangelicalism has to recognize its own complicity in the suppression of black voices such that you have a distorted perception of what black Christianity is. So who was the inheritable and evangelical context during this time period. The people who are hireable and who are horrible and many this is not all people from this time period.

Most people have become born from like the 60s up through that early 90s to early 2000s. Our African Americans who wouldn't who wouldn't upset the power structure. Who wouldn't engage a strong critique society.

So what you see then is in the public square, you have black radicalism and then black accommodation alism, seen as the only viable options. And why does all of this matter. All of this matters is that if you come to the, the modern period and I'll finish my talks here.

You end up with a little bit of who comes here comes everybody get the Internet. Right. So if the black Christian tradition has this spectrum of the transformational stream, the pietistic stream, the accommodation list stream and the radical stream.

When anyone critiques society. You talk about sin. Because the white Christian binary has these certain clusters.

If you talk about societal sin, you must have these theologically revisionist ideas. And that means that the actual heart of the black Christian tradition. They combined orthodoxy and orthopractic is often not even given space in the in the public square.

And that is a manifestation of theological colonialization. And what I mean by that, me by that is, is the inability to hear the black Christian voice on its own terms and understand that we have our own internal discussions. They can't be easily mapped upon the progressive liberal conservative binary in America, which is why you also see the same constant confusion and then I'll stop here and open up for Q and A. You see the same kind of confusion when you look at places like the UK, which we're not going to give them politics too much but I'm not professor right talks about how even though it was a center left and the United Kingdom, or even global even journalism, they doesn't have these issues of justice.

And so there is unique development of the United States theological history that leads us to cluster these ideas that are preventing modern understandings of the nature of the conversation, what it means to be a Christian contending for justice in the public square. Thank you. Thank you so much, Tom and you saw again.

There's too much here to pull apart and talk about. And think about what we're going to do about all this. But we do have some time and I'm going to try and do my best to focus us.

So there's a number of questions, Tom, as you were doing your recap of a very short history of colonialism and the way that affected Christian theological leaders and church leaders. So, and you use this short little phrase a differentiated unity that became almost impossible for Christians of any tradition orthodox Catholic Protestant in this period of colonial discovery. And of the colonization of new peoples.

This becomes impossible because of the structures in the ideologies that work. One question that comes to my mind where that's a that's a narrative that's getting a lot more exposure right now and that's important. That history needs to be known to a lot more people.

At the same time. I'm curious what and and maybe I guess if we had another historian here. In terms of bright spots or points of resistance.

There were also elements at work say in the Reformation that they did in theory undermine that whole colonial project, whether or not it occurred to people at the time. How would you are how would you describe what you know of as moments of resistance or just an alternate vision as the colonial project is going forward. Yeah, thanks.

Obviously it isn't my period. And if there are genuine historians out there who can contribute them please do I love studying the 18th and 19th centuries but I haven't spent my life doing that normally my normal habitat habitat is the first century as many people will know. But I mean that there are big figures.

I'm very interested in the 18th century with the Methodist movement with John Wesley

was clearly opposed to the idea of a prioritism which just took your soul off to some heavenly flights of fancy somewhere and left the plight of the poor untouched. And Wesley was I think I'm right in saying was one of the ones who was encouraging people like William Wilberforce in in the UK and there were equivalent people in the States obviously to say, look the gospel demands that we campaign for the abolition of slavery I mean to put it no stronger than that. What I see going on then in the 19th century is more and more English Christians are pulling back from that because they're saying no, heaven is what matters we just got to get people to heaven and don't worry about all this all this stuff down here.

But I would say that within the Methodist movement, there was a great tradition of protest, which was on the one hand very firmly rooted in Luther and the Reformation I mean Wesley had his great experience through listening to Luther's preface to the Romans so that this is not from at least at one level, but he also is saying no to the unthinking colonial project. And I want to say, and many people have argued this case and it's a very complex and difficult one at the moment, but colonialism per say has become a bad word in our contemporary discourse and that's an example of what he's always saying before, because there are many people who from Africa say who will look back and say well, the West did all sorts of bad things but my goodness they gave us this they gave us that they gave us the other and it's a mixed blessing like most of the things we humans get up to, but so that's where I would go to start the answer but there must be many many other things as well. And of course, in the in the in the 17th century, there are there are great spiritual leaders who are campaigning against the unthinking stupidity of some of those who just assume that we've got to do things the way we've always done them.

Anyway, I'm just rattling on somebody else should contribute to that. And again, I want to very much address issues that you raised I'm thinking here about even this this period of the discovery of the new world and so on. And just in terms of bright spots it's very easy to think of that as kind of this what's becoming now a new dark ages.

And this is what I would say this as a pedagogical tool. Sometimes when things get depressing in church history, one of the instinctive moves or the history of the world in general, is that we want to downplay the scope of the problem so it feels like there's less work for Christianity to do to solve it. So if it wasn't that it wasn't that bad then we have less emotional work to do to be able to overcome it.

And then we have to make a different philosophy and I say no it wasn't exactly as bad as they say, but that's besides to the world into which the gospel comes. In other words, you look at the story of the slaughter of the innocents. Baby Jesus is born and things seem to be this is the turn of the story angels are you know like things are great baby Jesus is born.



What's the next story that in that the Matthew tells. So in other words, this is not a fairy tale there is no other world for the gospel to move through with which other than the ones that are in which the powerful and willing to slaughter the innocent to hold on to power. And so I don't need to find bright spots in the colonial enterprise in order to justify the importance of the Christian message.

Now the great thing about the Christian so like that's the first part like that's just not how I do theology. I think the policy started from the cross and the resurrection's when I get really really sad. I ask is the tomb empty not are there like some good Christians who I could find a different parts from human history.

Now as I say that though after I've said, nope you got to steer into the darkness. We got to acknowledge the fact the majority of the Christian world stepped on black people rude in a hierarchy of persons. And that is our great shame.

Now, if you own it, you sit with it, you live with it. Then you could begin to ask the question and this is the one thing that is true. When I look back over the history of the church.

There's always an individual here and there. Give me some enterprise. The God is not enough to doubt a witness.

And what that means for me then is that in this present moment I don't need everybody to agree with me. I'm fine. I could be wrong.

I mean it's fine. But what my world is now is to say 50 to 75 years from now. And people are asking, well where were the Christians who were saying that this stuff is crazy.

Well, my work and it could be what it is, but like there was a witness there. And I'm a Christian because there was someone who was there at the time period. You can't look at the abolitionist work that was not just black, that was black and white rooted in Christianity.

But here's the truth. Here's the truth. Like the the Garris Sonians.

They were run out of churches. So you got to tell both those troubles. And they were saying to the Christians at the time, you can't do this to people.

Black and white rooted in the idea of the essentially quality of people. They were saying that you wouldn't do this and Christians wouldn't listen. And so I don't know if like I can blink in the face of the darkness.

I have to say the light shines in the darkness. And that's at least how I don't. I mean, one of the things that I would say that the black Christian tradition has to give to like, like the white Christian tradition, if you can talk about those things in those terms, is that we

haven't developed the Odyssey and experienced the Odyssey.

Like we never, we never believe the propaganda. Because we were the enslaved people. And so we come to Jesus in the context of seeing America before it is.

And we never had any other opinion otherwise. And so we're this comfortable being a Christian while owning the fact that things get really dark at different parts of our history. The hard part is when people aren't used to kind of seeing the darkness, they want to run from it.

And I was like, nope, you got to go into it. And then shine the light there. Thank you.

Thank you. Related to that, Tom, you put your finger on something and you saw I know this audience would be eager to hear you talk about it too. And this is focused on the present moment.

And this overlap of movements that are very much focusing on racial inequalities and inequities, but with a different story attached. And whatever ism you put to it, Marxism, critical theory. So this is a huge area of tension, especially in Christian leadership circles of which story is actually running the show accusations flying both ways.

And people are just looking for clarity in my world pastoral ministry leaders just for clarity and how to lead a congregation or a ministry teams through these accusations and how to get to the real issues that need to be addressed and acted upon. Can each of you speak to both what you see as the issues at stake and then how to move forward. I jump into the Western because you go ahead, Tom.

Can I say I enjoyed what what he saw said before. And the there are two verses in the gospels, which seem to be opposed to each other in one of them. Jesus is saying the ones who are not with you are against you.

And in the other one he's saying people who are not against you are on your side. And they are a tease in the gospels. I mean, there's many verses in the gospels which are a tease because in Mark's gospel, Jesus is always saying, and I think Mark is always saying, if you have ears then listen, or have you not yet understood, or are your heart still hardened.

In other words, some of this stuff, you're going to have to think this through. It's not going to be plain sailing. So the fact that we find ourselves thinking, Oh, help, how do we navigate this.

That's the normal position to be in. It doesn't mean we have made some terrible mistake somewhere. It means welcome to the real world, guys.

And that's why Paul says, I don't want you to be babies in your thinking. Be babies when

it comes to evil, but in your thinking, you've got to grow up and be transformed Romans 12 by the renewing of your mind. And that comes through again and again.

So it is here. We shouldn't expect it to be obvious. It's not written on the surface of the text as it were, how to navigate being a Christian in America today being Christian Britain today being Christian anywhere in the world today.

It's something that demands prayer and discernment. But I noticed particularly that this is actually the same thing that happens when you get involved in ordinary politics. I was a member of the Hazers of Parliament curiously for seven years because some of the Anglican bishops are.

And I discovered that the truth of the problem that you have to learn to collaborate without compromise and to critique without dualism. What do I mean? There are many people who share all sorts of agendas at the same level as you, and you can link arms with them and work together. But you must not compromise.

There comes a point when they say, Oh, well, if you're doing this, we always do this. And then we say, sorry, look, we Christians don't actually do that. We want to work with you on A, B and C. But if you're going to D, E and F, we're just not doing that.

But then likewise, we have to critique. We have to hold up a mirror. We have to speak the truth to power.

But without retreating into the dualism, which says we are perfectly right and you are perfectly wrong, because that's bound to be a wrong analysis. So collaborate without compromise and critique without dualism, and it takes wisdom and discernment and hard work and technical specialized knowledge often to know exactly where those things are going to fall out. And so that's so whether you're dealing with Black Lives Matter or colonialism or whatever it is.

I would say that one of the things that we need is little intellectual humility. And what I mean is what I tried to articulate is the question of the implications of the gospel for social action, which is what all of this conversation about is actually not new. It was raised both at the founding of the Black Church, and the Black Christians had a different set of agendas slave free was a legal slash theological debate, politics and religion.

Jim Crow and the Civil Rights Movement were legal and theological. So in both those cases, the African American Christian said, based upon our reading of the Bible, these are the ways in which we just are ready to be treated. So when you fast forward to the year of our Lord 2020, we actually have a record of reading these texts pretty well, and doing a pretty good job of diagnosing cures.

And if you look back at the abolitionist movement and the Civil Rights Movement in both cases, the African American Christian were accused of adopting a worldview that was

antithetical to the gospel. And so it may be the case that African Americans are guilty of socialism and communism and therefore they're not Christian. Well, before you level that accusation, you need to explain how your, how your particular critique is different from the Civil Rights Movement because it's listened.

They called Martin Luther King of Communists. And they said we can't join the Civil Rights Movement because of the influence of communism and socialism. So we need it could be the case that bears been a way of distracting from the issue at hand.

What is the Christian frame has to say to the disinherited by means of let's start this ideological argument. In other words, it's been done before. It's been done every single time African Americans raised the issue of injustice.

And so one question you should ask is the point in self reflection. Who is the black person who acknowledges the reality of systemic sin affecting the elements of society because this is the black people who I agree with. In other words, critical race theory and socialist and Marxism often function as a way of avoiding the issue itself.

And so it is really important to say, and my disappointing issue itself. The second question that often is put forward is the question of tone and language. I don't like the way that people are talking about this and it was just nicer people will listen like Dr King.

But here's once again, Dr King was not like during his time period. He knew what the problem was. They said that Dr King was way too radical.

If he would just change his tone like the black people earlier than abolitionist era, then things will be better. But if you actually go back to Frederick Douglass and what he said during his time, you know, he was said the problems for his two radicalist is tone. And so the two criticisms, the way that black people talk about racism and the ways that the idea that it comes from a non Christian worldview are just to be honest, the same criticisms that have often been leveled, levied against African Americans historically.

Now I'm going to say one more thing related to this and this is also important here. Every Christian, like the idea of general revelation or common grace means the non believers are able to say something true. So, for example, you have sociology, the elements of sociology that are important with the elements of sociology.

Well, you say, you know what, this is an alternative of the Christian faith. And so you can say I can land thanks on sociology, I can land thanks on psychology, and the whole point of Christian discernment is figuring out what is health and what is unhelpful from any area of knowledge. And so the Christian faith is the main one that we're talking about here, what arises out of a legal context to examine the persistence of inequalities in society.

That's what it does, it analyzes society. Some of those analysts, some of those, some of

the analysis of society is correct. And a Christian might say with these two or three things to cook race theory, say are true about reality, because it describes the human existence.

Again, if you unless you're going to say that one thing encompasses the whole worldview, you're the Christian has adopted a worldview. Let me give you one example that doesn't arise from critical race theory. For example, slavery is a system of oppression.

This is just in law. Do you think that it took like Karl Marx until like a black Christian that structures in society exist that like oppressed people. That's a crazy idea.

And if, as I've shown earlier, I say, hey, that's a structure of society structure of sin and society that exists, then I'm a critical race theory. That's a crazy idea. And so what we need to be able to do is to say, in any field of discipline, just about, it might be elements that I find helpful in the elements that I am that are in tension with what I believe is a Christian.

And that even within that general area of debate, something called critical race theory is a bunch of different things. It is not one thing. It's not how ideologies work or tools of analysis work.

And so Christians who sometimes interact with this stuff are going to come to a variety of things. And I'll say the last thing and I'll leave it alone. Reformation is a great analogy.

The information is a great analogy because here's what happened to the Reformation. Justification by faith is an insight that created all kinds of chaos right it split the charge into a thousand pieces. And if you look at the Reformation there's all kinds of groups that came out of the Reformation, we go, you know what, that was crazy like we don't have shakers anymore they're gone right that was an outbreak to ultimately say it was unhealthy, but all of it was written in this image that came from this theological idea.

And time gives us perfect to say this trend of Reformation clustered here, they went to a good place this trend clustered here went to a bad place. Now, what do you have again in this moment. The relationship between the Christian faith and the disinherited people so the world needs to be addressed.

Yes, that's where the energy is. And out of that insight just like the Reformation, there are tons of things that are going off in a thousand directions, some of which are unhealthy we say you know what, we agree here. So, the answer is, you're going to be a Protestant, as you can't put the genie back in the bottle.

You got to find a healthy way to incorporate this insight that was actually there in Christianity into a way that makes sense. And so what I see now is that people are looking at kind of the chaos that comes from the inside and they can control it. The best

thing that you can do is to make theological sense of it, and the work that people like Tom and I and others are doing are doing the best that we can to say, here's how you think about this in a way that is Christian and healthy.

And if you want to say what can pastors do, you can't run from it, and you can't start side arguments and write blogs and papers about corporate race theory. You got to actually talk to real black people about the issue and come to solve it and this is the last thing I'll say, I'm running out of time. I've done 50 events with African Americans over the last year, since this has occurred.

Not one, it's actually about critical race theory, not one of them. This conversation is largely in obsession with white evangelicalism. I'm not saying that there's an exist in black Christianity.

It's just the fact that you know what you know what black Christians have known about for a really long time, black progressivism. Like this isn't new to us. And we have a long, ongoing dialogue with the progressive tradition.

And we have ways of understanding this conversation. And so this not this new idea that there's black people who have different ideas about God and Christianity and whatever. It's just part of our general conversation.

And so I want you to understand that what I honestly believe. Not that there aren't deconstructive or destructive ways of talking about justice and race in America. What I'm saying is the obsession with a few ideologies related to that discussion is the obsession of white evangelical Christianity.

And it is functioned to cloud the ability to actually hear the concerns of their black brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you again for your your candor and your passion on that and your helpful insight both of you. There are too many amazing and insightful questions coming in and there's like four and a half minutes left.

So again thinking of our audience is primarily ministry faith leaders in local church nonprofit context. If you were going to give just a short list of what's the most helpful and faithful things to do moving forward in a local church with a nonprofit ministry. What are some best practices to pursue and dream.

And what are some things that we just need to avoid and stop repeating at all costs. I would just say, sadly because I'm getting older and I'm semi retired I'm not in a position to implement too much of this at the moment. But it is always a good idea to find Christians that you don't naturally associate with and simply to read the Bible with them and to pray with them at a very basic level, not anything high for looting not massive teaching systems just to be with people who are from different context to you and to read the Bible with them and pray with them.

And when that happens, you have no idea what's going to come out of it. But if it's scripture centered and prayerful, then good things should come out. And it will teach us as Esau said, the humility that we need as we go forward.

I was going to say read the Bible, like sorry, this is going to be boring. But one of the things this is actually true though, and this is what I mean, and this is what maybe this is biblical studies is going to manifest itself again. One of the things I try to give my students to do is to don't protect yourself from the Bible.

In other words, what I mean by that is there certain truths in the Christian faith, the strikers that kind of challenge our ideologies. So we run over to passage and are much more comfortable to us. And so there's tons of passages in the Bible.

This was you know your own ideological camp. If you're in the justice crew. You might need to read those holding his passages in the Bible, where he talked about the transformation of life, and the passage to talk about justification and trusting in Jesus.

So don't defend yourselves from those passages. But if you're from a tradition that has often been very intellectual and very cerebral and thinking about thinking about the right things about God. You need to read those passages that talk about the just society that's going to come in God's address.

And so what I mean is trusting in the entirety of the canonical witness, you may be able to inform the Christian life, trusting that God has left us a book that is there for our good. And so one of the hardest things to get people to do is the different traditions have learned to defend themselves from the scriptures. And so you got to put down to the fences and let the spirit of God do his work as you read these texts.

This is why the Anglican in me has been like the daily office. I'm just often like if you read the Psalms over and over again it just shapes you in a certain way. And so that's what I want to say don't defend yourselves from the scriptures.

If you're a Romans Christian Romans is your book makes you stand the gospel makes you read the law and the prophets read the whole Bible in prayer and conversation in your church and the area. And the thing and this is the last thing I'll say about this. The things that brings unity to all of that is not that I say what whatever I want to say these texts mean they mean.

It is the fact that we're reading together committed to the scriptures to some form of our authority. So look, we come into this this text agreeing that it's God's word for us for our good. And that's what brings the diversity of things together and this is important because I might say, Hey, this is what I see from this text based upon my experience.

I might need someone to say, you know what you saw on this place, you got a little bit muddled. But if it's not, but if it's just simply all this is what it means to me and this is

what my culture says about it. And there's no overarching kind of arbitrator, namely the spirit of God and trying to keep it with the text actually intended to me have hermological chaos.

And so I do think we need diversity of groups of people reading the Bible together in prayer committed to the scriptures ultimate authority. Thank you so much, both of you. This is by nature a conversation that cannot be finished.

It has to be ongoing in our own lives and communities. I saw Tom, thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with us today. Thank you and thank you to everyone who's been online.

It's extraordinary to think of you all out there and wish we could see you all personally, but this is a great way. So thanks to Tim and the others have said it. Yeah, I would say it's weird that like me in order to have this conversation, we had to get, you know, 800 people to do it, but we were.

It was like for three and a half years, we're probably just focused on collation. So this is reminding me of how much you made me keep me, make me still my feet when I was doing PhD. So thank you again for all that you've done.

Thank you. Catch up the next time we in person. Indeed, indeed, bless you.

We want to thank again, the co-host sponsors of this event, Regent College and Seattle Pacific Seminary Portland Seminary. The Merdot Trust Kevin and the Palau Association for helping us put these on. We're really grateful.

Thank you each of you for coming. I think you're going to be sent a survey to let us know about how this experience was beneficial or helpful. I know all of these organizations want to be doing more events like this in the near future.

May God have mercy upon us and guide us by his spirit as we go out into the world. Thank you everybody for coming. Well, thanks again to Together PDX for permission to broadcast this conversation between Tom Wright and Esau McCauley here on the podcast.

Again, links to the original video are with today's show. Next time it's back to our usual Q&A format as Tom answers questions on his best-selling book Surprised by Hope. Do certain Bible passages contradict the idea of a renewed earth? What method can I use to share the gospel? What's the fate of those who reflect God's love but don't believe in him? And if the Kingdom of Jesus here, why is the world still a mess? Lots of questions for Tom on next week's show.

For now, thanks for being with us. You can find out more about the show and support us at PremierUnbelievable.com. Subscribe to our newsletter and we'll send you a free ebook



on the evidence for God and of course the link to ask a question of Tom on this show. We'd also love you to join us for Unbelievable the Conference 2022 on Saturday the 14th of May.

You can attend from anywhere in the world. Unbelievable.live is the place to book your seat. All the links are with today's show.

God bless. See you next time.

[Music]

(buzzing)