

‘What is the Good of the Church?’: A Series of Reflections on Ecclesiology for Advent 2021

Session IV: ‘The American Heritage of Racism: Can an Ecclesial Vision of Hope be Found?’

(with Professors Sarah Coakley, Vincent Lloyd and Jonathan Tran)

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Some key *Questions* for discussion arising from video IV:

1. Vincent Lloyd discusses a historic ‘black natural law’ tradition which he claims has been occluded and lost since ‘civil rights’ discourses became dominant in the late 1960s (and these in turn have now come under critique, or despaired of, in some quarters). Key features of this older ‘natural law’ tradition are: i. a focus on the human as indelibly made in the ‘image of God’; ii. a quest for mutual *trust* in relation to this ‘image’; iii. a dynamic vision of change in the churches and in society inspired by *hope* for the future; iv. an integration of intellect and feeling as propelling this vision; v. a vision of ‘Church’ that brings unexpected allies through worship, prayer and mutual devotion.

How do you respond to Lloyd’s account of ‘black natural law’, and what do you see as its potential theological promise for life in the Church within the context of contemporary debates about historic American racism and its continuing impact?

2. Jonathan Tran discusses the problem of what he calls the current ‘identarian’ views of ‘race’, in which the focus is on individual racialized ‘identity’ (‘black’ or ‘white’), rather than on communal political responsibility for widespread economic conditions of poverty. (These, points out Tran, affect large numbers of people of *different* ethnicities). Pointing to an example of Asian American Church life in San Francisco which has transformed a deprived area (traditionally ‘black’) through creating a ‘micro-economy’ of sharing and mutual support, Tran offers a challenge to thinking about the Church in economic as well as spiritually-transforming ways. See esp. Mark 10: 17-31; Luke 10: 25-37, Acts 2: 43-46, 4: 32-37.

How do you respond to Tran’s critique of the contemporary focus on ‘racial identity’ as intrinsically individualistic? Can local churches make a real difference to local economies of deprivation, as Tran claims? How can church ‘practices’ (bible-reading, prayer, sacraments) truly transform communities, rather than simply re-instantiating a status quo which may be unconsciously ‘blind’ to racialized deprivations?

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Introduction: The Episcopal Church’s current responses to American racism, including ‘Becoming Beloved Community’ (see again John 15: 1-17).

- A. Vincent Lloyd on ‘Black Natural Law’ (in Frederick Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois and Martin Luther King, Jr.): A Challenge to Reconsider a Lost Tradition of Transformative Theological Thinking.
- B. Jonathan Tran on ‘Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism’: A Challenge to Consider A Way of Being ‘Church’ that Changes Economic and Political Culture.

Select Bibliography:

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/ministries/racial-reconciliation/resources/>, for the official resources on racism and Reconciliation and Justice on the Episcopal Church website

Vincent W. Lloyd, *Black Natural Law*

_____, *Black Dignity* (forthcoming)

Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*

Anna Julia Cooper, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper*

W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*

Martin Luther King, Jr., *Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King*

Jonathan Tran, *Asian Americans and the Spirit of Racial Capitalism*

Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together*

Kecanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*

Cathy Park Hong, *Minor Feelings: An Asian American Reckoning*

Jay Caspian Kang, *The Loneliest Americans*

Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class and Race* – also see

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/09/opinion/structural-racism.html>