



THE CENTER FOR  
FORMATION  
JUSTICE  
AND PEACE



CORACLE

## **"DO YOU WANT TO BE WELL?"**

*Diagnosis, Treatment & Healing  
for the Church in America*

*June 8, 2024*

---

# **INTRODUCTION:**

*The Triad of Racism,  
Patriarchy, and Christian  
Nationalism in White  
American Evangelicalism*



**REV. BILL HALEY**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
CORACLE

Thank you for joining our conference and conversation today. Thank you especially to the groups that have made it possible through their partnership: [Coracle](#), the [Center for Formation Justice and Peace](#), [Missio Alliance](#), [Natasha Sistrunk Robinson Ministries](#), and [Chasing Justice](#), and to all those who have expressed their support of this event.

**This conference is a question for the church, more specifically, the White Evangelical Church in America: “Do You Want to Be Well?”.**

Jesus asked this question in John 5 to a man at the pool of Bethesda who had been sick for a very long time. ‘Do you want to be well?’ *The question assumes that there is a sickness, and we are asking this question to the church in America— “Do you want to be well?”*

This morning we’re going to hear from white voices diagnosing sicknesses in the white evangelical tradition, and then this afternoon we’ll look to the voices of color to provide pathways to healing and hope. We’ll have brief opportunities for silence in between our speakers this morning, and spiritual practice and prayers, and conversations with each other. Our posture in offering this is one of honesty, humility, grief, and as must always be the case for followers of Jesus, hope.

**Friends, we’re gathering for this conference because we are people motivated by deep loves:**

We’re doing this because **we love Jesus Christ**, the Son of God, our hope and the hope of the world. He is beautiful. Jesus’ truth and beauty deserve clear witness.

We’re doing this because **we love the church**, not because we always want to or because it’s always easy, but because we have too, following in the footsteps of the one who died for her, grieves for her more than we do, and is still committed to her.

We’re doing this because **we love marginalized people**—especially women and people of color—who get wounded by the church.

And we’re doing this because **we love our fellow Christians** who may be unknowingly captive to a vision of Christianity that isn’t always fully reflective of Christ, a vision that even hides him from our eyes.

We're doing this because we are a people **motivated by deep love**, and **love stands up for what is good, true, and beautiful**. *Love stands up for Christ's sake, and for the sake of others. Love calls out danger when there's a threat to the beloved.*

*When sickness threatens the beloved, love responds with diagnosis and treatment for the sake healing.*

**If I have skin cancer beginning to spread** across my face and I can't see it, I want someone who loves me to tell me about it so it doesn't eventually disfigure and even kill me. I want someone to tell me about it so I can go to a doctor, and get a diagnosis, and to get treatment so I can be made well.

**If the air that I'm breathing has a toxic gas in it**, like radon, love tells me to find fresh air.

**If hard things need to be said** and named for the sake of my own health and flourishing, love says hard things and names them.

So I speak about White American Evangelicalism as a long-time insider, about as inside as a person can be. I don't have the time today to list my evangelical pedigree, but in this regard, my blood is very blue.

I apologize in advance for very high-level generalizations. I wish I had time today to fully develop, explain, and support what I'm about to say, to define things clearly, to trace the whole history, to cite all the sources, to illustrate it fully, and to nuance more carefully some sad and sobering clarities that I've come to in the past couple of years. I'm not alone in these observations, over these past couple of years many more people are talking about this for which we can be grateful. **These topics deserve much greater attention** from within the White American Evangelical movement, from here on out I'll just call it White Evangelicalism.

And here it is: *White Evangelicalism is shot through as a movement, it is laced with a significant presence of what I call "The Triad" of white supremacy, patriarchy, and Christian nationalism.*

This Triad of supremacy, patriarchy, and nationalism **was present in White Evangelicalism's history, foundations, and formation, and it persists** in many of its

current forms and is on display in many of its current fights or in its current places of silence. This Triad of supremacy, patriarchy, and nationalism are woven together and create part of the cloth that created White Evangelicalism, continues in it, and is perpetuated by it.

What's been going on in America and the American church in the last 8 years has caused many to scrutinize the church in America and try to figure out what's happening and what causes it. Some talk more about patriarchy, others more about racism, still others about nationalism. We're saying that all three of these things are present in this movement, albeit often unconsciously by the millions who are part of it, people who really love Jesus and truly want to follow him, but who have been misled by their leaders, people who inhabit **a Christian culture that over time actually can become malforming and obscures God and Christ**. A fish doesn't know it's wet.

*Now, it must be noted that White Evangelicalism is not representative of the whole church or of the Christian tradition.* When I say it this way it makes the point— the 20th Century, white, American, male, Protestant, evangelical tradition is a very narrow slice of the pie when it comes to 2000 years of church history around the world and global Christianity now and across time. It's just that this very young and narrow slice presents itself as the truest truth, and the only right way of belief that others must believe in order to be right, sometimes even saved.

*But this movement was created in a specific time and country and culture by a specific type of person.* It had its origin in a time and atmosphere that was not healthy. White Evangelicalism was built on the foundation of American Christian Fundamentalism and prior expressions of conservative American Protestant Christianity. It was built on and continues to be a carrier of the values of its founders—White, Anglo-Saxon, conservative, Protestant, Males (WASPM) of the late 1940s and 1950s. This movement asserted itself as being divinely authorized and commissioned by God for the sake of the “the Gospel” and being “faithful to the Bible.” It asserted that their way of understanding the Gospel and the Bible was the only right way to believe and that a person must believe it in that particular way in order to be saved (that is, to avoid hell, and since there is no second chance, you'd better believe it).

In its foundation and formation and then promulgation, White Evangelicalism carried with it the culture of its own origins in mid-20th century America:

- when women were in their place and patriarchy was assumed.
- when people of color, especially black people, had better stay in their place and white supremacy went almost unchallenged.
- when victory in World War II had vindicated America as God's chosen country and Christian nationalism soared to new heights.

**This culture was *created in, created, and creates* events and institutions that carry with it tendencies to racism, patriarchy, and nationalism.**

Time doesn't allow exploring:

- the explicitly racist roots of Dallas Theological Seminary, a school which has had a profound impact on American and Christian culture with its dissemination of pre-millennial dispensationalism.
- or how Billy Sunday, the greatest evangelist before Billy Graham, was actually paid off by the Ku Klux Klan.
- or how the founders of the flagship evangelical magazine "Christianity Today" intentionally platformed FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover—famous for his racism—because they saw Hoover as forwarding the mission of "Christianity Today" and the movement it spoke for.
- or why the relationship between Billy Graham and Martin Luther King Jr soured in spite of Graham's laudable efforts to desegregate his meetings.
- or how the initial motivation for evangelical's anti-abortion activism was actually rooted in resistance to desegregation which gave birth to what would be called the Moral Majority and other groups.
- or Christian segregationist academies in the 1960s and their contemporary forms.
- or the patriarchal foundations of the English Standard Version of the Bible.
- or many many other examples of how potent a force this Triad is within the formation, propagation, and current culture of the white American evangelical tradition.

Blind acceptance of these three woven threads of The Triad was the atmosphere then, that was the atmosphere White Evangelicalism was born in and still remains its atmosphere now, so much so that **millions of adherents aren't even aware of it**. It explains a lot of what we're seeing in America today.

You've heard of the toxic gas called radon, some homes have radon detectors in them. Radon is an invisible, colorless, tasteless, odorless poisonous gas that if you breathe it long enough will lead to sickness and death. If the air you're breathing has radon in it, how do you know?

David Gushee puts it well, "My book, *After Evangelicalism*, concludes that 'evangelical Christianity' turns out to have been at a theological level little more than a rebranding of fundamentalism by a certain group of mid-20th century white men, although at a cultural level these men succeeded perhaps beyond their wildest dreams in creating a religious identity and even a subculture that has stayed with us now for eight decades."

We can certainly be grateful and thank God for some emphases in the White Evangelical tradition, such as sharing Jesus with others and developing a personal relationship with Jesus, holding a high view of Scripture, having an impulse towards mission, and starting various relief and development efforts, having a strong emphasis on character formation, innovating in worship, holding the value of community, and more.

We can certainly *be grateful and thank God* for those evangelical institutions, churches, and individuals **who have recognized the blind spots and complicity** of the American evangelical tradition and have sought to address them in their own lives and spheres of influence.

*For all of its benefits and strengths, however, White Evangelicalism turns out to be as much if not more about White, Anglo-Saxon, conservative Protestant, Male culture and assumptions than it is about actual Christianity as presented in the Bible or modeled by Jesus, and this tradition expends inordinate energy defending and 'conserving' those White, Anglo-Saxon, conservative Protestant, Male values under the religious guise of 'defending the Gospel'.*

Michael Bird wrote an article in 2021 titled, “*Some Parts of Evangelicalism Do Not Need To be Deconstructed ... They Need To Be Destroyed!*” **He asks two important and disturbing questions**, “What if the system, the institutions, the networks, the culture, and the biases that prevail in predominantly white evangelical churches use the Bible in such a way as to codify and justify practices that are harmful, divisive, and overtly political. What if this so-called evangelical American Christianity turns out to be just a cog in a bigger machine?”

Another important question then becomes, “**What exactly are conservatives trying to conserve?**”

*Brothers and sisters, the air of White Evangelicalism, its atmosphere, has radon in it.*

While there are many good people and some good churches, the atmosphere and ecosystem has a poison in it. *Many who are doing what they do sincerely out of a genuine love of God and desire to be a sincere follower of Jesus are unconsciously part of and perpetuate a system that supports “The Triad”.*

While most white evangelicals would not say they are racist, patriarchal, or Christian nationalist, it is **the ecosystem** in which these dear, genuine people live. They do not know that the air that they are breathing is toxic, that it has radon in it, and that if they breathe it long enough it will hurt them, and others, and especially women, and men and women of color, and even white men too.

**This is not the fault of men and women in the pews. This is the fruit of misguided leadership.** You’ll notice in the gospels that Jesus reserves his anger almost exclusively for religious leaders.

In Mark 7.8-9 he speaks directly of and to the religious leaders of his own day: “‘In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” And he said to them, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!”

-----

**“Do you want to be well?” Jesus asked a man.**

## To the church in America, “Do you want to be well?”

When Jesus asked that question of the man who'd been sick for a very long time and needed help, Jesus was giving him a part to play in his own healing. **Jesus gave him agency in his own healing. He had to choose it.** Jesus said to him, “**Stand up**, take up your mat and walk.” The man had to choose and act to stand up for the sake of his own healing. And he did, and Jesus healed him.

For the White Evangelical church in America, **we need to choose to do our part in our own healing**, we need to say “Yes, we want to be healed”, and **stand up** in hope that Jesus will heal us.

**Standing up** means **scrutinizing our own history, asking hard questions, reading actual history and having a fearless commitment to truth** and facts and what the Scripture actually says, even when the facts are hard to face and the Scripture is bracing.

We need to reevaluate what we've been told to believe and see if it lines up to what the Bible is actually saying and what Jesus actually modeled and told us to do.

We must adopt the posture of honesty, humility, grief, and as always hope. Doing these things is to stand up for the sake of our own healing.

*“Do you want to be well?” Yes, we want to be well. Jesus is beautiful, we want him to have a clearer witness. The Kingdom of God is gorgeous, we want it to come more fully into the world and more fully in America.*

Before we ask our brothers and sisters of color to point us towards the paths toward hope and healing, we need to take an honest look at the sickness, we need to accurately diagnose the illness, to do a deeper dive on the ways that Christian nationalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy afflict the White Evangelical church in America.

---

This introduction, by Rev. Bill Haley, was written for the conference, *Do You Want to Be Well? Diagnosis, Treatment, & Healing for the Church in America*



You can find [full recordings here](#)

Rev. Bill Haley is the Executive Director of [Coracle](#) and a priest in the Anglican Church of North America. He is a board member of the [Center for Formation, Justice and Peace](#). He lives in Falls Church, VA with his family.