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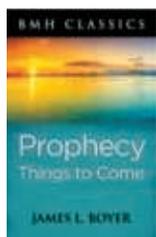
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GraceConnect, founded in January 2004 as *FGBC World*, is published four times a year by the Brethren Missionary Herald Company (BMH), a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization affiliated with the Charis Fellowship. The publication's mission is to nurture Great Commission teamwork by connecting people and churches of the Charis Fellowship. Inclusion of an article or advertisement does not necessarily indicate endorsement by the Brethren Missionary Herald Company or the Charis Fellowship.

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Staff: Liz Cutler Gates, *managing editor*; Bridget Fryman, *circulation*; Terry Julien, *graphic design*

Board of Directors, Brethren Missionary Herald Co.:

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SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

What I didn't understand, I avoided and, maybe even, feared.



As I traversed the path of preparing the copy for this issue, I was struck by a statement from Robert Soto, a Grace Brethren pastor who has drawn from his heritage as a Lipan Apache to develop a unique ministry to Native Americans along the southern border of Texas.

“People fear that which they do not understand,” he said. That described my desires as I planned this issue on race.

I grew up on the farm where one of my great-grandfathers housed an underground railroad station. I don't recall a time in our family where one ethnic group was held in esteem over another. Yet as discussions over race made the headlines, that family history did little to help me comprehend the experience of the African American, Native American, Japanese, or others who help make up this great land – and how that might impact their view of the gospel.

What I didn't understand, I avoided and, maybe even, feared.

I set out to educate myself and, in doing so, to provide some thoughtful resources for others in the Fellowship. I'm grateful to Jermaine Chaney at Grace College and Clive

Craig at Moody Bible Institute who listened to my awkward questions about their experiences and who challenged me to dig further. I've devoured works by Isabel Wilkerson, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Ronald Takaki, and others. The stack of unread books beside my chair continues to grow as I seek to learn.

I was also reminded how the Brethren movement has always had a heart for all nations. Of course, our interest in people in other lands is legendary. But in the U.S., the Brethren were sensitive to the Negroes in their midst during pre-Civil War days. (See *The Brethren Perspective on Race*, page 16.) Racial equality was an essential belief that has continued to permeate the Grace Brethren movement. Throughout our history, there have been efforts to take the gospel to the Navajo Indians, Spanish Americans, and Jewish ethnic groups. And while those ministries are no longer active, the role they played in the Charis Fellowship has been significant.

I'm sure this issue won't provide every answer on the topic of race in North America, but I trust it will begin a conversation. The perspectives of pastors Irv Clark, an African American, and Robert Soto, a Native American, have been reassuring as they seek unity in their congregations and beyond. Tim Sprankle's thoughts on white privilege challenged me to look at my own experience more closely. Johnston Moore's views on trans-racial adoption remind us to care for all orphans, not just those who look like us.

As I put this issue to bed, I'm reminded again that Christ died for everyone – without regard to the color of their skin. Unity in the faith begins at home – and in our local churches. It is nothing to be feared.



Liz Cutler Gates, lbgates@bmbhbooks.com, is the editor of Grace Connect. Since 2010, she has served as executive director of the Brethren Missionary Herald Company. She and her husband, Doug, live in Warsaw, Ind.

CLIMBING DOWN THE LADDER

by Timothy D.
Sprankle



Jesus—full of glory and truth, united in fellowship with God the Father, boasting unlimited and unrestricted access to divine attributes—released His grip on divine privilege.

RAISING A BLACK SON HAS HEIGHTENED MY SENSITIVITY TO SECOND GLANCES, SUSPICIOUS LOOKS, AND THE PRIVILEGES OF BEING WHITE.



I grew up on a cul-de-sac in a suburb of Columbus, Ohio; it was one of many privileges in my childhood. My parents modeled fidelity in their marriage, provided a stable home, instilled a protestant ethic, earned a handsome income, and gave me numerous opportunities: summer camps, Little League, theater lessons, and a winning smile secured by years of orthodontic treatment. I earned none of these privileges but let them propel me up the social ladder.

A top-notch education:

another rung, another privilege.

Early work option as paperboy:

another rung, another privilege.

Access to a thriving, Charis church:

another rung, another privilege.

Citizenship in the great USA:

another rung, another privilege.

Born male in a man's world:

another rung, another privilege.

White: another rung, another privilege.

Two years ago my wife (Liz) and I adopted a child from Ethiopia. Sensi does not evidence the stereotypical features of Ethiopians: caramel-colored skin, fine facial features. He was born in the Gambela region, close to the border of Sudan. My son is dark, his forehead broad, his lips lush.

Sensi does not look like me. Or his mother. Or his sisters. He has made our family “conspicuous,” meaning we stand out. The frequency of second glances has lessened in our immediate community, but I notice them when we venture out of our hometown.

Raising a black son has heightened my sensitivity to second glances, suspicious looks, and the privileges of being white. I know I can walk down my street at dusk wearing a hoodie with no fear of repercussions. A day will come when my black, soon-to-be teenage son would be wise not to. I can walk through a record shop without extra eyes on me. A day will come when my black, soon-to-be-teenage son will be scrutinized when strolling through stores. I could be pulled over for speeding and get off with a warning. A day will come when my black, soon-to-be-teenage son may get pulled from his vehicle for the same infraction.

I have greater awareness of these realities as the white father of a black son. My privilege—inherited and culturally-conditioned—grants me undeniable advantages in the world as it stands. I may not like white privilege (or male privilege or any other privilege), but my feelings for an idea do not invalidate it.

My sister-in-law, a decade-long resident of Chicago, introduced me to the idea of white privilege. She pointed me to a podcast (“On Being”), where the host, Krista Tippett, interviewed a white female, professor Eula Biss, about her wrestling with racial advantage.¹ I listened, nodding at times, shaking my fist at times, and, by the end, feeling powerless. Biss waxed eloquent but offered few conclusions. She had no answer beyond awareness.

Fortunately, I found the answer in the ethic of Jesus. He climbed down the ladder of privilege.

Paul’s letter to the Philippian church pivots around one of the most profound descriptions of Jesus Christ. Referred to as the Christ Hymn, Philippians 2:6-11 details Jesus’ pre-existent glory, selfless incarnation, inglorious death, and unrivaled ascension to God’s right hand. Virtually every commentator notes the “inverted V-pattern” of the text: from glory to grave to greater glory. The passage is doctrinally rich and doxologically potent. But Paul’s driving purpose for the Christ Hymn is neither theology nor worship. He intends a lesson on ethics.²

After greeting the church (1:1-11) and updating them on his circumstances (1:12-26), Paul calls them to live as citizens of God’s kingdom: bold in suffering, united in spirit, humble, and selfless (1:27-2:5). The Christ Hymn illustrates how to live—the attitude to maintain—in a culture preaching the gospel of Caesar and promoting the virtue of status.

Residents of Philippi would have felt the pressures of gaining and preserving honor in their status-conscious populace. A Roman province stocked with retired military,

¹ Listen or read the transcript from “Let’s Talk about Whiteness” here: <https://onbeing.org/programs/eula-biss-lets-talk-about-whiteness-jan2017/>

² This does not invalidate the theological or doxological contribution of Philippians 2:6-11. Paired with Hebrews 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:15-20, it makes a powerful statement about the divinity of Jesus. Linked to Isaiah 53, Mark 10:45, and 1 Peter 2:20-25, it highlights the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Set beside Revelation 1-7, it emphasizes the glory of Jesus.



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WE CLIMB DOWN TO RAISE OTHERS UP.
JESUS PERFECTED THE ETHIC.
LET'S BEGIN THE DESCENT.



Philippi was known as “Little Rome.” Archeological findings in Philippi tell a story of status, privilege, and broadcasting one’s honor on memorial stones, donor plaques, and political writings.³

Paul, a true student of culture, knows the honor game people play in Philippi. And he counters. It is the only letter he writes without asserting his apostolic title (1:1); instead, he exclusively takes the moniker “slave of Christ Jesus.” He labels his inherited and ascribed list of bragging rights a pile of manure (3:4-8). He emphasizes heavenly citizenship over Roman (1:27; 3:20). And, at the heart of Philippians, Paul presents Jesus as the perfect ethical model of climbing down the ladder of privilege (2:6-11).

Jesus—full of glory and truth, united in fellowship with God the Father, boasting unlimited and unrestricted access to divine attributes—released His grip on divine privilege. Hellerman writes, “The point is not that Christ ‘emptied Himself’ of something. The point is that He ‘emptied Himself,’ or poured himself out.”⁴ His descent showed that selflessness and sacrifice for others are greater aims than securing one’s own status.⁵

Talk of white privilege is not popular among white people. Talk of male privilege rubs most males wrongly. We feel defensive when anyone points out our naturally-born privileges. I’ve felt it at least. But defensiveness is not productive. Neither is guilt. We did not choose our birth race, gender, culture, generation, or socioeconomic condition.

A better starting point—a more Christ-like attitude—is for God’s people to *admit their privileges*. I am a white, male, married, middle-class, educated, American whose first loyalty belongs to Jesus. My privilege probably means local police and mortgage lenders give me the benefit of the doubt. My privileges probably mean I have more access to education, career, and recreational activities. My privileges probably mean I have no relatives currently incarcerated.

The story for women, immigrants, and black people is different. They often start lower and climb slower on their ascent up the ladder of privilege. Until we admit our diverse

set of privileges, feelings of guilt, blame, anger, victimization, and suspicion will fester. These qualities are a far cry from the mind of Christ.

Of course, the disparity of privilege does not call us to disparage all privileges. Rather we may *appreciate our privileges*. I appreciate my parents’ fidelity and financial stability. I appreciate my country with its freedoms and progress. I appreciate my seminary education, safe neighborhood, and strong masculinity. But healthy appreciation sees every privilege, advancement, and opportunity as a gift from God (Jas. 1:17). And God wants us to share his gifts not hoard them.

Thus we must learn to *limit our privileges*. Pastors need not take the closest parking spot at the local hospital but can leave it for family visitors. Men need not get the “last word” at family meetings but can practice the art of listening. Wealthy people need not buy the “Fast Lane” pass at the amusement park (racing past the poor slob in the regular, hour-long line) but can practice the art of patience. Politicians need not take special transportation for every trip across town but can interact with the people and learn from them like Churchill’s famed subway ride. And white people need not keep their safe silence from racial issues since they are the protected majority but can learn to engage in difficult racial conversations as peacemakers. (For some people to speak up about white (or male or evangelical) privilege would spell their death. Such is the mind of Christ—even death on a cross.)

If the Gospel truly breaks down spiritual walls—between Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-22; Col. 3:11)—making us one people of God, we might suppose God wants to destroy social walls, as well. Or, to keep with the ladder metaphor, God wants us to *leverage our privileges* to lift others. Perhaps this means teaching English to immigrants or applying to become foster parents. Perhaps this means befriending an Indian family who recently joined your workforce. Perhaps this means mentoring at-risk youth from a different racial background. Perhaps it means moving to a more diverse neighborhood to love others who are truly “other” than we are.

The expressions will vary but the direction will remain the same: we climb down to raise others up. Jesus perfected the ethic. Let’s begin the descent.

Timothy D. Sprankle is pastor of Grace Brethren Church, Leesburg, Ind., where he first expressed these thoughts in a sermon.

3 See Joseph Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Church Today and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 81-98.

4 Ibid, 145.

5 God would vindicate Jesus, heightening his status (name and seat) in the second half of the Hymn (2:9-11).

THE IMPACT OF RELATIONSHIP

by Irv Clark

I believe the majority of urban and suburban communities in this country are sitting on a bombshell; they are one major incident away from blowing up.



PAUL STATES, IT IS THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO CREATES OUR UNITY. WE ARE COMMANDED TO WORK AT IT. UNITY LIKE THIS DOESN'T HAPPEN AUTOMATICALLY, WE MUST INTENTIONALLY PURSUE AND LABOR IN IT.



On July 7, 2016 my phone rang; it was my 26-year-old son. With deep emotion in his voice, he struggled to speak as he tried to make sense of the recent police shooting deaths of three black men over the previous three days.

“Dad I don’t understand. Why?” he tearfully asked.

I had no answers for him.

Later that night as I sat in silence emotions begin to well up inside of me and tears began to stream down my own face. I asked the Lord the same question – why? I turned on the television only to hear another devastating report of five Dallas police officers shot down in a revenge killing. I sat stunned; my heart hurting; tears continuing to flow.

As the pastor of a culturally-diverse congregation, God made it clear He wanted to change the upcoming Sunday message. I began by stating boldly, “Every police officer is not bad cop. In fact, the majority of them are good cops who do their jobs with honor and put their lives on the line every day.”

“We have a number of good police officers in this congregation. In the same vein, not every African-American male ages 18 to 28 is a criminal.” (I would now also add, even those who have criminal records have value and do not deserve to be shot down.)

To say we live in a country full of racial and political dissension is an understatement. It is incidents like these and the August 2017 incident in Charlottesville, Va., that give clear evidence we are still a very racially and politically divided nation. I believe the majority of urban and suburban communities in this country are sitting on a bombshell; they are one major incident away from blowing up.

A few weeks after this incident, I invited two police officers to meet with a young men’s Bible study group. First, we allowed the young men, ranging in age from ages 18 to 27, to share their hurts, fears, anger, and experiences they’ve had with law enforcement. The

majority of them, including some who were Caucasian, shared their negative encounters.

The officers then spoke from their perspectives. One explained he went into law enforcement because of negative encounters he experienced with police officers as a teenager.

They also shared with these young men how to conduct yourself if you are ever pulled over. In the African-American community, this is referred to as a DWB (driving while black). The majority of African-American fathers have had “the police conversation” with their sons: how you are to respond if you are ever pulled over by police.

We ended this meeting by examining what God’s Word says. I share this because we have to bring people and groups together, in a safe environment, and allow them to have honest, productive, face-to-face, God-honoring dialogue. Meaning that after all is said and done, *what does God say?*

There are those who feel our president could do more to unify the nation; however, I truly believe God has called the Church to exemplify unity.

Jesus prayed the *Father* would make us one (unified) as the Father and the Son are one. He commented that our unity would be a testimony to the world that the Father sent the Son and that the Father loves us (John 17:2-23).

Paul states, it is the *Holy Spirit* who creates our unity. We are commanded to work at it. Unity like this doesn’t happen automatically, we must intentionally pursue and labor in it. Everything about Christianity points to our oneness (Ephesians 4:3-6).

Ephesians 2:14-16 explains the Lord Jesus removed the enmity and created one new man out of two formerly separate groups, making peace. Paul explains Jesus broke down the middle wall partition which separated us. Therefore, we are reconciled in one new body. The Church, by its created nature, is an example of cultural

WHEN WE FAIL TO EXHIBIT LOVE, UNITY, AND PEACE WE ARE METAPHORICALLY REBUILDING THE VERY WALL OUR LORD DIED TO BREAK DOWN.

and racial unity, peace and love. When we fail to exhibit love, unity, and peace we are metaphorically rebuilding the very wall our Lord died to break down. This is why James makes it clear that the showing of partiality is outright sin (James 2:9).

“By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35 ESV). The “all” refers to the unsaved world. Our true impartial love for one another authenticates to the world we are true followers of Christ. What is our love for others who are different from us communicating to the world?

We are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Light is seen, it illuminates by being a visual hands-on example that glorifies God and points to Christ. Salt preserves health and godliness in society. Natural salt works as an antiseptic helping to bring healing and it also makes people thirsty for God.

The Church, as a whole, has done a poor job being salt and light in this area of unity. God intended us to be His example, but instead of leading we have followed the culture and as a result in many ways, to the world, we have lost our relevance (saltiness) in the area of cul-

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WHAT IMPACT COULD WE HAVE ON THE CULTURE IF WE WOULD BE WHAT GOD CREATED US TO BE, WHAT CHRIST PRAYED AND DIED FOR US TO BE?



tural and racial unity. However, it is never too late to change that and be what God has called us to be.

So what do we need to do? What is the responsibility and call of the Church? God's Church?

First, we need to admit we've done a poor job representing His love and unity to the world and ask for God's forgiveness and resolve to be what God has called us to be.

Secondly, we must begin building bridges in the body of Christ. We can't wait until these social time bombs explode before we attempt to build bridges; it will be too late. We must work at building these bridges and relationships now. Church leadership needs to intentionally build relationships with leadership of other churches and commit to fellowshiping regularly. Leaders must set the example.

In order to build bridges cross-culturally, we need to reach outside of our personal and collective comfort zones. Some ask, "How do I build relationships with those who are different from me?" The same way you build relationships with those who are like you, people are people. We must want to build these relationships.

Social media is not the place to have these discussions. Sadly, it often leads to misinterpretation, judging of motives, confusion, and further division. This kind of relationship building should be done in person, in a safe setting, and be conducive to building and fostering relationships.

Once relationships are being built, we need to HEARU. Initially, it points to the importance of practicing James 1:19, being quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger, in every relational context. We need to make it our priority to listen and understand others first. Furthermore, it is an acrostic.

HONEST - We need to have an honest and heartfelt dialogue. Understand there will be those who are passionate about their experiences and opinions, and that's okay. Don't view their passion as negative and let

that deter you from having a meaningful conversation that builds bridges.

EMPATHY - Even though I may not totally understand or be able to relate to another's view and experiences, I can empathize with you. Empathy is the ability and action of understanding, being aware and sensitive to the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of another.

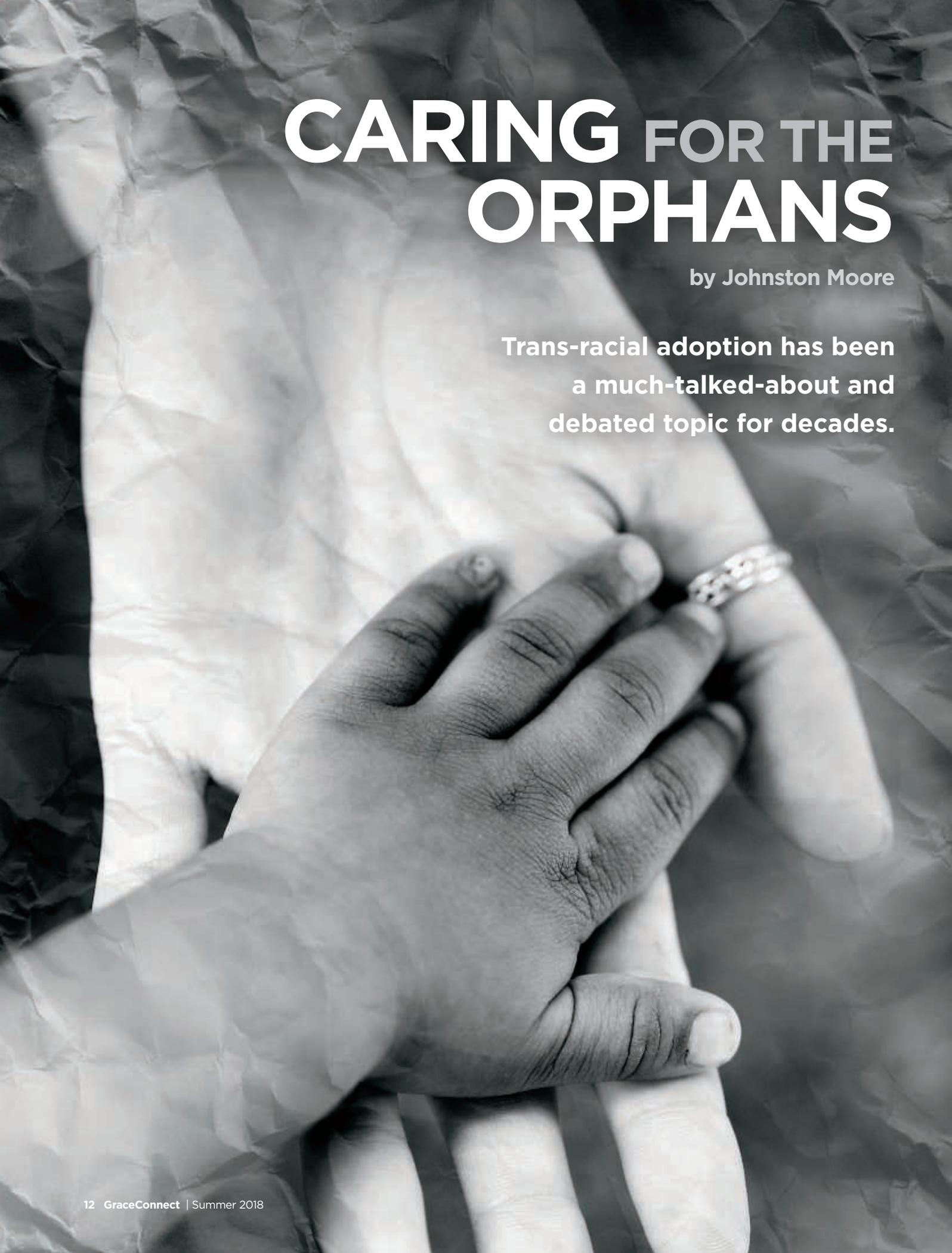
ACCEPTANCE - True acceptance is not tolerance. We are instructed in Romans 15:7 to accept one another even as God has accepted us. You are accepted and will always be accepted as my brother in the Lord, even though we may have different opinions on earthy matters.

RESPECT - There is a saying, "We agree to disagree agreeably." The believer needs to take this even further. We agree that even if we disagree, I will not lose respect for you, nor will I disrespect you.

ULTIMATE - We will agree that the cause of Christ and the gospel of Christ is our ultimate priority. Do my actions, words, and social media posts, promote the cause of Christ? Do they draw people toward the gospel? All other issues, no matter how important personally and socially they may be, must never take priority over Christ and the gospel. There are some in Christendom and in the world who equate evangelical Christianity with Republicanism. These two terms are viewed as synonymous in many circles. This is not true. It is not wise, and it is unhealthy to the cause of Christ and the spreading of the gospel in our society.

What impact could we have on the culture if we would be what God created us to be, what Christ prayed and died for us to be? Let us be the seasoning of love, peace, and unity to our world. Pray for God's wisdom and direction and then boldly take the actions He leads you to make.

Irv Clark is the senior pastor of Grace Brethren Church, Clinton, Md.



CARING FOR THE ORPHANS

by Johnston Moore

Trans-racial adoption has been a much-talked-about and debated topic for decades.

GOD CALLS US TO CARE FOR ORPHANS.
PERIOD. HE DOESN'T SAY WE ARE TO CARE
FOR ORPHANS WHO LOOK LIKE US.



“The National Association of Black Social Workers has taken a vehement stand against the placement of Black children in white homes for any reason. We affirm the inviolable position of Black children in Black families where they belong physically, psychologically and culturally in order that they receive the total sense of themselves and develop a sound projection of their future.”

—From the National Association of Black Social Workers Position Statement on Trans-Racial Adoptions, September 1972.

“Jane” looked a bit puzzled as the middle-aged, African-American woman approached her in a grocery store in her small Texas hometown and asked her if she remembered her.

The woman reminded her of a conversation they’d had in a restaurant a year or so before when Jane, who is Hispanic, stood in line ordering food for her family, including her husband, who is white, and three of their children, who are African-American. The woman had confronted her, asking her why she had “their” children. Taken aback, Jane responded that they were her children because she and her husband had adopted them, loved them, and took care of them. The woman told her emphatically that white people should not be able to adopt black children. Jane explained that she believes children need to be loved and cared for regardless of race. She then challenged the woman, asking her how many children she had fostered, adopted, or mentored.

Trans-racial adoption has been a much-talked-about and debated topic for decades. The 1972 position statement by the NABSW may seem to some as quite extreme and perhaps a product of its era, but it’s interesting to note that, in spite of subsequent statements apparently aimed at “clarifying” its meaning, the statement itself has never been retracted.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), passed in 1978, gives preference for adoptions and foster care

placements of Native American children, some of whom have mere traces of Native American blood, to Native American families over families of any other race.

Though the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 (MEPA) prohibited the use of a child’s or prospective parent’s race to delay or deny placement, it does not trump ICWA, and it did not change the minds of many in the system that children need to be in families that look like them.

Racism in foster care and adoption isn’t limited to policies or social workers and professionals with biases, unfortunately.

Just before we moved from California to Virginia in 2016, our social worker called about a newborn baby girl who was found abandoned and partially buried a few miles from our home. She needed a home, but social workers were having a hard time finding one. Though we knew it would likely delay our move, we told our worker that if no one had opened their home to her by mid-morning the next day, we would take her. We asked the worker why it was so hard to place her, and she bluntly replied, “Because she’s black.” Keep in mind that this was Los Angeles County, as diverse and progressive a community as anywhere. There are numerous Christian foster/adoptive families in the area. A healthy newborn baby girl needed a home, though, and no one would give her one, because of her race. That should not be. Thankfully, a family did finally step forward to take her in.

Various studies have looked at the impact of trans-racial adoption on adoptees over time. A 2016 article in *Psychology Today* reports that “A recent study adds to substantial evidence that concerns about trans-racial placement have been overblown and that, in fact, children are capable of developing a solid sense of identity and family regardless of the racial composition of their families.” (“Is Transracial Adoption Harmful to Kids” by Rebecca Compton, Ph.D., May 11, 2016)



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As a follower of Christ, a foster and adoptive parent, and an advocate for children in foster care, my opinions are based less on scientific studies, and more on how I see the best interests of children in light of God's word, and my own experiences with the system and the children who have come into our home. I simply think that some issues are more urgent for children than whether or not a child grows up with the same skin tone as his or her parents and siblings.

In light of the "substantial evidence" referred to in the above article, and in light of what Scripture calls us to concerning orphans, we need to stop asking whether trans-racial adoption is okay for kids. We need to recognize that it has happened and will continue to happen. We must learn how we can best help children and families adjust to and cope with the reality that they are a multi-racial, and possibly multi-cultural, family who is living in a nation and a world that have been marred by the fall.

We need to be honest with ourselves about our own racist beliefs, latent or not, and beg for help from the Holy Spirit to deal with them once and for all.

God calls us to care for orphans. Period. He doesn't say we are to care for orphans who look like us. He tells us to care for orphans. Caring for orphans means meeting their needs. Children without families to care for them need families. And the love of a family is far more important than race, or culture.

Psalm 68:5-6 says that God is Father to the fatherless, and that He sets the lonely in families. It doesn't mean that He sets the lonely in families who look like them.

James 1:27 tells us that pure and faultless religion includes caring for orphans in their

I SIMPLY THINK THAT SOME ISSUES ARE MORE URGENT FOR CHILDREN THAN WHETHER OR NOT A CHILD GROWS UP WITH THE SAME SKIN TONE AS HIS OR HER PARENTS AND SIBLINGS.



distress. There is no asterisk reminding us to care only for orphans who look like us.

God doesn't call us to discriminate in caring for orphans, so why should we tolerate such discrimination in ourselves or in others?

Over the course of 16 years, my wife and I adopted seven children from the Los Angeles County foster care system, including a daughter who is half-Hispanic, one-quarter Native American (Lumbee), and one-quarter Caucasian. For those who want to race-match in foster care and adoption placements, where is the family for our daughter? Another daughter is half-Cambodian and half-Italian-American. Are families with a similar makeup lining up to adopt? If so, how long should she have waited until the system found them? We have a son who is half-Hispanic, 7/16 Caucasian, and 1/16 Native American (Iowa Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska). Got the perfect family for him? No?

According to the latest Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) report, there are nearly 200,000 white kids in foster care in the United States. There are more than 100,000 black kids and almost 100,000 Hispanic kids. Among the more than 117,000 children waiting for adoptive



families, more than 51,000 are white, more than 26,000 are black, and more than 25,000 are Hispanic. More than 60,000 of those children waiting for adoptive families have been in foster care two or more years. With so many kids languishing in foster care, can we really afford to match each according to his or her race? I am guessing most of the waiting children would say no, and I'm guessing God would, too.

I am not suggesting there won't be issues for you or your child related to race if you adopt trans-racially, but I would argue that the problems will pale in comparison to issues your child would face if he or she had no family at all. Help your child navigate the issues with the help of Scripture, others who have walked the road before you, and experts in the field. But do so with the knowledge that in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Gentile. The Gospel cuts

across racial and cultural lines, and we, as His children, must do the same with our lives and in our families as long as children need homes.

As Jane listened to the woman recount their previous encounter, the woman smiled at her, telling her that, now, a year later, she had nearly completed the licensing process to become a foster/adoptive parent. She told Jane she couldn't wait for her first placement and that she didn't care what race the children would be. She now understood how great was the need for families to love kids. Before parting, she thanked Jane and gave her a huge hug.

Amen.

Johnston Moore, a founder of Home Forever, Permanency Advocates for Children, is a member of Grace Church, Long Beach, Calif. He and his family currently live in Virginia.

THE BRETHREN PERSPECTIVE ON RACE

by Viki Rife

The presence of slavery in their new adopted home was not something the Brethren had encountered in Germany. Their response was to search the Scriptures.



ALTHOUGH THE BRETHREN'S BELIEFS IN HUMAN EQUALITY WOULD HAVE PUT THEM IN THE ABOLITIONIST CAMP, THEY BELIEVED JUST AS FIRMLY IN PACIFISM AND NON-RESISTANCE.



John's day of attempting to sell his produce in Elmira, N.Y., had ended, and he was driving his wagon back to his farm. Suddenly he saw a carriage with a runaway horse careening toward him.

He directed his horse to pull the wagon over and courageously lunged for the bridle of the runaway. With all his strength he held the horse and spoke gently to calm it. Amazingly, the horse settled down without injuring him.

The door of the coach opened, and he saw the pale, frightened faces of three women. They were wealthy Mrs. Charles Langdon, her daughter Julia, and a nurse. They lived nearby, on Quarry Farm.

This incident was a life-changer for John T. Lewis. Born a free black man in Maryland in 1835, he had migrated to southern New York at the beginning of the Civil War. A youth with intense spiritual interest, he had been baptized into the Brethren church at age 18.

The grateful Langdon family rewarded Lewis with gifts and money and asked him to come work for them as their coachman. At that time, a suitor of the Langdon's daughter Olivia was visiting. He and Lewis initiated a close and lifelong friendship.

Olivia's suitor, whom she later married, was Samuel Langhorne Clemens, also known as Mark Twain. Years later Clemens said of Lewis, "I have not known an honest man nor a more respect-worthy one...I hold him in high and grateful regard." Lewis is considered to be one of the inspirations for the character named Jim in Mark Twain's much-beloved book, *The Adventures of Huck Finn*.

The presence of a black man among the Brethren of that time is not surprising. Racial equality was an essential part of the church's beliefs. After arriving in America in 1719, Jacob Price, a key elder, encouraged his son John to marry the granddaughter of Chief Tamanend, the Delaware leader who had made a treaty with William Penn.

The presence of slavery in their new adopted home was not something the Brethren had encountered in Germany. Their response was to search the Scriptures.

The Annual Meeting was the place where decisions were made concerning what was appropriate biblical conduct. Minutes from before 1778 are not available, but it is known that by 1782 the stance on slavery was assumed, "Concerning the unchristian negro slave trade, it has been unanimously considered that it can not be permitted in any wise by the church, that a member should or could purchase negroes, or keep them as slaves."

By 1797, questions arose about new converts who were slaveholders. The minutes that year read, "...In case a person is drawn by the grace of God, who has negroes, and desires to be received into the church, ...it is the brotherly and united counsel that brethren and members having negroes as slaves... to let their slaves go free, with a good suit of wearing apparel as is given to a white serve." Also included was a way for those who could not afford to immediately free their slaves to seek the counsel of the church on when the purchase price had been satisfied and then to free them. In addition, if the slave had children, the church member was to "have them taught reading and writing, and bring them up in the fear of the Lord."

Other minutes refer to the slave trade and slaveholding as "a most grievous evil, and should be abolished as soon as possible." Those who insisted on continuing to hold slaves were to be treated by the church "as with any other gross transgression."

In 1835, 25 years before the start of the Civil War, a question apparently came up about whether black persons could be full members of the church. The fact that they were members was assumed. It seems the problem involved their tradition of "greeting one another with a holy kiss." The minutes that year underscored that the Bible is to be preached to all nations and races, and those who come as repentant sinners cannot be refused. However, they also acknowledge that some of the white members were not willing to give the holy kiss to their black brothers and sisters, and requested that the black members bear with their weakness, and "not offer the kiss to such weak members until they become stronger and make the first offer."

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AS WE LOOK BACK ON THE EARLY BRETHREN AND THE ROOTS OF CHARIS FELLOWSHIP, WE SEE A PEOPLE WHO STOOD AGAINST THE CULTURE OF THEIR DAY TO ADVOCATE FOR GOD'S VALUES AS FOUND IN SCRIPTURE.



There has been some discussion about records which show that some of the Brethren purchased slaves. Some historians have assumed it was an example of “do as I say, not as I do.” However, there is the example of elder David Long, who preached strongly against slavery. At one point, as he passed a slave auction, he was so moved that he purchased all the slaves and proceeded to free them.

Knowing the unassuming ways of the Brethren and their strong disgust for slavery, it would not be surprising at all for them to quietly purchase slaves with the specific purpose of giving them their freedom. This explanation fits much better with what is known about the Brethren. There are records of a slave purchase made by one influential leader, Samuel Mumma. Based on the integrity and character expected of Brethren leaders, it is pretty certain he would not have been permitted to continue as a leader if he were going against the decisions made at the Annual Meetings.

Although the Brethren's beliefs in human equality would have put them in the abolitionist camp, they believed just as firmly in pacifism and non-resistance. As the Civil War approached, the Brethren along the Mason-Dixon line found themselves suspect by both sides. In the first place, both sides were asking them to swear an oath of allegiance to commit to a side, and they did not believe in taking oaths. Besides, their pacifist beliefs led them to refuse to enlist, angering both armies.

In the last few years before the Civil War, Brethren leaders began warning their congregations that they might have to suffer imprisonment and possibly death for their stance on abolition and pacifism. Some of the Brethren did indeed suffer imprisonment, and Elder John Kline was martyred as he went back and forth fulfilling his pastoral duties.

Ironically, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, Antietam, was fought partially on Brethren farmland.

Samuel Mumma, already mentioned, was one of the lead elders in the nearby Brethren, or Dunker, church. The location of his farm was considered strategic to both sides. Upon reaching the farm, the Confederates burned down all the buildings except a small springhouse. Other Brethren families found their crops destroyed, either by the fighting or by burning.

Many of the Brethren had fled as the fighting moved toward them, but the ones who were left retrieved wounded soldiers, regardless of whether they were Union or Confederate, and cared for them in their homes. Some of the wounded were moved to the church, which served as a hospital in the ensuing days. The church has been rebuilt and today serves as a monument on the Antietam National Battlefield.

At some point, one of the soldiers at Antietam appropriated the large Bible that had been at the front of the church. He took it home with him to New York, and it passed through several hands over the next four decades. Eventually, those who were left of his regiment decided to return the Bible to the church. There was one problem. They did not know whether the church was still in existence, or who the pastor might be.

There were no Brethren churches in New York, but someone knew of a Brethren man who lived in Elmira, John T. Lewis. He had kept in touch with the Brethren through their publications and was entrusted by the regiment representatives with returning the Bible to its rightful place, the little church near Antietam Creek.

As we look back on the early Brethren and the roots of Charis Fellowship, we see a people who stood against the culture of their day to advocate for God's values as found in Scripture. May we, too, search God's Word as we make decisions about how we will live.

Viki Rife is descended from a long line of Brethren families. She currently serves as executive director of Women of Grace USA.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

Robert Soto, a Lipan Apache, wants to reach his community for Christ. He recognizes that traditional methods might not be the best way to reach a culture that is steeped in tradition and often marginalized.

His congregation asked him to consider a ministry for Native Americans when their friends wouldn't accept invitations to attend the Grace Brethren Church he led in McAllen, Tex., because it was "a white man's church."

Wanting to use the best of the Native American cultural expression for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, he began to make changes, first by adding Native praise songs to the service.

The move was almost the downfall of the growing church. Rumors swirled as Soto, who is also known for his feather dancing in colorful Native dress, was accused of being a demon worshiper, a deceiver, and worse. Attendance dropped, they lost their building, and his salary was dropped. "I almost walked away from the ministry," he remembers.

"I concluded I was not going to allow man's opinions to destroy the calling God had placed in my heart," he says.

Today, he pastors the McAllen Grace Brethren Church, which has a more contemporary service led by a small worship team. The Native Church is more contextual in worship. "Both services are made up of Natives and most of them participate in both," he says. (He has also founded four American Indian congregations: three in Texas and one in Florida, along with Son Tree Native Path, a ministry which reaches the Native community in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.)

When undercover federal agents entered their family pow wow in 2006 and confiscated eagle feathers that had not been issued by the federal government, Soto fought back.

Seeing the action as a violation of religious freedom, he filed suit. On June 13, 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit decided in Soto's favor in *McAllen Grace Brethren Church v. Jewell*, and the feathers were ultimately returned.

"We do not worship the eagle feathers," he says, stressing that the feather is a symbol of one's Nateness, as the cross is to Christians. "It is difficult for one to understand the importance of the use of eagle feathers not so much as a pastor, but as a spiritual leader among our people. It is a testimony to our Native community that I have not forgotten who I am and where I came from."

As an evangelical pastor, he feels the use of eagle feathers becomes an opportunity to share the gospel with those God has called him to serve. "It is part of my contextual ministry as I attempt to reach my people through our cultural expressions given to us by God when he created our people. As Natives, as with any other culture, we take the best of who we are and use it to honor and glorify the Lord and to bring others to Jesus Christ," he says.

For more information on Robert Soto and McAllen Grace Brethren Church v. Jewell, see becketlaw.org/case/mcallen-grace-brethren-church-v-jewell.



Photo credit: Becket