

**Kevin:** Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you very much for joining us. We have a few people here, I'm sure that more will join as the time proceeds. This is the latest episode of our informal series of webinars that we've run here at JCFJ. In the past, before COVID, we used to regularly host what we called the Brown Bag Lunches, where we would invite an expert speaker of some kind to address us, have a conversation after their talk, and eat together. Sadly because the COVID cases are so dire here in Dublin, we're not going to be able to share our sandwiches together today, but I, on the plus side, it means that people from further afield are able to join us and reflect on this important issue together.

My name is Kevin Hargaden. I'm the director of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, where I work as a social theologian. That job title makes it sound a bit like I get to take people for pints to talk about God, which wouldn't actually be a bad idea, but it in fact, means that I'm given the job of thinking about the connection between Christian belief and our wider society. And there are a few issues that are more pressing in our age, within our wider society than in racism so I'm delighted to welcome Dr Taïdo Chino today to help us to explore that question. What does it mean that God is Not White? I've first met Dr Chino almost 10 years ago, we spent a couple of very happy years together sharing an office in the attic of a very old building right by the north sea in Aberdeen.

And I can honestly say that there are very few people from whom I have learned more in my life than Taïdo. He has a PhD from Aberdeen University. He did his postdoc at the acclaimed Tübingen University in Bavaria under the legendary and sadly recently deceased theologian, Christoph Schwöbel, and for the last few years, he's been teaching at a small liberal arts college in Illinois called Augustana College. One of his responsibilities there is to help students think about how American society has been shaped by Christianity And so that means he spent the last couple of years thinking an awful lot about how Christianity has been shaped by racism. The plan for our session today is that Taïdo and I will have an informal dialogue about race and Christianity. And through that time, you can add questions as they occur to you in the Q and A box, which you see at the bottom of your zoom screen.

To the best of our knowledge, those questions can be made anonymously so this is a safe space and you can ask whatever question you like and don't think, oh, that's a dumb question, or that's an obnoxious or an insulting question. Don't allow any kind of self-censorship to occur, if the question occurs to you, it's almost certain that someone else will appreciate you raising your voice or in this case, typing out your thoughts. At the end of about a half an hour of our conversation, my colleague Martina Madden, who's keeping track of all those questions will take over and share a more open conversation. So without stating the obvious, I would like to say that I am delighted to have Dr Chino here and he's come to join us, of course, on American Thanksgiving, so thank you very much, Taïdo.

**Taïdo:** Thank you. It's my pleasure to be here and I think something appropriate about talking about Christianity and it's complicity with racism on an American holiday like this, and so it's a delight to be able to come and join all of you, and as you've expressed think through something that is crucially important in not just in the American context, but increasingly in other places as well. And so I'm excited about the time that we're going to be able to share together. And I should I just from the

outset, by the way in addition to thank you for the invitation to come and share is to just recognise that I am very much working out of an American context and recognise that the way racism expresses itself from one place next is really quite different.

And so a lot of the examples that I'll be sort of sharing about are the ways it's manifested in American culture and American church culture in particular, it's going definitely going to look very different from one place to the next. And so I'm really grateful to have the chance to have be a dialogue with, for you to be able to kind of help understand how it might take shape in this context. And I'm also aware just of the time, this is a massive topic and books and books and books are being written around all of this and so in some ways we're just scratching the surface but I do hope that the time that we get to spend together is productive.

**Kevin:** Absolutely. I'm quietly confident that you and I might be able to say something, at least we'll be interested, and hopefully everyone else will as well. Taido the question that I think is important to start off with is when did you first become aware that the church had a problem with race?

**Taido:** That's an interesting question with an interesting response. I came to faith pretty late adolescence, early adulthood. I was maybe 18 or so and I started dating. This is actually important. I lived in Arkansas. I come from the great state of Arkansas, where a former president that some of you might be familiar with also hails from, Bill Clinton. This is in the American south, and graduated from high school there and attended my undergraduate there. And I started dating a young woman and her grandmother was a kindly old lady, as sweet as could be. She was a prominent pillar of the community, she taught what's called like an organised Bible study that hundreds and hundreds of women during her leadership in that ministry would've come under.

She was well recognised, well loved, well respected and in many ways was just a delightful person to be around. But when I started dating her granddaughter I became aware she didn't tell me directly she's too sweet, an old lady to do that, but I did become aware that she had an issue with my dating her [grand]daughter, who was Caucasian. And that I could wrap my head around because I encountered racism before, but it was, she had a biblical justification for doing this. And I can still remember it the way the reasoning, as it was explained to me back then was arguing out of a particular verse in the Bible, out of the book of Leviticus chapter 19, I don't remember the exact verse, but the verse goes something along the lines of this, where there is a prohibition against breeding two different kinds of cattle together, or mixing together two different kinds of material to create a fabric for clothing.

And the suggestion from that was that there is a non-mixing principle established in the Bible that God doesn't want to mix things that don't belong together. So you take that verse and then you go to other verses in the old Testament that often talk about the Israelites weren't to marry foreigners. And I could understand that a little bit, but I was still very young in the faith and I'm trying to understand, what does any of this have to do with me today? But those kinds of verses were brought up as a biblical justification for not getting involved with people romantically from another race. And again, I'm very young to the faith, but even I recognised in my inability to sort of

navigate the complexities of scripture, that something seemed a little bit off there, and I couldn't put my finger on it at the time.

I just thought, oh, this is some old lady who has some weird views about the Bible or whatever. So, I moved on from that experience, I say I moved on from, I did actually end up marrying this young woman that I was dating. And, actually I should go back and circle back to her credit. Despite the fact that she might not have been all that excited about it, she became one of my most hardened fans later on. She would attend the church that I would minister at, she was very complimentary of the kind of ministry that I was engaged in. But it took me some years to recognise that she wasn't a one off that she, wasn't doing some kind of strange thing that other people hadn't also doing, but that she actually stands at the kind of the culmination of a long line of approaching the scriptures to sort of justify various kinds of racist ideologies. And so that was my first encounter with it, and really put me on a decades, long journey of discovering actually there has been a long history of wielding Christianity in the scriptures to support these various racist projects.

**Kevin:** I think that's very important because when you told me that story first, you told it to me in a jovial fashion, and we were able to kind of laugh at this silly viewpoint, but it is in fact deeply embedded within the history of the Christian church. Do you think that the church is alert to its own history of racism?

**Tido:** No. And I would say that's maybe one of the most significant problems that the church is facing is that it has neglected to think about this history, to reflect on it, to potentially repent from it, and it's lack of awareness of this long history of a racist implication and, the church's implications in it is detrimental. You share that I teach at Augustana College, and I'm working primarily with undergraduates and it was in this context that I was not for the first time made aware of just the ignorance of around the history of Christianity's complicity with racism, but it's striking that I'll be teaching undergraduates, relatively serious minded students, and yet they're just completely ignorant of this history.

And so a lot of the work that I find myself doing is needing to unpack that long story. That really stretches back - it begins with the beginning of America. And the colonial projects that the various European nations were enacting during the 16th century and forward, that's when race actually began to sort of come into focus, at least in the way in which we begin to understand it today. We hear a lot about race being a social construct, because it is, but that construct had to emerge at a certain point in time. And that's... people have ideas about when this really came into effect, but race as a way of organising bodies really came to expression during this colonial period.

And I think that it's telling that it's during this period of time, when not only are sort of empires expanding, but along with it, there's a religious backing that is needing to reframe the story in such a way that one can show up into a new place into a new land, and have to imagine how it is that Christianity is meant to be, sort of a propelling force in this in this new place. And the kinds of recategorisations of the value of human bodies of black bodies, and brown bodies, the mental and theological gymnastics to do that are profound, I think. And it's one that is deeply

embedded in the kind of Christianity that gets imported that animates the, the project from its entirety, from the very beginning.

**Kevin:** Yeah, I think too few people recognize it's too easy for us to assume that because there's something intrinsic in human beings that like to understand the world in terms of us and them. And it's very easy for me, where I grew up in a town called Leixlip, there was another part of Leixlip called Confey which was up the hill. And so as children, we were the Far Enders and they were the Hillers and there shall never be peace between these two tribes. And we kind of read that out and imagine that therefore racism is a kind of natural thing, and on that level, it is. But actually, when we talk about racism and the consequences of racism, say for example, in the United States, that's a distinctive colonial project that dates to 400 years ago. And we know this to be the case because in 1200 AD European Christians didn't think you could own slaves and by 1600 AD European Christians were fully legitimating a slave-owning state. And the missing piece there is the racial hierarchy that was not fabricated out of nothing, but certainly theologically imagined at that point.

**Taido:** Yeah. I think it's important to separate the ethnic... ethnocentrism is one thing, and racist projects are another thing, and they're linked in some kinds of meaningful way. And one of the mistakes that I think that at least the church in America sometimes does, this isn't just how profound that the racist construct has kind of over overtaken, is to read racism back into the scriptures. To talk about scripture in such a way as to say, it's dealing with issues of race and it's to say, well, no, actually it's dealing with issues of us and them and ethnicity might be playing a part into that, but it's not necessarily race as a category or it didn't exist at the time when the scriptures were being written. And that's just telling in my mind that how much it's overtaken our imagination about the shape of the world, that we tend to read everything through the category of race.

**Kevin:** So would it be true to say that the church doesn't know what racism is? Is that too bold a claim?

**Taido:** I think it's absolutely the case. And not only does it not know, it doesn't know on multiple fronts what racism is.

**Kevin:** Say more about that. Unpack what that means.

**Taido:** I don't know what the participants who are showing up for today, the kinds of Ecclesial backgrounds that they are necessarily coming out of, but I come out of one that is American evangelical kind of expression of Christianity. And it's one that tends to view race or racism as a personal problem, a personal sin problem. That the reason that we have racism in the world is that there are individual people who have racist views and who have been enacted racist kinds of actions. And that's the only lens that they are able to sort of see the problem of racism through. When they're evaluating whether or not racism is a problem, all they're ever really doing is looking at themselves, or their neighbours, and saying, I'm not a racist, and I've never owned slaves, and neither have the people who are sitting next to me.

Then they might even genuinely think we don't believe in segregation. We think that that schools are ought to be integrated, we're not living in that age, therefore, how

can I be racist? I think everyone should be treated fairly and humanely. So as long as I think this is the case, and as long as the people I know who I go to church with, think this is the case, why are we making a big deal about this? So it's reduced to an individual's attitudes and actions, and that's fine. That is a component of racism. If there were no racist individuals, then potentially there would be no racism on a more grand scale. But then on the other end of the thing and this is, again, I'm just playing out how the conversation works out in the American context and there's vigorous debate.

So on the other end of the spectrum is to think of it systemically, that racism, it's not individuals, yes, individuals might be racist, but the real problem of racism is that it's so deeply embedded in the structures of our society, whether it's things having to do with economics, economic disparities and recognising that certain races, not just certain races, but identifiable races are lower on the socioeconomic scale than white Americans. The list could go on and on where the structural pieces show up, that with overwhelming majority in the, the American prison system, that it is African Americans who find themselves imprisoned over white Americans. Housing practices for generations of practice that was called redlining, where it was both the people who were in making a zoning decision and realtors were coming alongside, everyone was of cooperating to keep certain races out of certain neighbourhoods, and that this practice was ordained. And importantly that these are all Christians of who are engaged in these kinds of practices, so it's the systemic nature of it that is coming on. And so the debate that happens in the church is between this, is it an individual problem, or is it a systemic problem? And that there's no imagination for trying to think through it in terms other than that. I don't know if that kind of debate is being replicated here in Ireland.

**Kevin:** Well, the debate in Ireland is present and is rich where it occurs. There are organisations who are very capable of introducing people to these conversations. I think of the Dublin City Interfaith Forum who are not obviously addressing racism particularly, but they are full of people who are alert to these kinds of conversations. But I would say that generally the Irish church, again, broad generalisations with lots of exceptions, has a real problem with grasping racism because of our imagination on this question being shaped by American popular culture. So we think that races are people who wear white sheets over their head and go and put burning crosses on the lawns of nice African American people. And if you're not like a caricature Ku Klux Klan member, then you are not a racist. And that allows us a kind of a double movement.

We can project racism onto the other. Those Americans have a racial problem, and we can obscure the racism present in our society. So it's not like, and I'm not making a direct comparison, but you've talked about economic inequality, penal policy and housing provision. And we have an ethnic class of people in Ireland who are disproportionately impoverished, who are disproportionately imprisoned, and who live in temporary halting sites on the edges of towns, absolutely kept out of stable housing by good Christian upstanding moral people, and that class of people is called Travellers. So our racist discourse, if it adopts the pointers and cues from the United States or from the United Kingdom, a very important and vibrant conversation will occur, but it also might be a vibrant conversation that allows us to avoid the most

pressing example of both individual and systemic racism in our society, the prejudice that we have against travellers.

So I think that unpacking the difference between the bog standard anthropological basis of human beings like people who are like them, and they are sceptical of people who are different from them, and making a clear distinction between that and racism is an important first step, so that we're able to recognise the ways in which our society is racist. It's not just a problem that other people have. It's such an ironic kind of devilish little formulation that we have here. So I think that the stuff that you're describing has direct relevance and maybe in our wider discussion others will be able to feed into that. So would you say that a task facing the church, both in the United States and elsewhere is to offer an alternative that manages to transcend the either individual or structural response?

**Taido:** Yeah. And if I had the solution for how to solve racism...

**Kevin:** Well, presumably you'd still be here with us.

**Taido:** That's right. That's right.

**Kevin:** But you'd also be having conversations with other people too, yeah.

**Taido:** No, even more so. But in all of my thinking around this, I am interested in a liberalised context, helping students begin to understand these sorts of things, but I have a genuine concern that the church would be able to more profoundly think about the ways in which they might respond to and address problems of racism that emerge in their contexts. And I don't think that it's a one size fits all kind of solution, but when I look at the American church, and again, I'm speaking about that which I know best, part I'm struck with and it's not like they're not responding to the questions around race and problems of race. It's just that they're inadequate and I'll say it this way. They're discourse mimics the kind of discourse that happens in broader culture and there there's no theological imagination for the ways in which the church might have something distinctive to offer or say into this conversation. And that's what troubles me. And so part of what I think the church needs to spend some more time doing is to thinking of a properly Christian and or theological response to this issue.

And I think that needs to happen on several fronts. And firstly it's that churches would simply recognise racism for what it is, which is sin. And most churches can quite frankly, get there pretty quickly. It's not that difficult. Churches, at least that I'm aware of, they're willing to say, yeah, racism is sin, but that's about the end of the theological reflection that they tend to do around this, which is a shame because I think the church is relatively well equipped. It has a history of reflecting on what is the Christian solution, so to speak for thinking about sin and overcoming as much as one's able to, sin and the practices of sin in the world. And more and more I think it's a framework of, the theological word for it is reconciliation. And I think that's work the church needs to begin to think about and not in superficial ways but in a sort of processed way.

And the value I think of being able to a framework of reconciliation in place allows for a kind of capacious for the different kinds of ways that whether it's on an individual level, on an institutional level, individuals and institutions of various kinds. So for example in America, one recent example is Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and it's recognition that that they were involved in, in the practice of slavery. They profited at a time when they needed to in the 19th century, they sold 272 slaves for a sum of money. And they have made efforts recently to want to make reparations for that. And I think it explicitly in a process of reconciliation and so they, as best, they've been able to, identify the descendants of those of those slaves and to begin to make kinds of renumerations, not just to them individually, but to the communities that they're a part of and keeping an open door to wanting them to be able to participate in the life of the community that they have.

And so I think that's a kind of gesture, but that wouldn't make sense. That's a good thing for a college to do, but how might a churches go about doing it somehow differently? And I've been a part of churches that have been in interested in trying to work a process of reconciliation in their own context. So for example the church I was a part of in Arkansas, recognise that in our context, segregation has left a lasting mark even to this present day. And we want to begin to repair the damage done by segregation. And so they would host as part of their discipleship curriculum, a series of sessions that would help white parishioners to be able to sort of recognise the ways in which racism has damaged their communities. And we have black parishioners as well, and they were coming together and having honest conversations about the ways in which each other perceived one another, and over some time relationships were being built to sort of undo the work. And we were under no illusions that you have a few sessions and all of a sudden the process done, but it was a movement towards reconciliation that you just don't find space for in that many ecclesial communities.

**Kevin:** It's fascinating to think about a church self-consciously or a Christian community self-consciously trying to conceive of what it means to be an agent of reconciliation in the aftermath of racial hatred and prejudice. But I suspect that most churches and most kind of Christian organizations, the Jesuits, Georgetown University, they, they have the bandwidth and the capacity and the resources to think that through coherently. But how does a parish who recognizes that there's a problem in Ireland with our colonial legacy, that's incredibly complicated. We were colonized and yet Irish people were also agents of imperialism. And then we have the very recent and dramatic and largely successful influx of what we call the New Irish. And then we have that kind of latent long lasting refusal to consider it the place of the traveller in our society. That's a big mix of problems and I can imagine all kinds of ways that that could go wrong, even on a pastoral level, with the best will in the world, you end up tearing the congregation apart with conflict. So how does an ordinary parish try to pursue that question? Is there anywhere that you would point them, say scripturally? You talk about theological imagination. How do you begin that?

**Tido:** Yeah. I am encouraged that we aren't the first church communities that have had to sort of think through this. And as you suggest that there are places in scripture where we actually get to see this on display in a different context, obviously. I would go to Acts chapter six, where they were told that there was a

discrimination of sort taking place between the Greek Jews and the Israelite Jews, and the Hebrew Jews and the widows weren't receiving the allotment that they needed for life. And that this was brought to the attention of the church leaders and they thought and prayed about this, and they made a decision to appoint some people to take care of the social needs of the widows in a way that was equitable.

And I think that's real telling the creativity to say, we just don't have the bandwidth to take care of these social needs, our primary task is in preaching and teaching and this kind of thing. And so a kind of outsourcing if you will, and it wasn't outsourcing because these are people who are part of the community and such to recognise, we need people who are dedicated to this task. And frankly, I think modern day churches could learn from that as well. Again, I just don't think the church context that I've been in, local church leaders have the capacity for the deep kind of reflection that needs to take place. And so to have, for example, an organisation like JCJF, which just able to think through really complicated issues and be able to have that kind of reflection brought back into the church, whether it's around issues around race or, prison, and the ways that the disparities show up in all kinds of surprising ways that people in the church would never have even imagined.

Lots of church people don't recognise that when, for example, climate change is taking place and that the effects of climate change, are they going to disproportionately affect people who are brown and black? No, they're not thinking about that. They're thinking about what am I doing with my plastic straw. So those kinds of questions haven't been brought to bear on what I would call the average church goer in America, or even the average church leader in America. And so to have resources that they can draw from outside of themselves, I think is crucial.

**Kevin:** I like that - JCJF as deacons of social analysis. That's something I can run with maybe. It's a very interesting Taido, I'm aware of time, we want to honour our lunch hour, and I see that there are questions so good. I might invite Martina to come in and take over and we'll have a more open conversation. Would that be okay?

**Taido:** Yep. That'd be great.

**Martina:** Hi Taido. Thank you very much for that, it was really interesting. We've got a couple of interesting questions in as well. I feel that a couple of them have been answered partially, but maybe you would like to elaborate on them. One from Richard Carson asks - aside from this wonderful webinar, how can we challenge the racialising of the church that assumes that racism is not a social construct, but only an individual behaviour trait? What should our witness look like in practice particularly when the view is so deeply embedded? So I guess it's more about personal behaviour.

**Taido:** I think it's, at least the context that I find myself working in, rooting out sort of that individualism, if it's not a personal problem for me, then I don't recognize it as a problem. I think that's really crucial work flagging up the systemic nature of racism. And I think that people can grab a hold of that. Critical race theory and talk of systemic racism is the kind of bogeyman in the American context right now. I don't know how familiar you might be, but States are going through the process of forbidding questions around systemic racism being taught as curriculum in school.



And I think that frankly, the more that churches can become aware of this, they need to be kind of a representative and advocates for, no, that we don't have to be afraid of talking about these issues. We can think about these kinds of things without undermining our commitment to the Christian gospel. The idea that the two things are antithetical is being is being pressed in certain church contexts in America, and can understand the concern, but it seems to be misguided in my imagination. So I think that's part of what the idea is to help people come to terms with there's ways into this that help to illuminate the gospel as opposed to diminish it.

**Martina:** Thank you.

**Kevin:** Can I come in on that Martina, if possible?

**Martina:** Of course.

**Kevin:** I I'm thinking about this because Taido and I are both from kind of reformed Christian backgrounds, but we're talking to a largely Catholic audience and I'm representing a Catholic organisation. And I think that there is in terms of, Richard talks about witness looks like in practice. And I think that the obvious place for church community both reformed and Catholic to go to is the communion table. That Eucharist, it's an act of remembering, do this in memory of me. But remembering doesn't just mean the cognitive recall of an event that happened once in an upper room in Jerusalem before Jesus's trial. Remembering is putting the body of Christ back together again, and recognising that already in Ireland, one of the most socially diverse places you'll ever hope to be is in church on a Sunday.

It is one of the few places where really rich people who are well established in Ireland, rub shoulders with and have to engage with the New Irish and with recent arrivals and with people who are not so well established. And so the fact that we all come to that table equally, and we all come to that table in equally desperate, need is a kind of liturgical basis by which the church can bear witness to the reality that Christianity declares. That there is no Jew nor Greek, there is no saved nor free, there is no male or female in Christ. That there is proper genuine radical equality. So I think that there are really obvious places where church leaders would be able to kind of start to weave a story about racism that's different from you're either a snowflake liberal woke person who is concerned with racial microaggressions if that caricature, or you're a conservative troglodyte who doesn't care about racial justice. Christianity has resources to actually tell a different story besides that polarisation and it begins with the very basic fundamental practices of our shared life. So that would be my answer to Richard in terms of the practice doesn't end at the table, but it can at least begin there.

**Taido:** Yeah.

**Martina:** Thanks, Kevin. And I'm glad that you brought up that church is one of the places where that's genuinely diverse in Irish life, because that was another question that I wanted to ask Taido and yourself about the Irish context. Because when speaking about the churches, it's as if it's a monolith of white people, which of course it's not the case. And I wondered if you could speak Taido about the US experience of racial groups within churches.

**Tido:** Say it again. I missed maybe the first half.

**Martina:** I know, sorry. It was a little bit garbled. When speaking about the church and racism in the church it's as if we're speaking about a monolith of white people, but of course that's not the case. And here in the Irish context, you know that the Traveller community is largely Catholic and I wondered if you could speak about the US context for racial groups within churches.

**Tido:** Yeah. Well, part of the American legacy has been that segregation ran so deep that we were able successfully to form monocultural churches for generations that would be exclusively white or exclusively African American or exclusively Asian American and on and on. And it has really only been in the last, I would say 25, 30 years that there has been work towards overcoming that, and it is genuinely real work to try to overcome these, these monocultural silos. And that's, I would say I'm speaking out of a Protestant context, I recognise that the Catholic church in a America is going to take on a different flavour. But the other interesting thing is that one of the things that I appreciate getting to share with my students is the ways in which Christianity have provided resources, there's the negative side, that it has been used as a tool of oppression in say civil war times or post-civil war times as well.

But that it's also been used as a possibility for liberation and that the communities themselves, so African Americans have been historically committed to Christianity as a people group in America and that it's been a tremendous place for them to recognize that the white gospel, so to speak is not the only version of the gospel. And so to be able to look to Christianity as a means for providing encouragement and support, it's the lifeblood in some ways for many African-American communities that have been beaten down for centuries now. And a similar story could be told for Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans as well. Some of the more robust move, frankly, where Christianity is growing even in America, it's with minority groups over and against Caucasian Americans so it's just an interesting mix of kind of religious dynamic in our country.

**Kevin:** I think that that's one of the things that I look forward to in the coming decades in Ireland, the church is obviously in decline, is being chased, humbled disciplined for many things that happen in the 20th century and it's right and proper that the church in some ways will be shrinking and losing influence, having in many ways, squandered the opportunity to represent for peace and for justice. But what that means is that the churches are also wide open to being reimagined because so much of the dynamism in the church comes from the New Irish. And there's just a real possibility that this monoculture that Martina refers to - the church that Irish people imagine is a bunch of old white men is already kind of in churn and at the end of that, it's going to be a very different thing from a Western European reaction against British imperialism.

Which is obviously the church was more than that. I feel the academic in me wanting to qualify my statements, but what I'm saying is that because it is such a diverse place already, we're in a situation whereas one of these questions has asked, am I hopeful that the churches problems of can be transformed? I, I think I'm quietly

confident that there will be a transformation simply because the Irish church was going to have to start listening to the New Irish. As a function of the decline, there's also there, the seeds for the renewal. I see as well Martina, there's a question from Damian Jackson in the chat box, as opposed to in the Q and A box.

**Martina:** Okay, well, I'll get to that now in a moment. I have another question here from Irene Maguire that I'll get to now. While open to symbolic gestures, such as that of Georgetown to repair past harms, such gestures also need to be accompanied by ensuring the embedded racial structures are addressed such as college governance, promotional policies, student access, community engagements, to dismantle and rebuild new ways of ensuring quality and inclusion for all, especially women and non-white persons. Thoughts?

**Taido:** Yeah. Thanks for bringing that up, and I'm aware that the Georgetown example it has been met with some criticism, and I'm sympathetic to criticism. There's a kind of one wants to guard against at least a couple of things. The performative nature of it which I don't, at that point, you're trying to evaluate intentions and that's always a difficult thing to do, but in the American context, they would be hard pressed not to begin to make a kind of a university like this to make reparations like that. Of course, there are plenty of universities that would've just blatantly ignore it. But then as Irene, I believe that's the name, has intubated the idea that it would terminate as a sort of a fiscal transaction of sorts would be it would be a real tragedy, quite frankly. And I think Irene has mentioned more like long standing and embedded structures and reconfiguring different aspects of it.

All of which I would think are more helpful steps, not more helpful, additional helpful steps in fulfilling, again, this idea of a full scale reconciliation that I'm suggesting, which is more broadly applied and that there would be space in the midst of that for real human beings to make real connections and the kind of genuine reconciliation where both repentance is, is enacted and forgiveness is extended. Those kinds of things I think can get papered over if we imagine it as simply being a matter of economic restitution.

**Martina:** Thank you.

**Kevin:** I heard a very illustrative illuminating story about a young African American student who attended a Christian college who was trying very hard to think this stuff through. And they did a lot of the stuff that Irene alludes to in terms of undoing the embedded racial structures by actively recruiting excellent scholars of colour, and they they definitely had promotional policies in inner city urban areas that were disproportionately black and educationally disadvantaged. They went in, in the summer and ran all kinds of programs to try to bring students in. And this very fine young student rocked up to this college and committed to go here instead of to somewhere where he might visually fit in better. There's a rich tradition of African American colleges that you could go to. And instead, he went to this place that was traditionally white, and they had done all that structural stuff.

And on the first week of his first year, he and his black friend were stopped by security guards on campus and quite confrontationally asked to prove that they had a right to be there. And over the course of the four years that they spent there, none

of his white classmates ever received that kind of treatment from the security officials. So what does that say? It says that we need to adapting Catholic social teaching language what's required here is some kind of integrated reconciliation that both deals with the structural problems in a serious and robust way, has measures to stop the performance of nature, so that it's a PR and marketing campaign, and also that's seeking to address that individual repentance that's required because all the best practice documents in the world don't make a difference if you are also allowing actual individuals to go around benignly.

I'm sure security guards would like Taido has described, say, I believe in equality, I haven't got a racist bone in my body and yet that was a formative experience for that young man that he carried with him years later. So I think that Irene's put her finger really on just how deep a problem this is. But that's not me saying, oh, well, there's nothing to do. I think that there are lots of ways that the church can think that through holistically. Sorry, Martina.

**Martina:** No, you're absolutely fine.

**Kevin:** Almost getting into preacher mode there. Yeah.

**Martina:** You're okay. I'll get on with the next question. Thank you for pointing it out. Damion Jackson in the chat box. Here in the Irish council of churches with Vox Magazine, we've just run a survey on this topic, but one of our main findings was an overwhelming proportion of people agree that racism is an issue, and really want to talk about it about 90%, however, leaders perhaps lacking confidence or courage to do so. The responses show that there will be vehement pushback, but only from a small loud proportion. Do you think that's the case in the US, Taido? How can we encourage leadership to be brave and intentional on this?

**Taido:** Yeah, what a great question. And I do think that's possible that the dynamics in the US are a little different right now. Questions around race are becoming a kind of litmus test and so people are lining up, if one wants to talk about race, one is becoming a kind of social gospel person, liberal, wanting to sort of pull away from the traditional Orthodox Christianity. And I've encountered it personally, I hear stories of it repeatedly, and I wish it was just sort of a kind of a Trumpian sort of thing but it's more broad ranging than that. There is a sense in which one wonders that maybe a generation of white evangelical Christians really are feeling threatened in some way, and that they see conversations around race as, as threatening their core identity and what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a faithful church doing the work of God in society and the world.

And again, I think it maybe has to do with this nagging individualism, where they think that they aren't racist, they just don't think it's a problem. They think that they have dealt with it, and because that they have their children went to schools with people of a different colour or something like this, what's the big deal. And so that being said, I also know a lot of churches that do want to have this conversation, and I think we're at a kind of tipping point, but if we can't break out of this polarised culture war, I'm not sceptical. I think that there are going to be churches that are willing to do the long, hard work of trying to think through it and do so in a meaningful way with the help of other organisations to provide a kind of robust response, but just because

of the fractured nature of the church in America, it can feel hopeless, but I'm not one to despair.

**Tido:** Should add to that genuinely I believe that God actually is in the midst of us and that we can have a kind of hopefulness. When I was talking about theological resources a little while ago, one of the theological resources we can come to is the work of atonement that Christ has genuinely died for the sin of the world. Racism is a part of the sin of the world. It doesn't mean that we can gloss over it, I see that as being a future reality in the age to come there, there's not going to be racism. And that we can have a confident hope that this is what God wants in the world is for there to be people who are treated with dignity and equally, and that as we're going along the way, I'm consoled to know that that God is already waiting there and is present here to bring this into... I think what I'm trying to say is we're going to do all the things we can do as human beings, but to recognise that it is in fact, a divine work that needs to take place in order for racism be overcome our time.

**Kevin:** And that should be a real encouragement to pastors who are tempted to talk about this stuff who are going to face really disappointing reactions from some influential congregation members, because what you're basically saying is we're licensed to not be judged by our apparent results. And you know, Damian asks, how can we encourage leadership? And we just have to encourage them to be faithful to the message that they've been entrusted with and their job isn't necessarily to constantly grow and to constantly have harmony. Sometimes the dissenters and the aggro is healthy and you're doing the right thing, even if it is generating all kinds of heated debates. There should be great freedom in knowing that God hasn't abandoned us.

**Taido:** Yeah, I would add to Damian's questions, I can sympathize. I was a pastor at a church that was primarily a white church, this one in Arkansas and when we made a decisive step at that, we've said we are going to be a church that wants to actively work towards racial reconciliation and racial inclusion and made real efforts towards that, this church in America, it was about 600 attendees on a Sunday. And I don't know what that translates into and kind of an Irish context. But when we made that move about 200 people left the church, about a third of our congregation said, and of course they don't say we're leaving because you guys have gotten all this interested in race. It's we feel led to go to another place, just never this kind of a quiet attrition, but about a third of the congregation left.

And then the encouragement would be, is that those numbers were filled back up with people who found that this was a kind of vibrancy in our church that they were not experiencing in other places. And that we were a kind of church that was willing to do this really relevant work within the community. People were energized by that as well. So if people are afraid of driving people off that there is a silver lining of sorts, and again, back to this idea of a hopefulness that God is going to meet us in the midst of doing this work.

**Martina:** Thank you. That kind of leads us on to the last question then, which was - are you hopeful that churches problems with racism can be transformed? And is

there anything happening in different areas, which gives you this hope? I think you've partially answered that just there.

**Taido:** Yeah. I'd maybe just come back to, we can be so myopic in our thinking about what's happening in the church, at least I know Americans are particularly guilty of this, that whatever's happening here is the most important thing happening within Christianity, and to recognise that Christianity is a global movement, we're so in the minority, and to think that what we're doing is the most important thing. I take a lot of encouragement from knowing that our brothers and sisters in Africa and Asia and other places are thriving in their ministries and that they're seeing God's work. Which isn't to say that they will encounter the same us, them kinds of problems. They do encounter the same kinds of us, them problems. But that our particular instant of it doesn't necessarily need to replicate in in other contexts. I take a lot of encouragement from that.

**Martina:** Thank you. And does anybody else have any questions to put in the Q and A or do you have any final comments?

**Kevin:** Martina, I see that there's a question there about the Vatican kind of taking the lead. And I'm able to declare with some amount of credibility when the Catholic church is taking the lead, because I'm not member of the Catholic church. And if you look at the Amazonian Senate, it is a remarkable event in the history of the church, because that's the church turning its attention fully, the global church, institutionally turning its attention towards this especially significant ecosystem and people there in, and that conversation being led by the people from the Amazon. So that's like a very real example of governance from the very top, including the voices who are the kind of definition of marginalised. And then when you pair that with Fratelli Tutti which is this papal encyclical this rousing call to social friendship to fraternity as this social virtue, that must be paired with liberty and equality to genuinely make a flourishing society.

What you do have is like a very clear signal that under Francis's papacy, the church is not going to address this head on in the terms that we're familiar with, because as Taido said, the terms we're familiar with are determined by America, not by the world and it would be like a very weird situation for the church to approach things in terms of are familiar or native to Anglo speakers. But in its own way, I would say that there are things developing there that need to be encouraged and recognised as remarkably different from what would've happened before. So do other faith traditions offer such models and thoughts? My honest position is that as a Presbyterian who will be fairly familiar with what's happening in the world council of churches and the world council that reform churches and all these other bodies, we're behind the Catholic church on this. So there's reason there to be hopeful and yep, I see that there's recommendations for books there. And my final question to title was if he could recommend reading, if somebody wanted to pursue this, where would you direct them?

**Taido:** Sure. And again, my apologies for the American centric kind of reading list this is inevitably going to be, but there have been I think the first book or maybe depends on what person's interest is, but there's a theologian named Willie Jennings out of Yale doing some extraordinary work on particularly historical work and on the

ways in which Christianity is, the theological formation that's taken place for Christians in not just America, but in the west, generally speaking, unpacking how racism came to be and be embodied so distinctly within Christian context and offering not just a prognosis, but a way maybe a way forward. So Willie Jennings would be good. The Christian Imagination. An easier, more accessible book, And again, this would be an exercise in American history, but the degree to which the same kinds of dynamics replicate themselves in other places Jamar Tisby's The Colour of Compromise, I found very helpful to introduce people to the ways in which Christianity was used in inappropriate ways.

He doesn't major so much on the ways that it was offering kind of hope and resiliency for both white and African American Christians who are interested in equality and dignity for slaves and black people, but I think that's a helpful book for recognizing that. And then this one doesn't hit race head on, but as far as thinking through reconciliation and the kinds of forgiveness processes and repentance processes Miroslav Volf's Exclusion and Embrace is a kind of classic. It's maybe the best thing he's potentially ever written and I think it's stands the test of time for helping people to think through some of these very complicated issues of division and oppression.

And then lastly, I'd be remised to not mention James Cone, who is considered the father of black theology in America. He wrote important works in the 1970s that were introducing black theology as a form of liberation theology. And theological reflection that he did in that is I think worth thinking through, not all of it resonates wholly with me, but there are parts of it that have really challenged me to kind of second guess my instinctual kind of reformed heritage and so that's been a helpful book for me as well.

**Kevin:** I've added them in there in the chat box if people want to copy and paste that for taking down to their local bookshop to order for Christmas. So thank you for that.

**Taido:** That's my reading list. I'm sure somebody else would have a different kind of reading list.

**Martina:** Thank you. I think we are at the end just to mention that the other book that was mentioned was My Grandmother's Hands by Resmaa Menakem, and that's why Irene Maguire, so if you want to add that in as well Kevin, that'd be great. So that brings us to the end. Thank you very much.

**Kevin:** Thank you very much Taido for joining us and thank you especially to all the attendees who joined us and for your questions and for your dialogue. And we look forward to hosting future webinars about topics as hopefully as interesting as this. So once again, thank you to Taido and thank you to you all. And I hope you have a lovely afternoon.

**Taido:** Thank you.

**Kevin:** See you.