



CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION

UNDERSTANDING RACISM

A FOUR-PART SERIES + REFLECTION GUIDE

ARTICLES AUTHORED BY ANDRE HENRY

INTRODUCTION

Racism is one of the most persistent and misunderstood realities shaping American life, including the Church. Many Christians want to engage questions of race and justice faithfully, but these conversations can quickly become tangled in politics, defensiveness, or uncertainty.

This four-part series from Andre Henry and the Racial Justice Institute invites us to begin with theology, history, Scripture, and the Church's own witness.

Together, these articles explore racism not simply as individual prejudice, but as a spiritual and social reality embedded in cultures, institutions, and systems. They also ask Christians to reckon honestly with the ways theology has been used to justify racial hierarchy and oppression, while recovering the biblical call toward justice, dignity, and repair.

Across the four parts, we'll consider:

- What is racism, and why is it a spiritual issue?
- How has Christian theology contributed to racial hierarchy?
- What does Scripture reveal about God's concern for justice?
- What might repentance and faithful action look like for churches today?

This guide is designed to help you move through the series slowly — on your own or with a church, classroom, or small group. Each section includes reflection questions to encourage deeper consideration and conversation.

Our hope is that this resource helps Christians move beyond simply condemning racism toward understanding how it works, reckoning with the church's participation in racial harm, and imagining faithful paths toward repentance, repair, and transformation.

KEY THEMES

1. RACISM IS MORE THAN PERSONAL PREJUDICE.

Racism can include individual bias and hostility, but it can also operate through cultural norms, institutions, and systems that shape opportunity, power, resources, and dignity based on race.

2. RACISM IS A THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL PROBLEM.

Every person bears the image of God. Racial hierarchy rejects that fundamental Christian claim and distorts Jesus' command to love God and love our neighbors.

3. THE CHURCH HAS HELPED SHAPE MODERN RACISM.

Christian ideas did not develop outside history. Distorted theology has been used to justify conquest, enslavement, segregation, racial hierarchy, and other forms of oppression. Understanding that history is necessary for meaningful repentance.

4. THE BIBLE CONTAINS A DEEP CURRENT OF JUSTICE AND LIBERATION.

From Exodus and the Torah's commands concerning foreigners to Ruth, the Good Samaritan, Paul, James, and Revelation, Scripture repeatedly calls God's people to resist oppression, reject favoritism, welcome outsiders, and pursue human dignity.

5. THEOLOGY HAS REAL-WORLD CONSEQUENCES.

What Christians believe affects how we organize communities, distribute power, understand our neighbors, and respond to injustice. Theology can be used to reinforce oppressive systems — or to challenge them.

6. REPENTANCE REQUIRES MORE THAN ACKNOWLEDGING WRONG.

Christian repentance involves turning away from harmful practices and moving toward repair. For churches, confronting racism therefore requires examining structures, leadership, worship, resources, and institutional practices.

KEY THEMES, CONT.

7. RACIAL JUSTICE REQUIRES SHARING POWER.

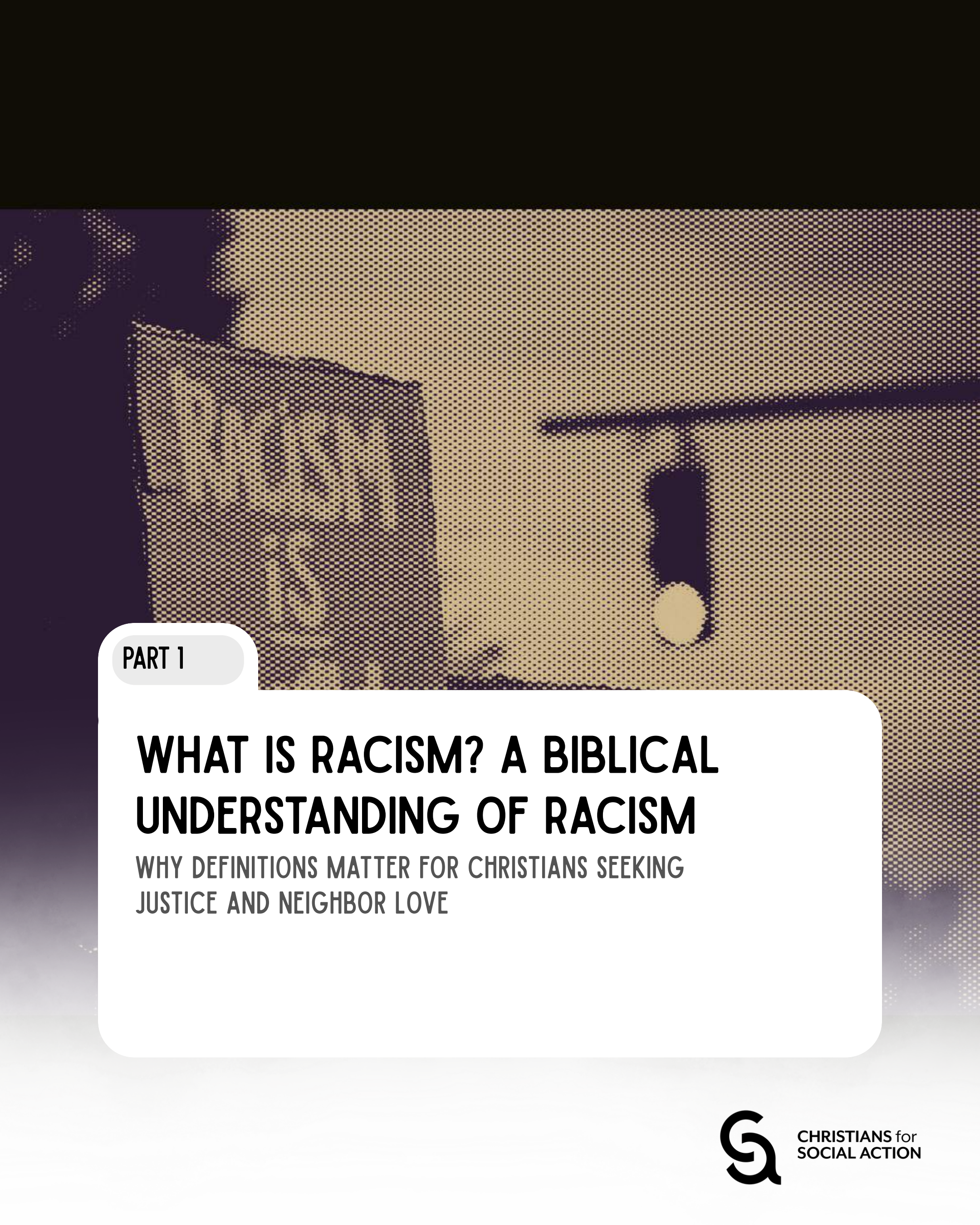
Representation alone is not enough. Churches committed to racial justice must consider who holds authority, whose voices shape decisions, whose theology is taught, and whose cultural traditions are treated as central or peripheral.

8. THE CHURCH HAS RESOURCES FOR TRANSFORMATION.

Churches possess more than good intentions. They have relationships, buildings, money, communication networks, spiritual practices, pastoral care, and community influence that can be mobilized in service of justice and human flourishing.

9. ANTI-RACISM IS PART OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP.

The goal is not simply to become more informed about racism. It is to become communities more fully shaped by love of neighbor, justice for those who are oppressed, shared dignity, repentance, and repair.



PART 1

WHAT IS RACISM? A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF RACISM

WHY DEFINITIONS MATTER FOR CHRISTIANS SEEKING
JUSTICE AND NEIGHBOR LOVE



CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION

In Part 1, Andre Henry begins by expanding our understanding of racism beyond individual prejudice or intentional hatred. Looking through a biblical and theological lens, he explores racism as a sin against the image of God and examines the interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and internalized ways racial harm can take shape.

Many Christians believe racism is only obvious, extreme, personal hatred: using slurs, marching with the Ku Klux Klan, or committing a hate crime. But if that's our only definition, we'll miss most of the ways racism actually operates. Racism is broader than animosity and can be more subtle than slurs.

Racism is more than personal prejudice; it's the combination of racial bias and the power — personal, cultural, or institutional — to shape outcomes, opportunities, and dignity based on race. It is a spiritual problem, backed by distorted theology, that creates pervasive social problems.

RACISM IS A SIN AGAINST THE IMAGE OF GOD

There are two theological bases on which we can categorize racism as sin. Scripture teaches that every human being is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).

Any ideology that suggests otherwise is a rejection of that truth. Racism is not just a failure of manners or a cultural disagreement; it is a spiritual lie that assigns hierarchy to God's image. When this truth is rejected in order to justify harm, exclusion, or domination, it becomes the foundation for countless oppressive and sinful actions.

Jesus named the greatest commandments as loving God and loving your neighbor (Mark 12:30–31). Racism is a betrayal of both. It distorts our understanding of neighbor, restricts our empathy, and creates systems of exclusion and harm.

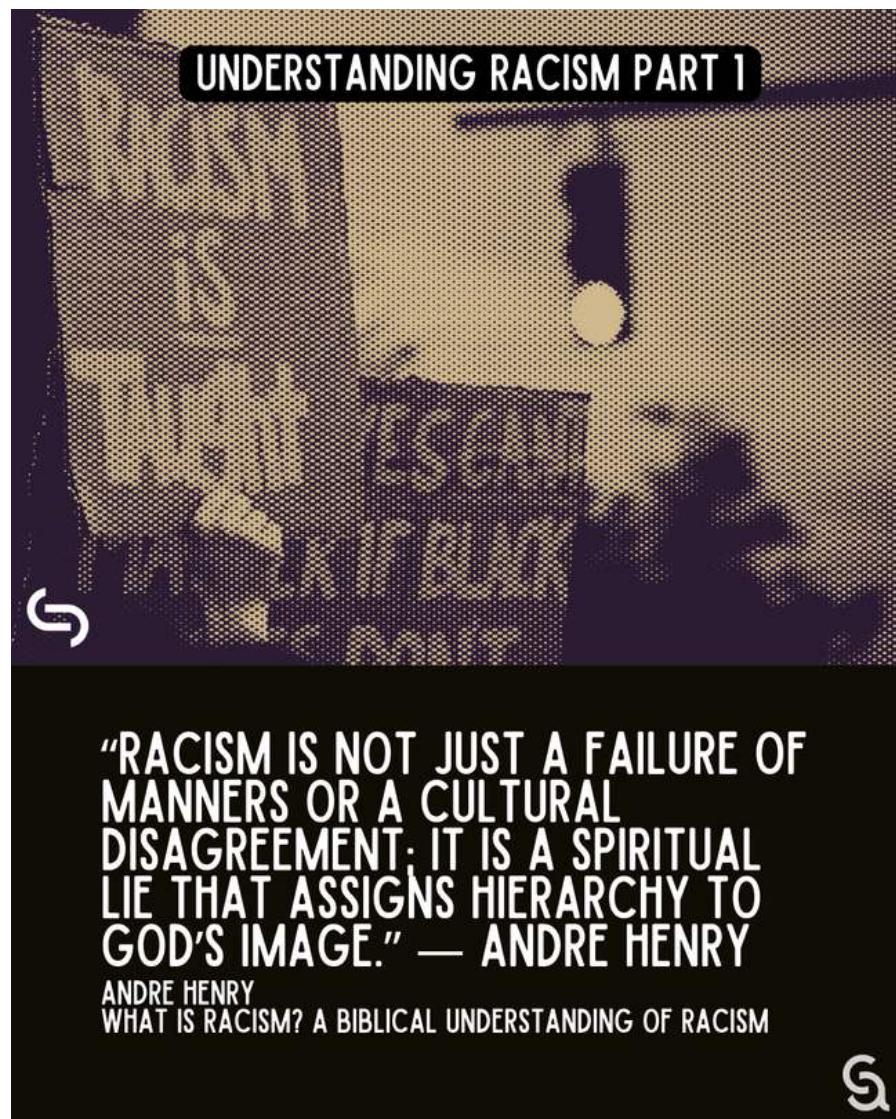
Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God's people are consistently called to care for those who are marginalized and to remember that injustice against the vulnerable is an offense to God (Matt. 25:31–40).

The Exodus story can be read as an example of God's posture toward systems of oppression. Pharaoh's campaign against the Israelites was more than personal bias. It was a national policy of oppression. When God liberates the Israelites from slavery, oppressed people throughout history have read it as a divine critique of all systems like it.

That interpretation is echoed by the prophets, who insisted that God condemned not just individual wrongdoing, but also entire societies that exploit the poor and favor the powerful (Ps. 82; Amos 5:11–12; Isa. 10:1–2).

RACISM IS MORE THAN PERSONAL PREJUDICE

Prejudice is part of racism, but it isn't a large enough conceptual container to hold all that racism is. Prejudice is largely an attitude or belief. It's a type of bias — a snap judgment or assumption — that any of us can hold toward others, regardless of race.



Racism differs from ordinary prejudice because it often involves power and can operate impersonally through systems, institutions, and cultural patterns, even without conscious racial hostility.

For example, a 2024 study revealed that economists sent 83,000 identical fake résumés — differing only in “racially distinctive” names — to 11,000 entry-level jobs at Fortune 500 companies.

Applicants with names more common for White people (e.g., Brad, Amanda) received callbacks at roughly double the rate of those with names more common for Black people (e.g., Darnell, Ebony).

This study is one of many examples of racism as empowered prejudice: The hiring managers from this study probably wouldn't say they dislike Black people, but popular anti-Black biases clearly informed their preference to hire applicants they presumed to be White.

THE MANY FORMS OF RACISM

Another factor that makes racism difficult to understand and discuss is that people often focus on just one type — usually the one they're most familiar with — and treat it as the only kind. In truth, racism manifests in many ways. Here are a few:

- Interpersonal racism is probably the most familiar form of racism. This is hate expressed in insults, discrimination, and violence.
- Cultural racism refers to norms, values, and ideals that shape everyday behaviors, such as beauty standards or ideas about professionalism. In church, this extends to ministers deeming certain expressions of Christian faith as inferior because they're rooted in the cultural expression of racially marginalized groups, or, in multiethnic settings, the preferencing of certain Anglo worship styles over those represented in the wider congregation.
- Institutional or structural racism happens when schools, businesses, or churches function in ways that exclude or disadvantage people of color, even without intending to. It's the accumulated result of history — how past racial injustices continue to shape housing, education, health care, employment, and policing today. In ministry, it's important to be mindful about whether certain types of people are over-represented in leadership and positions of influence. Who are the saints we revere and the theologians we quote? If they are mostly White and male, why is that?
- Internalized racism is when racialized people absorb, uphold, and even spread harmful beliefs about their own worth, beauty, or value from the surrounding culture.

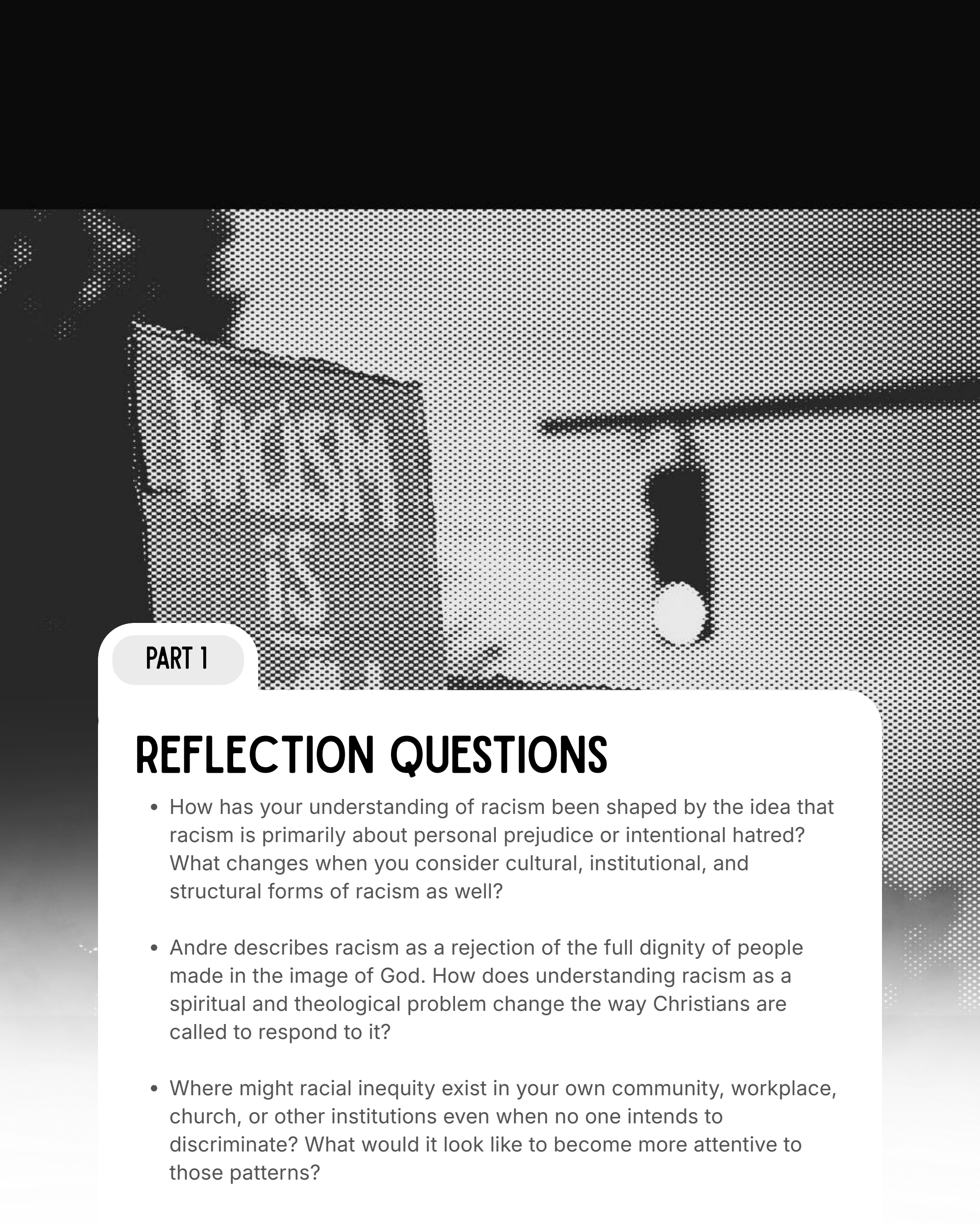
All of these are different expressions of the same root sin: rejecting the full dignity of others (or ourselves) based on race.

WHY DEFINITIONS MATTER

Some may ask: Why does it matter how we define racism? Isn't it enough just to be kind to everyone?

Defining racism accurately helps us recognize it more clearly. If we believe racism only exists when someone is openly hateful, we will overlook the deeper patterns that shape opportunities, institutions, and life outcomes.

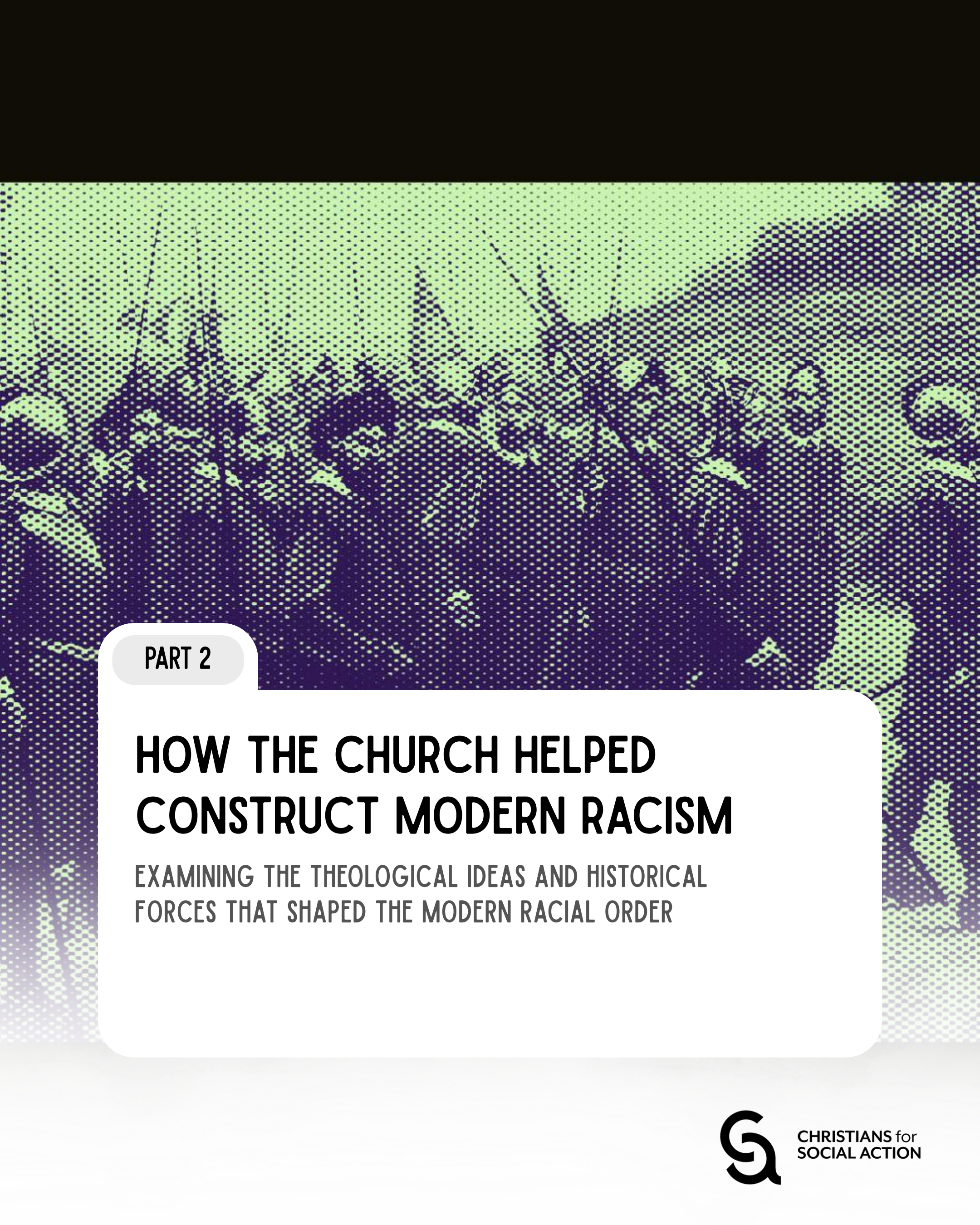
Racism affects housing, education, employment, health care, immigration, and the criminal justice system in ways that are often invisible to those not directly impacted by them. Christians are called not only to reject hatred, but also to pursue justice and love our neighbors faithfully. We cannot confront injustice wisely if we misunderstand how it works.



PART 1

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How has your understanding of racism been shaped by the idea that racism is primarily about personal prejudice or intentional hatred? What changes when you consider cultural, institutional, and structural forms of racism as well?
- Andre describes racism as a rejection of the full dignity of people made in the image of God. How does understanding racism as a spiritual and theological problem change the way Christians are called to respond to it?
- Where might racial inequity exist in your own community, workplace, church, or other institutions even when no one intends to discriminate? What would it look like to become more attentive to those patterns?



PART 2

HOW THE CHURCH HELPED CONSTRUCT MODERN RACISM

EXAMINING THE THEOLOGICAL IDEAS AND HISTORICAL
FORCES THAT SHAPED THE MODERN RACIAL ORDER



CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION

In Part 2, Henry turns to the church's own history, tracing how Christian ideas about human hierarchy became entangled with conquest, slavery, segregation, and racial power. He invites Christians to reckon honestly with this legacy and consider why understanding the church's complicity is essential to meaningful repentance and repair.

Without the Church and its theology, modern racism as we know it today would not exist. In pre-modern times, the Church was the heartbeat of society. It patronized some of history's renowned artists, trained some of history's most influential intellectuals, and crowned emperors. Theology shaped philosophy, law, and science.

Therefore, we can't fully understand today's society or its problems without understanding how the Church contributed to it. History shows that Christians and Christian institutions played a significant role in shaping many of the racist ideas and structures that continue to influence society today.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION: CHRISTIANITY AND HUMAN HIERARCHY

Early Christian intellectuals didn't know the modern concept of race. But their writings reflect assumptions of human hierarchy and supremacist logic. In his book "Stamped From the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America," Dr. Ibram X. Kendi notes that early supremacist ideas connected superiority to geography.

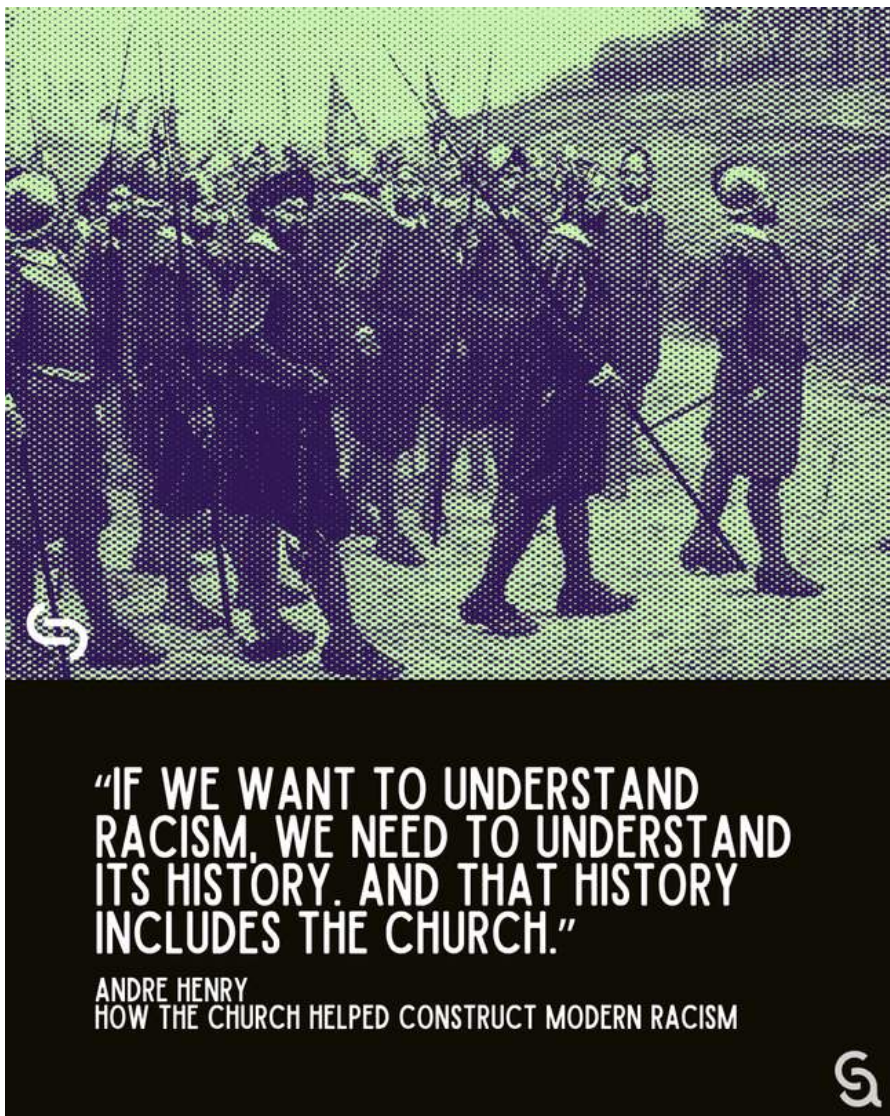
Origen, who wrote the first systematic theology, does this in some of his writings, when he connects spiritual development, geography, and human difference in ways that reflect early hierarchical assumptions about humanity.

He argues that people with the least divine revelation are condemned to harsh climates where "detestable practices" are the norm as punishment for poor behavior in a previous spiritual state. That suggests that human hierarchy is divinely ordained and that a people's morality — or lack thereof — can be inferred from what region they live in.

However, Origen's thesis wasn't racial. He mentions that the people living in harsher climates are darker-skinned without making complexion the quintessential indicator of their inferiority. Nevertheless, complexion is part and parcel with his geographic morality thesis, and it would prove useful for the racist discourses of later Christians.

The development of early Christian identity helped open the door for later racialized and supremacist ways of thinking, including the eventual marriage of Christian identity with ideas of supremacy. The first followers of Jesus were Jews. The New Testament portrays them engaged in intense debates with Jewish leaders over Jewish issues like the role of the sacrificial system, circumcision, and Torah.

Over time, however, many Christians began to describe themselves as the "new Israel," as if their divine revelation — that Jesus takes a central place in the Jewish religion — now entitled them to displace the larger Jewish community, who disagreed, as the sole heir to God's promises. In this way, early Christian identity evolved as something separate from and superior to Jewish identity.



By the second century and beyond, Christian writers began to explicitly refer to Christians as a "third race" or a new people, thereby distinguishing Christianity from Greco-Roman society. This kind of language untethers Christian identity from any specific geography or ethnic group.

As the Christian community evolves in those centuries, it is defined by creed, ritual, and community, while retaining the logic of human hierarchy based on special revelation.

God's covenant people became increasingly abstracted from any particular ethnicity or geography, allowing later Christians to re-anchor "chosen" identity onto their own nations, cultures, and even bloodlines.

Centuries later, these theological moves would prove catastrophic.

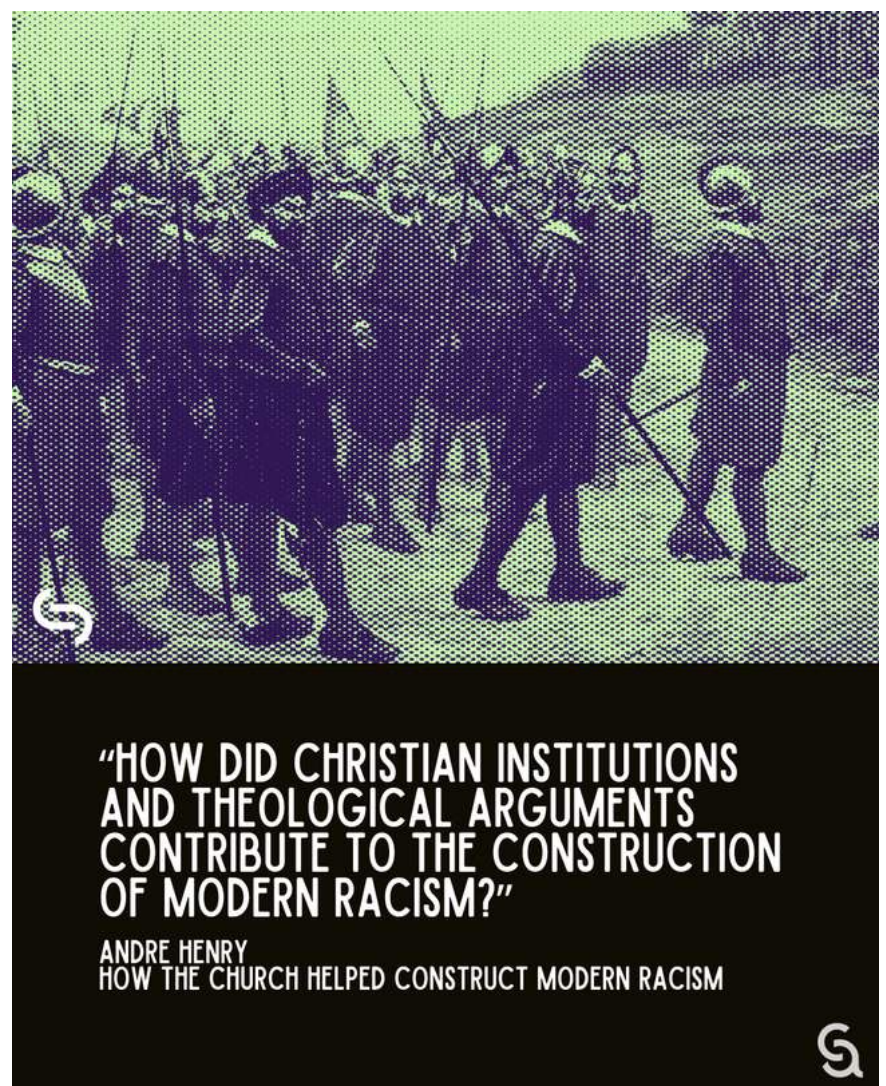
RAISING THE STRUCTURE: THEOLOGY, CONQUEST, AND RACIAL POWER

Christians during the age of conquest expanded on the supremacist logic of the Early Church. "For the first time in human history, peoples (especially in the colonized worlds) were forced to think of themselves in disorienting ways," writes theologian William James Jennings, "to think of themselves away from land and away from animals and into racial encasement."

At first, they presumed a connection between religious superiority and geography. They assumed that as Christians, they possessed greater divine revelation than people in Africa or the Americas. But they went further than early theologians to claim that religious superiority served as justification to mistreat and oppress.

In 1455, Pope Nicholas V issued *Romanus Pontifex*, granting Portugal the right to conquer lands and enslave peoples in the so-called New World. This became part of the "Doctrine of Discovery," a set of teachings that framed the brutality of conquest in salvific terms. Colonizers often framed conquest and forced conversion as necessary for saving souls and spreading Christian civilization. From there, theological distortion hardened into policy, law, and culture.

In the Americas, theology justified chattel slavery. Slave owners created Bibles omitting anti-oppressive sentiment.



Doctrines like the “Curse of Ham,” which argues that Ham’s descendants were condemned by God to perpetual servitude, justified hereditary bondage.

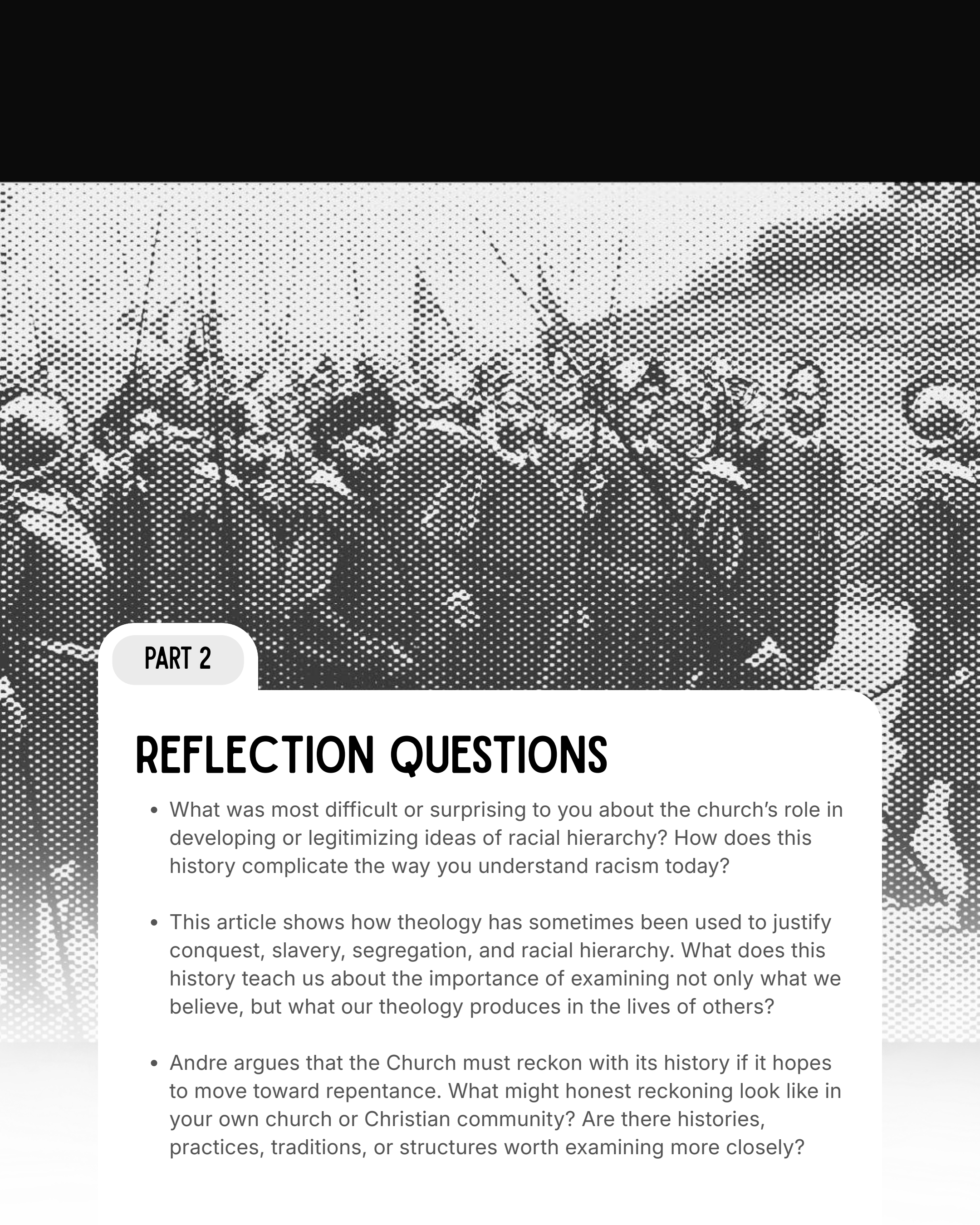
Theology also upheld U.S. apartheid during the Jim Crow era. Segregationists used the Tower of Babel to affirm segregation. The Ku Klux Klan was resurrected by a Methodist pastor. Theologies of racial hierarchy developed within Christian societies would later influence racial systems around the world, including South African apartheid and aspects of Nazi racial ideology.

RENOVATION: RECKONING WITH COMPLICITY

It is important to recount this history in order to understand the work that must be done to repent of our complicity in constructing the unjust racial world order.

If the Christian Church hopes to have any integrity or relevance in future generations, it must reckon with this history and abandon its trajectory. Churches can engage this work by auditing their practices: from who gets hired to what gets sung and prayed in our liturgies.

The Church must dismantle structures that remain in place from centuries of bad theology and complicity in discriminatory practices. There is hope for the church — but only on the other side of repentance.



PART 2

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What was most difficult or surprising to you about the church's role in developing or legitimizing ideas of racial hierarchy? How does this history complicate the way you understand racism today?
- This article shows how theology has sometimes been used to justify conquest, slavery, segregation, and racial hierarchy. What does this history teach us about the importance of examining not only what we believe, but what our theology produces in the lives of others?
- Andre argues that the Church must reckon with its history if it hopes to move toward repentance. What might honest reckoning look like in your own church or Christian community? Are there histories, practices, traditions, or structures worth examining more closely?



PART 3

HOW THE BIBLE ADDRESSES RACIAL JUSTICE

DISCOVERING THE DEEP CURRENTS OF JUSTICE, LIBERATION, AND HUMAN DIGNITY THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE



CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION

In Part 3, Henry explores the biblical foundations for Christian engagement with racial justice. Moving through stories and themes from Exodus to Revelation, he shows how Scripture's concern for liberation, the outsider, human dignity, and resistance to oppression places the pursuit of justice within the heart of Christian faith.

Some Christians hold back from social action because they link “social justice” to a particular political agenda — often one that’s partisan. Others have even built platforms claiming it’s just a Trojan horse for politics that go against true Christian values.

This can create the impression that Christian concern for justice is driven more by politics than by genuine faith. But the Bible, from beginning to end, pulses with concern for liberation, mercy, justice, and human dignity. We need to recognize these currents to see that justice work and human rights aren’t some outside contamination of Christianity. They spring right from its heart. Doing justice is living out our faith.

Here are several biblical stories and themes that provide theological grounding for Christian social justice advocacy, particularly anti-racist work.

THE EXODUS STORY

God fights systemic oppression in the Exodus story when he frees the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage. “Habiru” (“Hebrew” in English) was a label for marginalized people: vagrants, merchants, shepherds, and such. The Egyptians looked down on them. They would not even eat with Hebrews (Gen. 46:34).

In the Exodus story, that prejudice becomes a system of forced labor. When God liberates the Hebrews from bondage, the story reveals God’s opposition to systems of oppression and exploitation. This is why oppressed people throughout history have identified with this story. It shows that God sides with the marginalized.

LAWS ABOUT FOREIGNERS

The Torah commands the Israelites to be different from their oppressors. “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born,” YHWH commands. “Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (Lev. 19:34).

THE STORY OF RUTH

Some scholars say the story of Ruth was written to fight anti-Moabite sentiment in ancient Israel. At a time when leaders ordered people to divorce foreign spouses, the writer of Ruth wrote this novella to show the noble character of an outsider. The story also undermines rigid ideas about ethnic exclusion and outsider status by ending the story with a genealogy that connects Ruth to King David.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan confronted Judean anti-Samaritan bigotry. Judeans thought of Samaritans as spiritual and cultural inferiors for their mixed Assyrian-Israelite roots.



By casting a Samaritan as the hero who aids a beaten Judean (unlike a priest and Levite), Jesus challenged the notion that Samaritans are inferiors — imagining a Samaritan who kept the law of Moses more faithfully than the parable’s Judean religious leaders.

PAUL AND EQUALITY

As Gentiles joined the Early Church, ethnic hierarchy resurfaced. Some Jewish Christians felt superior to Gentile Christians. Paul tackled this head-on: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free” (Gal. 3:28).

"DOING JUSTICE IS LIVING OUT OUR FAITH."

ANDRE HENRY
HOW THE BIBLE ADDRESSES RACIAL JUSTICE



Some modern Christians interpret these words in ways that bypass ongoing racial tensions and inequities. Yet Paul's concern was precisely the ethnic and social divisions fracturing the early church.

JAMES AND FAVORITISM

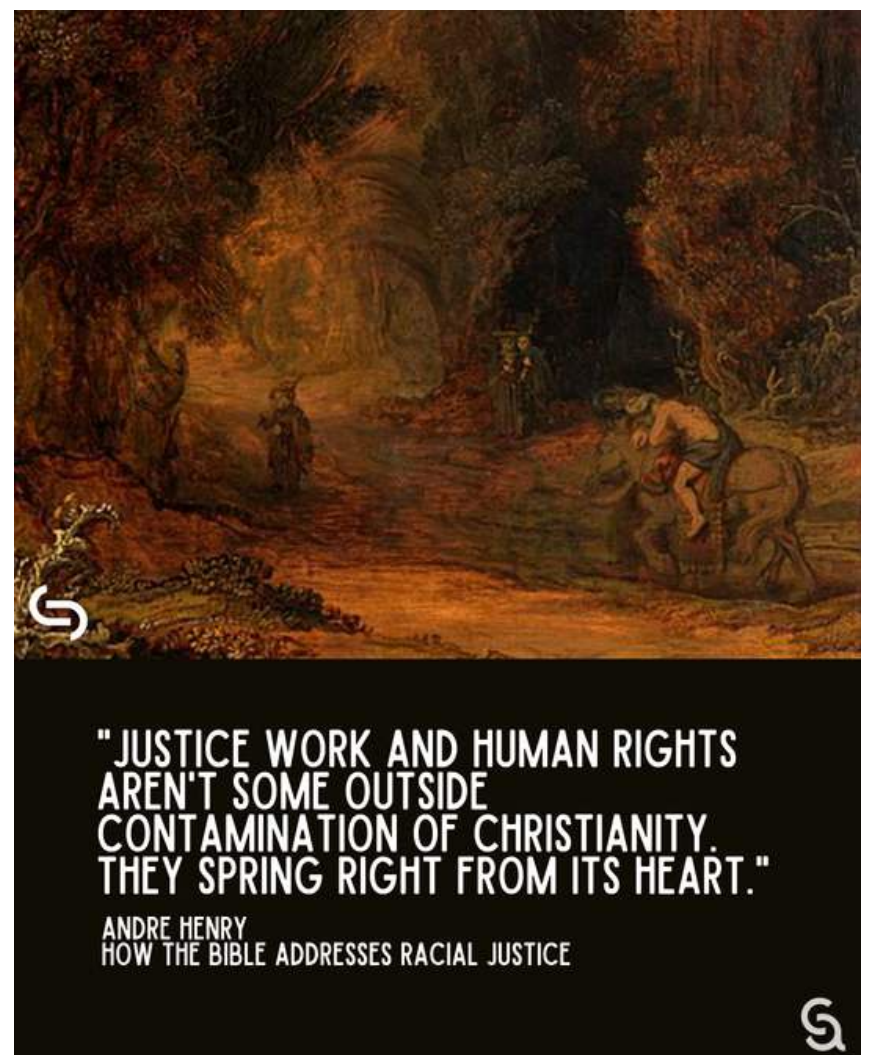
James' epistle condemns favoritism between rich and poor (James 2:1-9). Though his argument most obviously invokes notions of class divide, it also applies to racism, since race often creates underclasses. Funneling power, privilege, and resources to the favored few is a form of societal favoritism. As Jesus' brother and a top Early Church leader, James held great influence. Early Christians took him seriously. We should, too. It shows that anti-oppressive values have been core to Jesus' Way from day one.

REVELATION AND EMPIRE

Historically, racism has been deeply intertwined with imperialism. Ideas about race were used to justify land theft, genocide, forced labor, and colonial expansion for the economic benefit of European empires.

When the Apostle John imagines God setting the world right in the Book of Revelation, he imagines the dismantling of the greatest empire of his time: Rome. In Revelation 13, everyone takes the mark of the beast, and they all sing the beast's praises in unison.

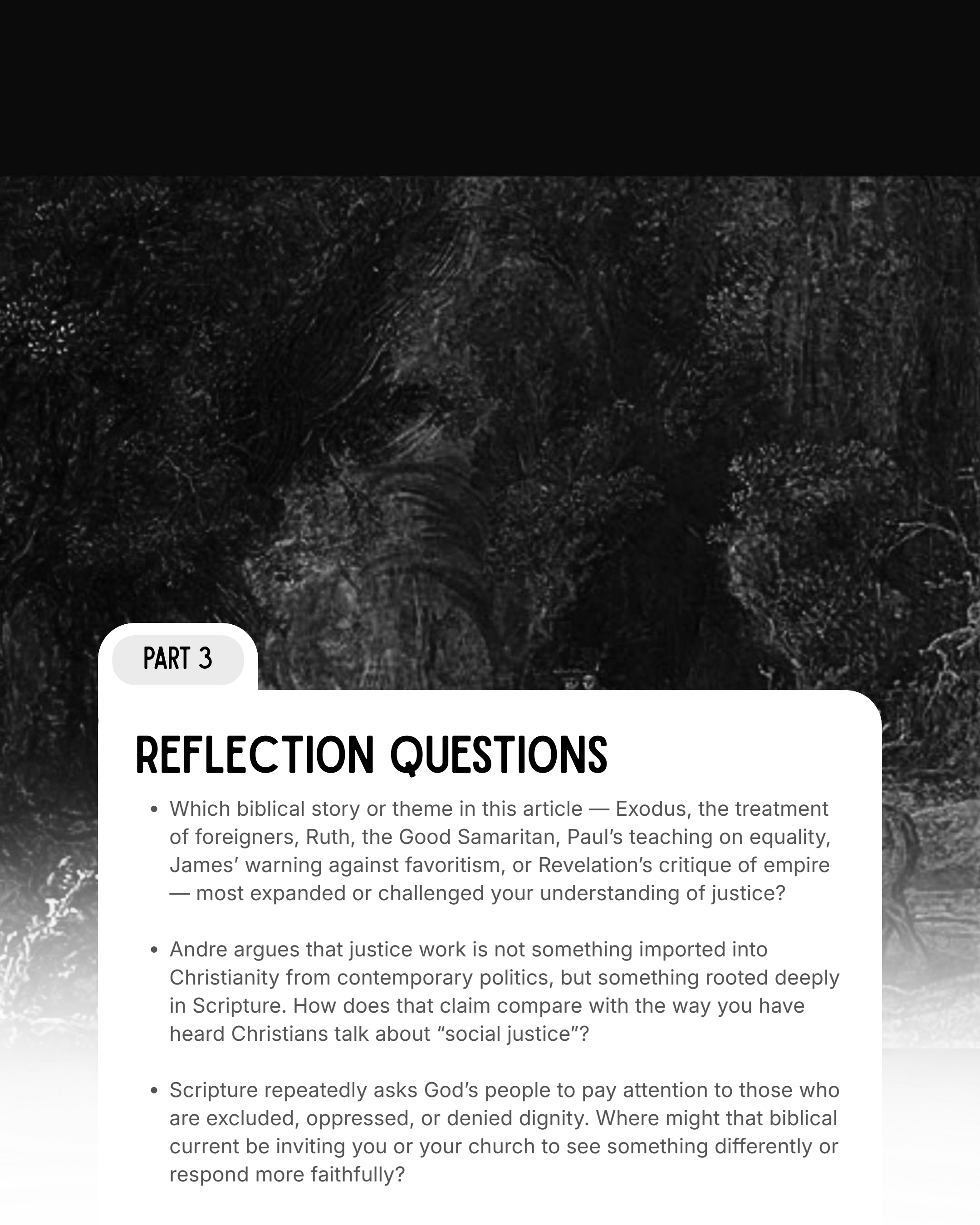
That vision is a depiction of the way Empire subjugates the colonized. John juxtaposes this image with the heavenly realm, where there is a diverse group of people from every nation, singing to God in many languages (Rev. 7). When John imagines God setting the world right, he envisions the empire falling apart while angels sing "Hallelujah!"



FOLLOWING THE CURRENT

It's often said that you can find whatever you're looking for in the Bible. These passages show currents of anti-oppressive sentiment throughout Scripture.

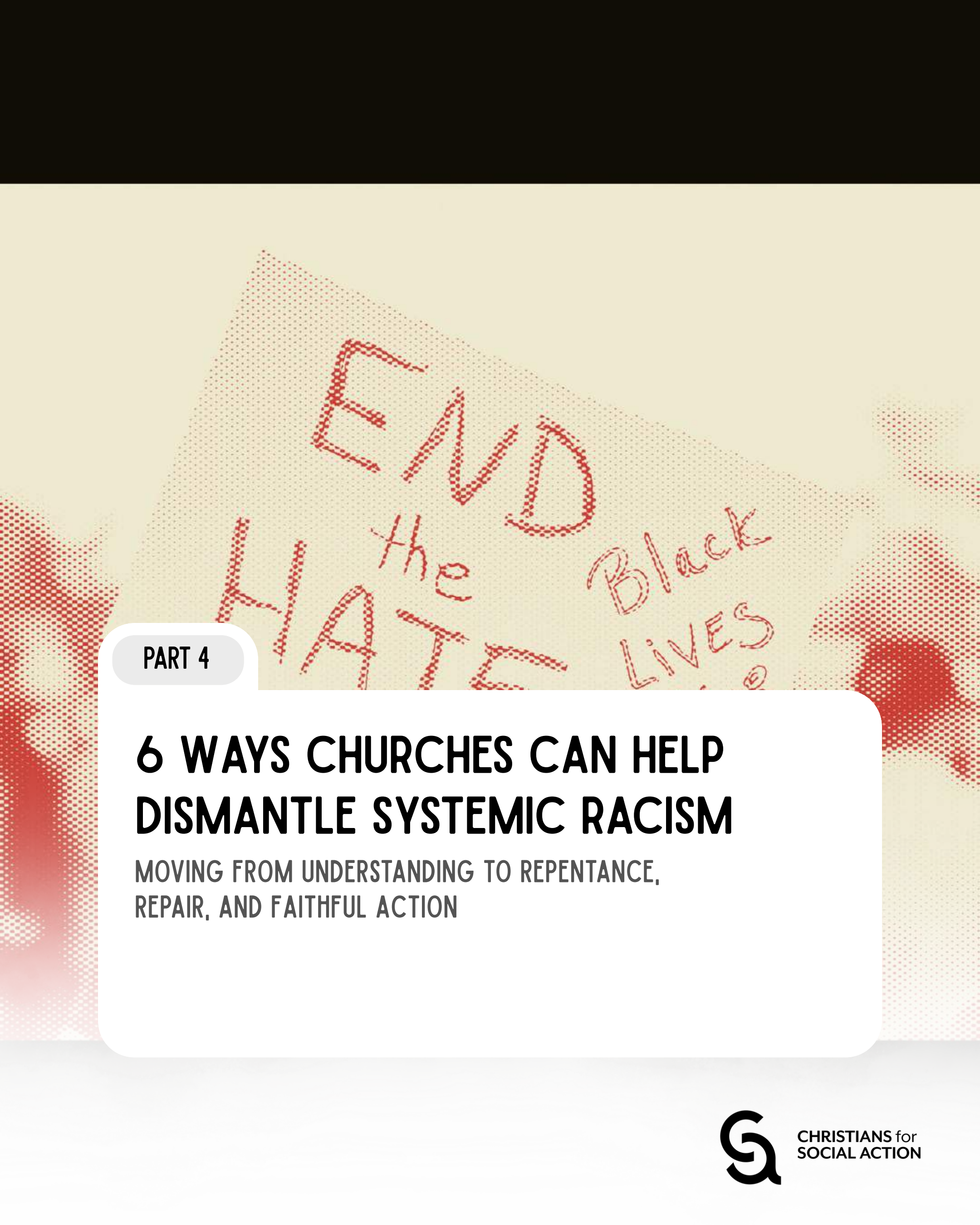
Though these currents are at times contradicted by passages that can be read to support various forms of oppression, these passages tap into God's deep heart for justice, helping those of us who are compelled to social action because of our faith to recognize and locate ourselves within a long Christian tradition of pursuing dignity, liberation, and human flourishing.



PART 3

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which biblical story or theme in this article — Exodus, the treatment of foreigners, Ruth, the Good Samaritan, Paul’s teaching on equality, James’ warning against favoritism, or Revelation’s critique of empire — most expanded or challenged your understanding of justice?
- Andre argues that justice work is not something imported into Christianity from contemporary politics, but something rooted deeply in Scripture. How does that claim compare with the way you have heard Christians talk about “social justice”?
- Scripture repeatedly asks God’s people to pay attention to those who are excluded, oppressed, or denied dignity. Where might that biblical current be inviting you or your church to see something differently or respond more faithfully?



PART 4

6 WAYS CHURCHES CAN HELP DISMANTLE SYSTEMIC RACISM

MOVING FROM UNDERSTANDING TO REPENTANCE,
REPAIR, AND FAITHFUL ACTION



CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION

In Part 4, Henry moves from understanding and repentance toward faithful action. He offers six practical ways churches can confront systemic racism — from examining their values, worship, and leadership to sharing resources and power — and invites congregations to discern what meaningful repair and transformation can look like in their own communities.

In this series, we've established that racism is sin. We've shown that racism is not just personal hatred, but a system that unequally distributes power, opportunity, and resources based on race. We've also recounted how the Christian church has been deeply implicated in constructing that system.

Therefore, the Church has a moral and spiritual obligation to repent of its participation in building and upholding global racism. True repentance goes beyond confessing the sin or even stopping it. It requires seeking repair where harm has been done, if possible, and committing to actively doing good (Deut. 15:12; Eph. 4:28). For the church, this means more than disavowing racism — it demands actively dismantling it. Here are six practical ways the church can help dismantle systemic racism:

MAKE ANTI-RACISM A CORE VALUE

Make your commitment to anti-racism explicit. List it alongside the other core values on your website, in your bylaws, wherever it lives. If “anti-racism” doesn’t feel like the right language, swap in “human rights,” “racial equity,” or “justice for the oppressed.” Whatever language you choose, make it unambiguous. This is important as a signal to people who have been racially oppressed that your sanctuary is a place where they will receive ministry relevant to the unique pain of racial harm. It is also an important point of repentance for the harms the church has historically participated in.

PREACH AND PRAY CONTEXTUALLY

Treat biblical people as flesh-and-blood humans grappling with the political, economic, and social realities of their time. When you preach, spotlight power dynamics that already exist in the text. Make sure that a portion of your liturgies respond directly to the communal anxieties that arise from the headlines.

SUPPORT DIRECT ACTION MOVEMENTS WITH RESOURCES

Freedom movements thrive on mobilized resources: communication networks, trusted leaders, relationships, money, land, buildings, vehicles. Churches were in the vanguard of the 1950s-60s Civil Rights charge because they had all that in surplus:

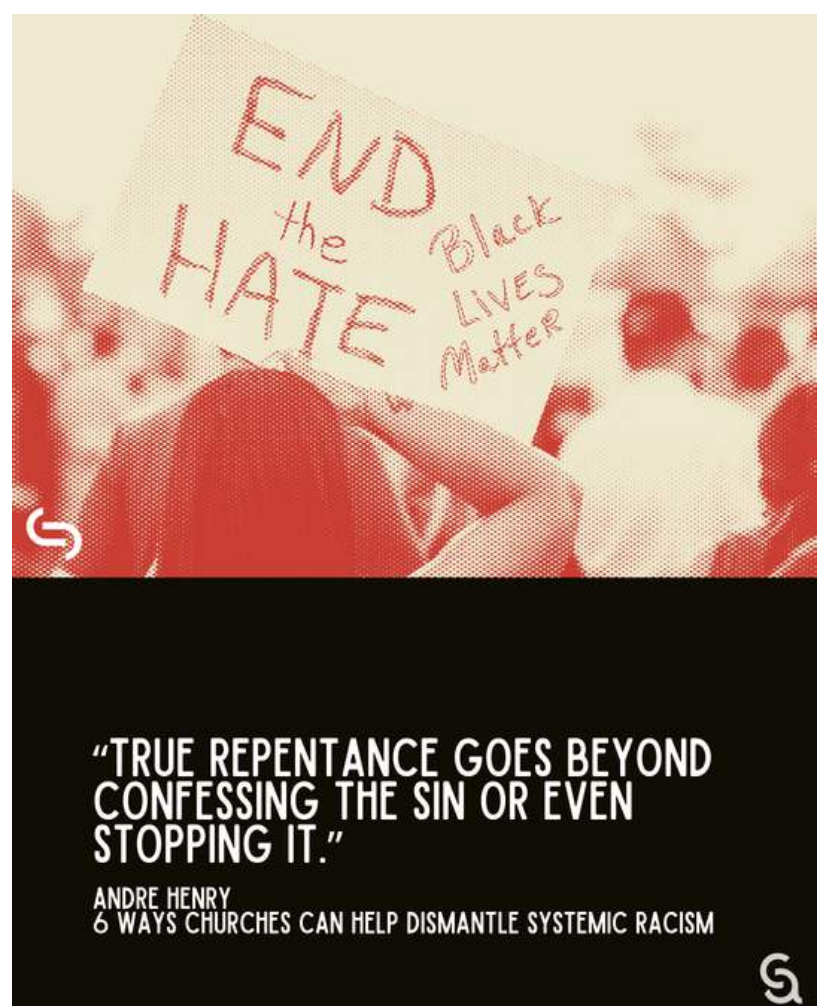
Think of the Montgomery Boycott, where churches volunteered their sanctuaries for strategy sessions and mass meetings. Offer your email lists for mobilization calls, parking lots for rallies, or meeting spaces for organizers. Have extra space, transportation, funding, or communication resources? Consider how those assets might support vulnerable communities, peaceful demonstrations, legal aid efforts, community organizing, or local justice initiatives.

PROVIDE SPIRITUAL SUPPORT TO SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Burnout hits hard in the trenches. Step up with pastoral care: one-on-one spiritual direction for weary leaders and sermons that remind weary people that pursuing justice and loving neighbor are sacred callings. Go to actions and pray for them, offer water, counsel, or just presence amid chaos, like chaplains on the front lines. Create a therapy fund for organizers.

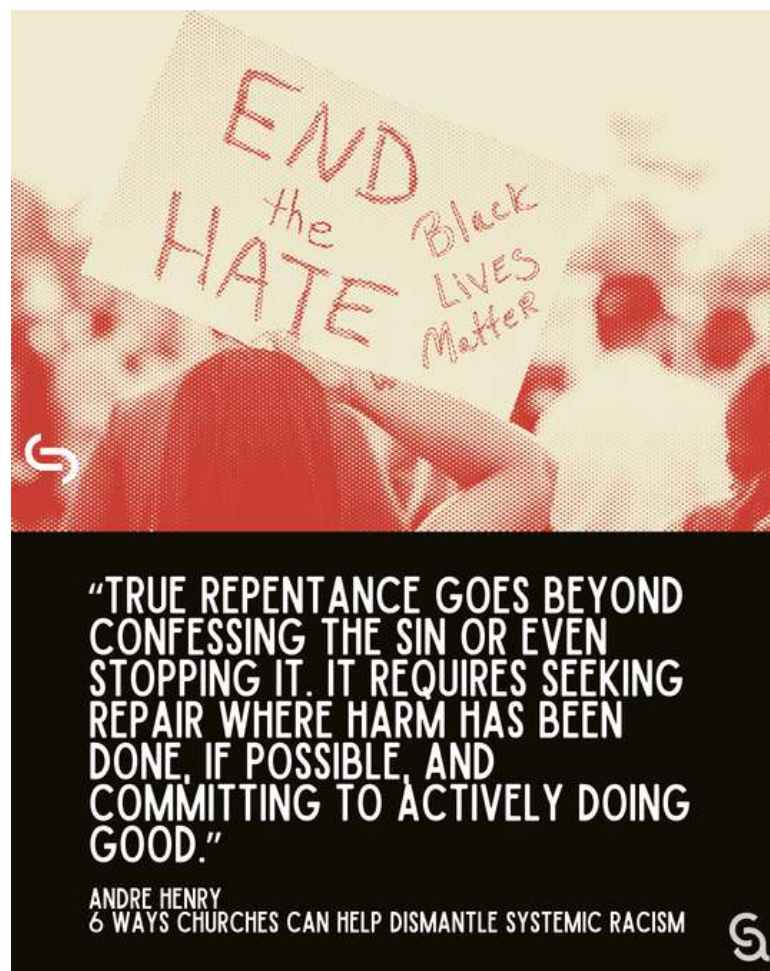
ACCEPT LEADERSHIP FROM MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Racism persists without diverse power-sharing. Prioritize leadership — volunteer and paid — that reflects your community's demographics, ensuring that people from racially marginalized communities (Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, etc.) hold real decision-making authority, not just visible roles.

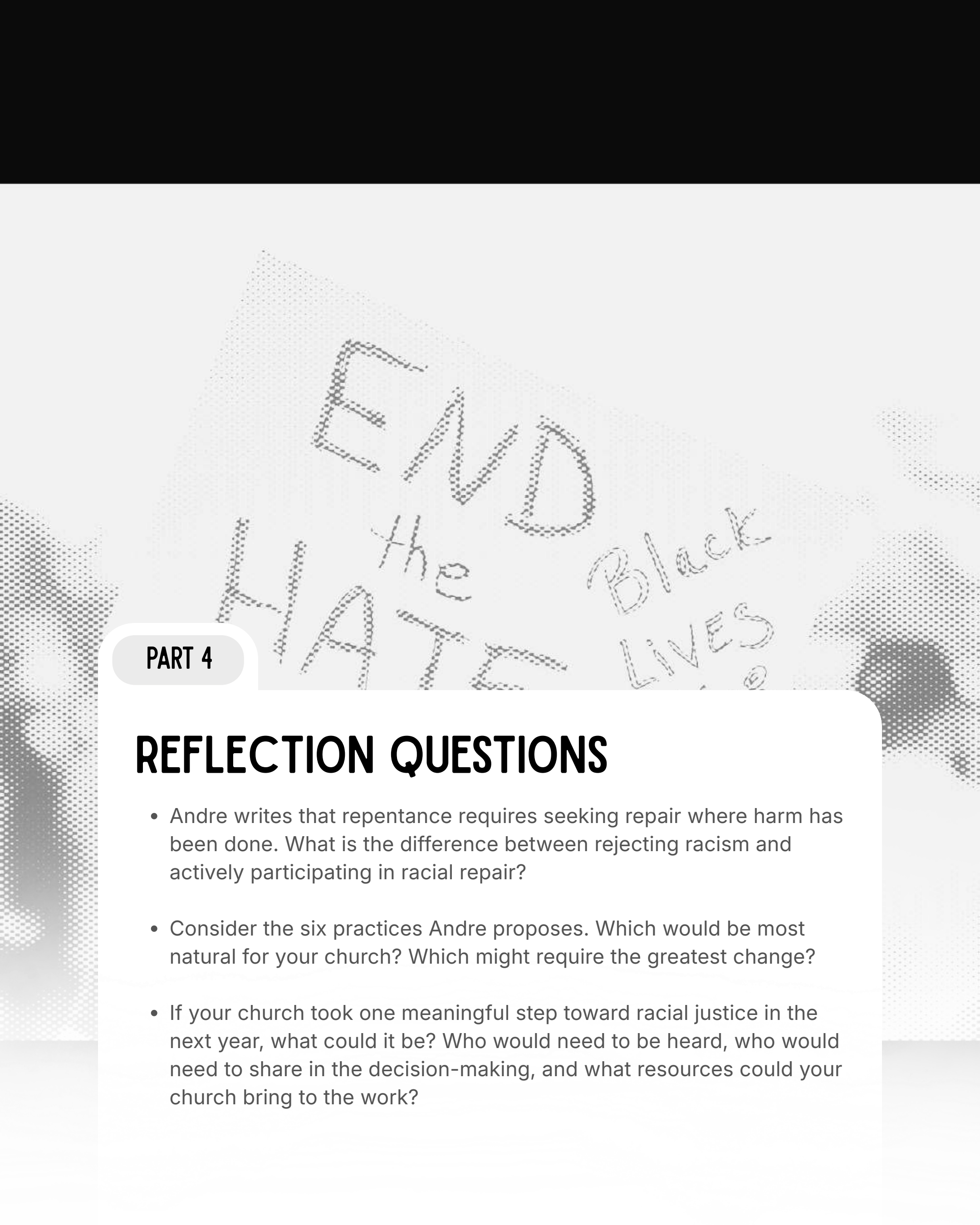


IN WHITE-LED, MULTIETHNIC CHURCHES, AMPLIFY MARGINALIZED STORIES IN WORSHIP AND EDUCATION

Counter dominant narratives by centering racially marginalized voices. Diversify hymnals, prayers, lectionary resources, and educational curricula. Incorporate worship traditions and spiritual exercises in your liturgies from the communities represented in your congregation. Swap Eurocentric saints' days with Christian exemplars from marginalized communities.



This is not an exhaustive checklist every church must implement in the same way. These ideas are meant to spark imagination and faithful discernment. Listen to your congregation, especially racially marginalized members, and work with trusted local leaders to determine what faithfulness looks like in your context.



PART 4

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Andre writes that repentance requires seeking repair where harm has been done. What is the difference between rejecting racism and actively participating in racial repair?
- Consider the six practices Andre proposes. Which would be most natural for your church? Which might require the greatest change?
- If your church took one meaningful step toward racial justice in the next year, what could it be? Who would need to be heard, who would need to share in the decision-making, and what resources could your church bring to the work?

WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

Understanding racism matters. But Christian discipleship calls us beyond understanding toward faithful practice. You do not have to do everything at once. Begin where you are, listen well, and choose a next step that moves you and your community toward greater justice, dignity, and repair.

LISTEN AND LEARN

Pay attention to whose voices have shaped your understanding of race, theology, and justice — and whose may be missing. Read and learn from Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian American, and other racially marginalized Christian leaders, theologians, historians, and neighbors. Approach their experiences not as problems to debate, but as wisdom worth hearing.

EXAMINE YOUR CHURCH

Look honestly at your congregation's leadership, worship, teaching, hiring, partnerships, and decision-making. Who holds influence? Whose theology gets quoted? Whose music and traditions shape worship? Who may feel welcomed into the room but not invited to shape it?

LEARN YOUR LOCAL HISTORY

Racism is not only a national story. Learn how race has shaped housing, schools, churches, neighborhoods, policing, and access to opportunity where you live. Understanding your community's particular history can help you discern what meaningful repair might look like there.

WAYS TO TAKE ACTION, CONT.

SHARE POWER, NOT JUST SPACE

Representation matters, but belonging requires more than visibility. Consider whether people from racially marginalized communities have meaningful opportunities to lead, make decisions, shape priorities, and influence how resources are used.

PUT YOUR RESOURCES TO WORK

Churches have buildings, budgets, relationships, communication platforms, volunteers, and community trust. Ask how those resources might serve local organizations and movements already working toward racial justice — and whenever possible, follow the leadership of people closest to the issues.

PRACTICE REPENTANCE AND REPAIR

Repentance is more than acknowledging that something was wrong. Where racial harm has occurred, ask what can be repaired. That may involve changing policies, restoring relationships, redirecting resources, acknowledging history, or creating new practices that prevent harm from continuing.

CHOOSE ONE NEXT STEP

Lasting change rarely begins with doing everything. Gather a few people from your church or community and ask: *What is one concrete step we can take in the next 30 days?*

Then name who will take responsibility, what resources are needed, and when you will return to evaluate what you have learned.

The goal is not to become a church that has “solved” racism. It is to become a community willing to keep listening, repenting, learning, sharing power, and practicing justice as part of following Jesus.

A PRAYER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

GOD OF JUSTICE AND MERCY,

YOU CREATED EVERY PERSON IN YOUR IMAGE
AND CALLED US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS YOU HAVE LOVED US.

GIVE US COURAGE TO SEE CLEARLY—
TO RECOGNIZE RACISM IN OUR HEARTS,
OUR CHURCHES, OUR INSTITUTIONS,
AND THE STORIES WE HAVE INHERITED.

WHERE WE HAVE CAUSED HARM, LEAD US TO REPENTANCE.
WHERE WE HAVE REMAINED SILENT, GIVE US COURAGE.
WHERE WE HAVE FAILED TO LISTEN, MAKE US HUMBLE.
WHERE INJUSTICE HAS BECOME FAMILIAR, DISTURB OUR COMFORT.

TEACH US TO SEEK MORE THAN GOOD INTENTIONS.
HELP US SHARE POWER, REPAIR WHAT HAS BEEN BROKEN,
STAND ALONGSIDE THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN HARMED,

AND BUILD COMMUNITIES WHERE EVERY PERSON'S DIGNITY
IS HONORED AND PROTECTED.

SHAPE YOUR CHURCH INTO A PEOPLE KNOWN
NOT ONLY BY WHAT WE OPPOSE,
BUT BY THE JUSTICE WE PURSUE,
THE LOVE WE PRACTICE,
AND THE REPAIR WE ARE WILLING TO UNDERTAKE.

MAKE US FAITHFUL WITNESSES
TO YOUR BELOVED COMMUNITY.

AMEN.



AUTHOR

ANDRE HENRY

Andre Henry is program manager of the Racial Justice Institute at Christians for Social Action. He is a student of nonviolent struggle and social change, including studying leadership in nonviolent movements for social change through the Harvard Kennedy School. He holds a BA in Practical Theology and an MA in Theology with an emphasis in Biblical Languages.



**WHERE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION MEETS FAITHFUL ACTION.
STAY CONNECTED WITH US.**



**CHRISTIANS for
SOCIAL ACTION**

christiansforsocialaction.org