

## MISSION AD GENTES AND THE PERILS OF RACIAL PRIVILEGE

PAUL V. KOLLMAN, C.S.C.

*Building on an episode in Uganda, the author considers ethical issues facing missionaries due to race-based privileges. He uses the notion of white privilege to consider how missionaries should negotiate the default racialization found in missionary settings where race operates differently than it does where white privilege is usually found. Racial privileges intensify the competing demands at work in contemporary theologies of mission between dialogue and proclamation. In acknowledging such privileges and the accompanying tension they augment, missionaries should pursue awareness of and accountability for them.*

**W**HITE PRIVILEGE is a term and notion that has in recent years emerged in discussions of race and racism to describe a broad set of presumed advantages accorded those designated white.<sup>1</sup> Though most references to white privilege have appeared in relation to the distinctive history of race associated with the United States, certain types of privileges associated with whiteness also operate outside the United States. This article will address the ethical complexities missionaries face in prototypical

PAUL V. KOLLMAN, C.S.C., earned his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School and is now assistant professor in the Department of Theology at the University of Notre Dame. Specializing in African Christianity and history of religions, his recent publications include *The Evangelization of Slaves and Catholic Origins in Eastern Africa* (2005). Currently in preparation is a monograph on the Catholic evangelization of eastern Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> For helpful introductions to the issue, see Paula Rothenberg, ed.: *White Privilege: Essential Readings from the Other Side of Racism* (New York: Worth, 2002); and Frances Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships across Race* (New York: Routledge, 2006). For an overview and discussion of whiteness, see Melanie E. Bush, *Breaking the Code of Good Intentions: Everyday Forms of Whiteness* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004) 15–18. For a more personal reflection see Robert Jensen, *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2005). For a discussion of the difference between white power and white privilege, see Joseph R. Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 85–110.

missionary settings due to privileges associated with race, in an effort to present a missiological reflection on the implications of contemporary dynamics of race and race-making.

My first visit to the central bus station in Jinja, Uganda, occasioned an epiphany. I entered the broad, dusty expanse near the center of one of Uganda's larger cities as the rising heat of the morning joined pungent diesel and gasoline fumes. Loud male voices barked in several languages: "Iganga, Iganga, leaving now for Iganga!" "Mbale! This way to Mbale!" "Kampala! *Shilingi elfu tatu* [3000 shillings] to Kampala." I also heard more personal messages as young men sidled up, pleading, "Where are you going?" or "Where do you want to go?" or "Let me show you a good vehicle." One tugged at my sleeve, "Hey, *mzungu* [a Swahili word for foreigner, especially European foreigner], are you going to Kampala?" Uganda's capital being my destination, I tentatively followed him.

I noticed that the potential passengers who were Africans—nearly everyone else—received no such personal invitations, but I and the few other *wazungu* (the plural form of *mzungu*) received many. I first guessed, "They charge us more, thus we're a good catch for these young men who get a fee for each passenger they bring." Then, with slightly more charity, I surmised, "We're curiosities, so they're interested in us."

Neither hunch was unreasonable. I sometimes did pay more than darker hued customers, due to what is sometimes semi-humorously designated a "skin-tax." And people are curious about strangers everywhere. But soon I discovered another less obvious reason that shaped how and why I was courted so assiduously, a reason linked to the seat I was guaranteed as I haggled over the price of my ticket. On the hair-raising ride to Kampala I sat in a choice spot in the minivan, up front with the driver, a place with comparatively ample leg-room. As he and I spoke, I asked why the young man who had gathered passengers for the journey had promised me this desirable perch. Sensing my suspicions, the driver quickly assured me that I had not been asked to pay a higher fare than other passengers. Then he added, "*Ssebo* [Luganda for 'sir'], with your white face here in the window the police do not stop this vehicle at road-blocks." Here was an obvious case of literal *white privilege*, for I received this seat because I was seen as white.

How should one deal with receiving such privileges arising in missionary settings? To consider this question and address ethical and missiological implications of how race works in such contexts, this article proceeds in three parts. Part 1 introduces the notion of white privilege as used in contemporary scholarship, highlighting its place in recent theological discussions. Part 2 describes how a different but related sort of racialized privileging operates in settings like the Jinja bus park. Clearly the treatment accorded me on the ride to Kampala was not the kind of white

privilege usually identified in discussions of the topic, since invocations of white privilege tend to refer to situations encountered in places like the United States where perceived whiteness confers easy-to-overlook advantages because of a supposed lack of racial marking. Instead it took place while I was in a traditionally prototypical overseas missionary setting, a place where my whiteness rendered me prominent rather than unmarked or ordinary. Such settings create ethical challenges different from those posed by white privilege in the United States, for racial categorizations do not operate the same way in places where whiteness is hypervisible.<sup>2</sup> Thus part 3 considers those ethical challenges, showing how they raise questions that confront the heart of Christian mission.

Mission today faces inevitable tensions that arise due to competing intrinsic demands. Risking oversimplification, one could say that on the one hand we are called to proclaim the gospel, while on the other hand we are called to adopt a stance of dialogue with those evangelized.<sup>3</sup> Privileges like those due to race expose and amplify the intrinsic tension between dialogue and proclamation. In response to and in light of such privileges, I will make three claims constitutive of missionary ethics. First, missionaries have an obligation to be mindful of the privileges they receive due to race, so that such awareness should be seen as integral to the cultural and social familiarity they aspire to as evangelizers in particular settings. Second, though uncritical acquiescence in such privileging is obviously unacceptable, unilateral refusal to allow any such privileges, though ostensibly a noble aspiration, is also problematic. Not only is it unrealistic due to ubiquitous “race-making,” but it risks being counterproductive since it can represent a unilateral decision that itself reinforces the power imbalance that must be resisted. Third, a stance of ethical accountability toward such privileges calls missionaries not simply to accept them at times, but also to consider how their service as missionaries, even when depending on such undeserved privileges, should also pursue their reduction and eventual undoing. To that end, I make a suggestion about how missionaries might assume accountability for the privileges they receive.

<sup>2</sup> In asserting that the different context entails different ethical challenges, I do not mean here to reengage an older debate about situational or contextual ethics, but only to make a more modest point that ethical reflection on white privilege has, for the most part, focused on the United States and similar contexts, not places like Uganda.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller discussion of differing models at work in mission today, see Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004); and Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Concepts of Mission: The Evolution of Contemporary Missiology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2006).

This article will not seek to address racism and mission per se, a subject much discussed elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Nor does it consider mission in the broader sense of the term, that is, as the church's entire role in the world as bearer of the Good News. It instead focuses on the more subtle notion of white and other forms of racial privilege, and on situations where missionaries cross borders in pursuit of evangelization, in what is traditionally called mission *ad gentes*. In such cases differences attributed to race regularly distinguish missionaries where they are serving.

This focus raises an obvious potential objection to this article, given the reality of Christian mission today. After all, many Christian missionaries are not viewed as white, so the article's subject may seem irrelevant, even anachronistic. Yet it is still the case that many missionaries remain categorized as white, and their perceived whiteness operates socially where they carry out their evangelization. Moreover, all are subject to practices of racialization so that racial differentiations play themselves out in countless human interactions and in complex ways, often unconsciously. Appreciating the intricacies of white privilege casts light on how racial constructions affect mission even when those perceived as white are not present, and thus raises questions that all who pursue Christian evangelization today should consider.

### DISCERNING WHITE PRIVILEGE

White privilege, which apparently garnered me a choice seat on the road between Jinja and Kampala, takes many forms. Employed to capture the comparative benefits accruing to people because they are perceived to be

<sup>4</sup> See Margaret Elletta Guider, "'Oh, Deep in My Heart, I Do Believe. . .': Elements of a Missionary Spirituality for Redressing Racism," *Missiology* 32 (2004) 5–13; Guider "Moral Imagination and the *Missio Ad Gentes*: Redressing the Counterwitness of Racism," in *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence*, ed. Laurie M. Cassidy and Alex Mikulich (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2007) 95–123; Rodney L. Petersen, "Racism, Restorative Justice, and Reconciliation," *Missiology* 32 (2004) 71–91; Darrell Whiteman, "The Role of Ethnicity and Culture in Shaping Western Mission Agency Identity," *Missiology* 34 (2006) 59–70. It should be noted that some discussions of "white privilege" use the term as a synonym for racism instead of in the more specific use considered here. Bonnie Sue Lewis, for example, analyzes how what she calls "white missionary privilege" operated among Presbyterian missionaries who evangelized Native Americans and Native Alaskans ("The Dynamics and Dismantling of White Missionary Privilege," *Missiology* 32 [2004] 37–45). She gives some forms of such white missionary privilege, and she uses the term as a synonym for ingrained racist and ethnocentric assumptions and practices rather than in conscious dialogue with other discussions of white privilege per se in the broader literature. She emphasizes that the dismantling of racism in the church was the work not of outsider-missionaries as much as of leaders among the Native Americans and Native Alaskans.

white, white privilege is thus a conceptual subset among the many ways that perceived racial differences operate systemically to favor some and disfavor others. It represents one aspect of racism, what Paula Rothenberg calls racism's "other side"—the side that confers a better seat to some, while "the normal side" of racism consigns others to less desirable seats.<sup>5</sup>

Though there are physiognomic similarities linked to prehistoric human origins from certain parts of the globe, race in a strong biological sense—is capturing the kinds of differences that mark important human capacities—is dubious. Yet as a social construct, race operates in all sorts of social contexts, so that race is "neither fiction nor fixed."<sup>6</sup> Recognizing the problematic history behind the notion of race, as well as its socially constructed nature, in this article I join others in using terms like "racialism," "race-thinking," "race-making," "race construction," or "racialization" to foreground the social processes by which race-based identities operate despite race's dubious nature. These terms emphasize the now nearly irresistible impulse to classify people by races. Racism denotes the selective impulse to use those perceived differences for systematic disfavoring and favoring of groups defined by race. As a notion and a phenomenon, white privilege thus depends on the reality of widespread, often default, social processes of racialization rooted in operative notions of race.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Rothenburg, *White Privilege*; and Karyn D. McKinney, *Being White: Stories of Race and Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, eds., *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 2006) 4.

<sup>7</sup> For helpful discussions, in addition to *ibid.*, see Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible": A Reader in Black Women's History*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed (New York: Carlson, 1995) 3–24; George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2002); Maria Krysan and Amanda E. Lewis, eds., *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity* (New York: Russell Sage, 2004); Karim Murji and John Solomos, eds., *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University, 2004); Paul C. Taylor, *Race: A Philosophical Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2004); Bruce Baum, *The Rise and Fall of the Caucasian Race: A Political History of Racial Identity* (New York: New York University, 2006); Joseph Young and Jana Evans Braziel, eds., *Race and the Foundations of Knowledge: Cultural Amnesia in the Academy* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois, 2006); Shelly Tochluk, *Witnessing Whiteness: First Steps toward an Antiracist Practice and Culture* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Kenan Malik, *Strange Fruit: Why Both Sides Are Wrong in the Race Debate* (New York: Oneworld, 2008); Joshua Glasgow, *A Theory of Race* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Gerald J. Beyer, "Why Race Still Matters: Catholics and the Rise of Barack Obama," *America* 200.16 (2009) 11–14; William McKee Evans, *Open Wound: The Long View of Race in America* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois, 2009). Most of the works build upon and/or engage critical race theory as exemplified in the work of Charles Mills

Some of the most eloquent insights into the widespread insidiousness of white privilege come from African-American intellectuals like W. E. B. Du Bois, James Baldwin, and bell hooks. Conscious of their own oft-perceived stigmatization as black, they recognize how being considered white in the United States has meant certain advantages, often through not having to be conscious of belonging to a race at all. Thus the phenomenon of white privilege does not depend on overt white supremacy or obvious racism encoded in laws. It has a life of its own, often beyond critically conscious self-awareness.

### Invisible Whiteness

Whites in the United States, as cultural studies scholar Ruth Frankenberg notes, sometimes defensively claim not to be obsessed by race, and express sadness and pity for “people of color” for whom race has such salience in their self-understanding and collective assertions of identity. Yet Frankenberg and others observe that this presumptive “absence of race” is itself a stance of power persisting with stubborn elusiveness after blatant white supremacy is gone. And they insist that whiteness operates as a racial marker in the United States, even if it is not so named. Whites all too often unselfconsciously enjoy “presupposed privilege, taken-for-granted access, expected protections, unhindered mobility, and unthinking facilities.”<sup>8</sup> African-Americans, by contrast, are inescapably shaped by what Du Bois presciently called double-consciousness.<sup>9</sup> They are simultaneously aware of themselves as both personalized subjects *and* as objects through objectification-as-racialization by others.

One of the earliest and most famous ideas associated with the concept of white privilege is feminist theorist Peggy McIntosh’s notion of the “Invisible Knapsack.” McIntosh describes white privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day.” She lists 50 or so unconscious assumptions that those perceived as European-Americans possess, even without knowing it, capacities available to “whites” that “non-whites” usually go without. Others have borrowed McIntosh’s term and identified “invisible knapsacks” of different orders: male, heterosexist, or “un-disabled.” Each list tries to heighten awareness

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(especially *The Racial Contract* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1997] and *From Class to Race: Essays in White Marxism and Black Radicalism* [New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003]).

<sup>8</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), cited by James Perkinson in *White Theology: Outing Supremacy in Modernity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) 164.

<sup>9</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Cutchogue, N.Y.: Buccaneer, 1976) 16–17.

of the taken-for-granted nature of the various privileges given some and denied others.<sup>10</sup>

Reinforcing McIntosh's image, feminist philosopher Shannon Sullivan presents white privilege as an "unconscious habit," one internalized and reinforced in whites (and others) in the United States through social experiences. With the help of psychoanalytic theories of embodiment, Sullivan speaks of the "soft patter" of white privilege, how it often functions invisibly.<sup>11</sup> Identifying white privilege as an unconscious habit (or collection of habits) also illuminates the way white privilege is at once mental and physical, individual and social, personal and structural, as well as concrete in one moment (such as on a highway in Uganda) but operating differently in other circumstances.

Other insights into the subtleties of white privilege have been generated in recent years by historians and anthropologists who have uncovered the complex legacy of racism, especially in the U.S. past. These historical arguments have complemented with documentary evidence intuitions long held by African-Americans, showing how and why such intuitions discerned historical realities. In particular, a number of studies have disclosed how ethnic, linguistic, or religious groups once considered nonwhite in the United States redefined themselves as white in pursuit of higher status. For example, Noel Ignatiev, Karen Brodtkin, David Roediger, and Eric Goldstein have shown how racialized white identity in the United States has changed over time, as former immigrant groups like European Jews, Italians, and the Irish—each initially categorized as nonwhite in hegemonic U.S. racialization—moved toward white self-designations, invariably thereby gaining advantages in the national milieu they slowly grew to understand.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For two essays that discuss the notion of the invisible knapsack, see Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," in *White Privilege* 97–101; and "White Privilege and Male Privilege," in *Privilege: A Reader*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferder (Cambridge, Mass.: Westview, 2003) 147–60. For analogous "knapsacks," simply type "invisible knapsack" into any Internet search engine. One is found at: [http://www.cs.earlham.edu/~hyrax/personal/files/student\\_res/straightprivilege.pdf](http://www.cs.earlham.edu/~hyrax/personal/files/student_res/straightprivilege.pdf) (accessed November 24, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2006) 3–5.

<sup>12</sup> Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University, 2000); David Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2006). For an account of U.S. racial experience that summarizes much recent research, see David R. Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon* (London: Verso, 2008).

Recently Mark Smith has further enlarged and complexified our view of the historical evolution of racialization in the United States. Smith shows how racism grew to depend on other types of sensory evidence beyond that given by the eyes. With the legal end of U.S. slavery, the visual priority of racialization, while not disappearing, was increasingly supplemented by olfactory, auditory, and skin-texture-based presumptions about how to differentiate whites and blacks, especially in the American South. Smith argues that the move to other senses beyond the visual gave white supremacy and resultant white privilege a firmer basis in the hegemonic taken-for-granted world of the Jim Crow South.<sup>13</sup>

### White Privilege and Theology

The notion of white privilege as a latent legacy of overt white supremacy has also recently made its way onto the theological agenda. In 2004 a group of theologians and pastors edited a volume entitled *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need To Do*.<sup>14</sup> Two years later, a conference at the University of Notre Dame addressed the relationship between white privilege and theology, the culmination of several annual sessions at the Catholic Theological Society of America's yearly meeting that had addressed the topic. This conference also produced an edited volume.<sup>15</sup> Despite these efforts,

<sup>13</sup> Mark M. Smith, *How Race Is Made: Slavery, Segregation, and the Senses* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer Harvey, Karin A. Case, and Robin Hawley Gorsline, eds., *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within: White People on What We Need To Do* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2004). The editors were motivated by James Cone's challenge at the 2001 meeting of the American Academy of Religion, where Cone said that 30 years after Black liberation theology appeared white theologians had failed to take racism as a starting point for theological reflection (Harvey et al., *Disrupting* 7).

<sup>15</sup> Cassidy and Mikulich, *Interrupting White Privilege*. This volume contains papers referred to or included in the following volumes of *Proceedings of the Annual Convention* (Catholic Theological Society of America) 56 (2001) 49–75; 57 (2002) 131–33; 58 (2003) 101–2; 59 (2004) 151–52; 60 (2005) 150–51; 61 (2006) 137–38, 177–78. Critics of the notion of white privilege raise a variety of objections to its invocation, even when they recognize the accuracy of what it describes. Some have asked, for instance, if isolating whiteness as a factor ignores other ways that privileging occurs, due to gender, class, sexual preference, lack of disability or some other discernible basis for differentiation. A single-minded focus on race, such critics claim, risks overlooking the shared experiences of unjust discrimination, shared experiences that can then become the basis for political action to undo it. Others decry the way the term white privilege denounces the bad without announcing the good. Roger Haight thus prefers to speak of the goal of racial solidarity (“The Dysfunctional Rhetoric of ‘White Privilege’ and the Need for Racial Solidarity” in *Interrupting White Privilege* 85–94). Still others see white privilege failing to account for the harm done to all people, including whites, by racism. Thus Jon

focused theological analysis of white racism and resultant white privilege has been rare.<sup>16</sup>

Among theologians, James Perkinson's work represents an exception. In a number of articles and two books, Perkinson has interrogated whiteness in light of Christian assumptions, bringing much-needed theological reflection to the topic.<sup>17</sup> Building on critical race theory, he sees whiteness as a "power of opposition" that "emerges historically as perceived difference from, economic exploitation of, political dominance over, and presumed social superiority to, peoples 'of color.'"<sup>18</sup> Perkinson's theological method features cultural analyses of contemporary manifestations of race and incisive readings of the history of philosophy and theology. Central to his project is foregrounding the interdependence of blackness and whiteness in U.S. racialization past and present. In light of that interdependence, Perkinson interrogates African-American experiences in order to uncover the nature of whiteness.

Perkinson's distinctive contributions are twofold. First, he echoes and supplements the then-startling claim of James Cone, who over three decades ago insisted that for Christ to be salvific in the United States, Christ needed to be seen as Black. Perkinson attends to the inverse reality, positing the soteriological presuppositions that lie behind white identity. He contends that modern racial ideology has, with the help of mainstream theology, been a surrogate mode of soteriology, in which whiteness has been "a mythic presumption of wholeness."<sup>19</sup> He writes: "I address the

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Nilson at the Notre Dame conference said that he prefers "white alienation," which captures the way unconscious privileges accorded to a few disfigure our common humanity. Finally, a number of analysts prefer to foreground white supremacy instead of white privilege, for they are suspicious that emphasizing white privilege allows whites to explore their subjective experiences and work on individual reform without interrogating the larger social processes that create such experiences (see Mills, *Racial Contract* and *From Class to Race*, as well as Anna Stubblefield, *Ethics along the Colorline* [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 2005]).

<sup>16</sup> Jon Nilson (*Hearing Past the Pain: Why White Catholic Theologians Need Black Theology* [New York: Paulist, 2007]) develops his contribution to *Interrupting White Privilege*, lamenting the longstanding tendency among U.S. Catholic theologians to ignore black theology. A more practical approach and one shaped by Evangelical concerns can be found in Paula Harris and Doug Schaupp, *Being White: Finding Our Place in a Multiethnic World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004). J. Kameron Carter's *Race: A Theological Account* (New York: Oxford University, 2008) appeared too late to be fully incorporated into this article, but his emphasis is on race in general, not on whiteness per se.

<sup>17</sup> James W. Perkinson, *White Theology and Shamanism, Racism, and Hip-Hop Culture: Essays on White Supremacy and Black Subversion* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Perkinson, *White Theology* 153.      <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 3, 49.

whiteness of mainstream theology by way of the *theological-ness of mainstream whiteness*.”<sup>20</sup>

Perkinson’s second contribution lies in his genealogical account of U.S./ American racialization, which traces the unfolding of the link between whiteness and salvation. He believes that white racism’s roots lie in Hebrew and early Christian notions of otherness.<sup>21</sup> These roots were then reshaped through a series of powerful historical experiences: first the medieval Spanish encounter with Islam and Judaism, and then the Iberian (and eventually broader European) encounter with the Americas. Western Christianity’s Europe-centered sense of itself in relation to Jews, Muslims, and then the Americas forged a disposition to mark encountered, conquered, and colonized Others under the sign of unbelief-imaged-as-darkness in an instinctive and self-protective appropriation.<sup>22</sup> Europeans in North America, Perkinson claims, then underwent a distinctive Calvinist-inspired appropriation of African blackness that, in the context of enslavement, prototypically cast blackness as unsaved. This racializing instinct was then reinforced when white North Americans themselves resisted colonization by emphasizing the purity of their new world-becoming-nation. The U.S. experience of race was thus unique. As Perkinson writes, in the United States, “racialization organized social differentiation by means of soteriological signification.”<sup>23</sup>

### RACIAL PRIVILEGE IN PROTOTYPICAL MISSIONARY SETTINGS

The preceding overview of white privilege has been selective, but it shows what a fuller account would confirm: nearly all discussion around white privilege has appeared in relationship to the United States and its particular history of race, racialization, and racism. African-American experiences have generated existential and dramatic insights, the basis for compelling critical race theory; Peggy McIntosh’s “invisible knapsack” image presupposes a U.S. setting; historical research emphasizes the distinctiveness and evolving nature of white identity in the United States; theological attempts to address the issue have come in edited collections from mostly U.S.-based theologians; and Perkinson’s approaches to whiteness as soteriological depends heavily on sophisticated readings of African-American public performance and critical theory largely deriving from

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 2 (emphasis original).

<sup>21</sup> Carter (*Race* 4–5) offers a slightly different account, explaining the origins of racism within Christianity’s rejection of its Jewish roots.

<sup>22</sup> Perkinson, *White Theology* 49–61; Perkinson, *Shamanism* 26–28.

<sup>23</sup> Perkinson, *White Theology* 60.

U.S. experiences. Unsurprisingly, Jim Wallis recently reiterated that white racism is “America’s original sin.”<sup>24</sup>

The question thus arises: is it appropriate to refer to white privilege in prototypical missionary circumstances in places where, as is often the case, white missionaries evangelize *outside* the United States? Yes, inasmuch as I obtained a good seat in Uganda because of the color of my face in that minivan window. But surely that whiteness—the whiteness that made me an *mzungu*—differs from the whiteness of U.S. racial experience that informs most accounts of white privilege. Two differences seem salient. First, one consequence of the unique history of the United States has been that race has long been popularly seen in bipolar terms. Despite ample evidence to the contrary—namely, the variety of peoples who have lived within its borders—blackness and whiteness have by and large organized racialization in the United States. Elsewhere categories of black and white have not interrelated in the same interdependent way.<sup>25</sup> In other times and places, perceptions of difference rooted in physiognomy—like skin color—have operated differently, so that “the color line has a different geometry.”<sup>26</sup> As critical race theorists show in ever more sophisticated ways, categories of differentiation supposedly linked with color—white, black, red, yellow, brown, even blue—have different meanings at different times and in different places.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Jim Wallis, “America’s Original Sin: The Legacy of White Racism,” *Cross Currents* 57 (2007) 197–202.

<sup>25</sup> As Eric Goldstein (*Price of Whiteness* 3–6) shows, the black-white polarity around race in the United States has operated as an ideology that has shifted over time. Early 20th-century Germany operated with a sense of national racial consciousness in which whiteness was even more presumptive than in the United States; see Laura Tharsen, “Ethnic Nationalism in Germany,” *Philosophia Africana* 8 (2005) 117–42. South Africa’s history of racialization is particularly complex, largely due to *apartheid*. Judith Stone, *When She Was White: The True Story of a Family Divided by Race* (New York: Hyperion, 2007) explores the tragic absurdities of that history; the book traces the story of Sandra Laing, a young girl who, born in the late 1950s, grew up darker than her “white” parents; removed from her Afrikaaner school at 11, she was racially reclassified several times in her lifetime. For collections of essays on the contemporary globalization of race and racialization, see Clarke and Thomas, *Globalization and Race*; and Manning Marable and Vanessa Agard-Jones, eds. *Transnational Blackness: Navigating the Global Color Line* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Clarke and Thomas, *Globalization and Race* 33.

<sup>27</sup> Mills, *From Class to Race*; Anne-Meike Fechter, “The ‘Other’ Stares Back: Experiencing Whiteness in Jakarta,” *Ethnography* 6 (2005) 87–103; Radhika Mohanram, *Imperial White: Race, Diaspora, and the British Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2007); Ira Bashkow, *The Meaning of Whitemen: Race and Modernity in the Orokaiva Cultural World* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2008).

Second, even when race has expanded its varieties in the U.S. imagination beyond the black/white divide, as it has on census forms, for example, it has remained easy to think of whiteness as nonracial due to its default normative status. One of the powers of whiteness in the United States lies in its capacity to deny its racial nature at all, so that “white is not a color,” allowing those seen as white to assume a sort of racial invisibility.

The difference with common missionary settings is obvious. On that morning in Jinja, I was anything but racially invisible; I was a target, an opportunity, a marked outsider in that bus park. I was singled out because I was so categorized. Missionaries marked as white often find themselves similarly conspicuous.<sup>28</sup> Certain disadvantages accompany such notoriety—like the skin tax mentioned earlier, as well as realities more disabling to evangelization—yet advantages also accrue to those deemed white.

### Whiteness Visible: Racial Privileges at Large

Recognizing that this hypervisible whiteness operates is sometimes simple, as in that Jinja bus park, but understanding how it operates in a racialized social order is rarely easy. In postcolonial settings like Uganda, appreciating the layers of social complexity creating the privilege can be daunting. For example, why did I get a good seat that morning? To answer that question one needs to recognize that, like the United States, Uganda has its own particular history of racialization, part of an evolving collection of socially differentiated ways of positing and marking differences among people. No doubt a crucial part of how differentiation by skin color determined my seat that morning derives from Uganda’s past, especially since its peoples underwent the traumas of European colonialism, independence, and profound postcolonial upheaval, not to mention millennia of migration and complex historical dynamics before the 19th century. But another aspect shaping racialization today in Uganda—one decisive for my experience that morning, I believe—derives from its current form of governmentality,<sup>29</sup> which cannot be separated from a global system in which Uganda as a nation-state takes part.

The driver’s comments suggested the immediate reason in his mind that I was sitting in a preferred seat: my white face allowed his vehicle to pass unstopped through roadblocks. But why was that? Raising that question prompts an inquiry into the intersection between the individual percep-

<sup>28</sup> After having prepared the first version of this article I learned that Stephen Bevens, in his response to a presentation by Michael Perry at the March 2006 Notre Dame conference, had made a similar point.

<sup>29</sup> The term “governmentality” was first used and its meaning developed by Michel Foucault. See “Governmentality” in *A Dictionary of Geography*, ed. Susan Mayhew (New York: Oxford University, 2004) 233–34.

tions of a minivan driver and the larger structures of the global order. That intersection goes, I believe, something like this. It is well known that Uganda's police and military regularly stop and shake down vehicles, public and private, seeking their *chai*, literally "tea"—Eastern African slang for a bribe. At the same time, Uganda's national government is anxious to project an international image as a place with comparatively little corruption. Thus its police and soldiers face hefty punishment—fines, dismissal, imprisonment—if convicted of taking bribes. Yet they know that the chances of that are low; very few Ugandans, or other Africans—especially minivan drivers and the Somali truckers who ply that route connecting Indian Ocean ports like Mombasa to much of eastern and central Africa—risk making a complaint. They understandably fear the consequences of bucking the system and finding themselves targeted in the future for even more egregious exploitation.

But expatriates, especially European-looking expatriates, are another story. Not regulars on the road, and rarely dependent for their livelihood on traveling those roads, they risk little by complaining to authorities. Besides the greater likelihood that their complaints will actually catch the attention of local authorities, those deemed white also might complain to their own embassies or consulates, which wield power over Uganda's government, a government that depends on international aid for a high percentage of its annual expenses.

Now it is not clear that either the driver of the minivan or the "tout" (the name given the young man who escorted me to the front seat of this vehicle after dangling the prize seat during our haggling) could have explained all this. But they did not need to know the linkages in the chain between the privileges they conferred on me due to my white face and Uganda's sensitivity to its international image. To them I represented a way to avoid paying a bribe that morning to a policeman. The effects of those linkages were real: I got a good seat that morning because I was white, but Uganda's colonial experiences, endemic corruption, and current dependency on international aid likely shaped how my whiteness operated in that setting.

Clearly the background to my good fortune was not simply the history of racialization in the United States, a history that has generated most versions of what goes by the name "white privilege." The immediate background has its own dynamic, a dynamic creating what transnational feminists call "scattered hegemonies,"<sup>30</sup> disparate systems of social relations shaped by inequalities of power that apply in cross-cutting ways to

<sup>30</sup> Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994).

different circumstances. Whiteness in Uganda was not the same whiteness that analyses of white privilege identify in the United States. It did not operate by rendering me invisible racially. Indeed, I was highly visible as a white person in a prototypical missionary situation.

In light of such an obvious difference, theories of race that have emerged from other places besides the United States—among Caribbean theorists, for instance—arguably have more relevance in Uganda than the analyses of race shaped by the U.S. experience.<sup>31</sup> After all, unlike the United States, Uganda has no history of race-based slavery, but it does have a recent history of colonization like the Caribbean. And in both places, whiteness would be highly visible rather than a source of unconscious privilege, as in the United States, and any preferences associated with whiteness likely derive more from a shared colonial legacy and lingering postcolonial inequalities than from racialization deriving from U.S. history.

Still, I would argue that differing histories of racialization do not render white privilege literature deriving from the United States irrelevant to typical missionary situations. Instead, the distinction between the white privilege typical of the United States that informs most contemporary analysis and the privileging that white missionaries face due to their whiteness should not be overemphasized, for they are related even if they operate differently. Both depend on implicit disempowerment or unprivileging of those deemed “nonwhite”—in the case of Uganda, the many Africans who live without the advantages of, for example, easy passage through roadblocks. Moreover, Perkinson’s genealogy of white racism in the United States connects the two historically. He distinguishes the particularities of the U.S. experience, highlighting its Calvinist origins and the violence of slavery and abolition, followed by the legalized racism of the Jim Crow era in the late 19th and 20th centuries. But he also recognizes the roots of U.S. racialization in broader Christian and European habits of mind that made sense of those deemed non-Christian or non-European.<sup>32</sup> Those habits have a global relevance, increasingly so as Western cultural mores are purveyed through globalization that has helped produce what Manning Marable calls “transnational blackness” associated with “global apartheid.” Even without endorsing Marable’s diagnosis—after all, economic class constructs any such apartheid as much as race, even if race still largely marks global inequality—it is hard to dispute Leith Mullings’s recent observation that “four centuries of the transatlantic slave trade and racialized subordination of people of African descent produced a

<sup>31</sup> The works of Franz Fanon, Stuart Hall, and Paul Gilroy would be relevant here. I thank an anonymous reviewer for making this point.

<sup>32</sup> Carter in *Race* (39–121) makes a similar point.

construction of race throughout much of the world.”<sup>33</sup> The slave trade shaped racialization throughout the Americas, shadowing as well the colonial experience in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Thus one can still affirm that it is not only in the United States that it can seem that, as W. E. B. Du Bois once wrote, “I am given to understand that whiteness is ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen!”<sup>34</sup>

For these reasons, the white privilege literature from the United States has relevance for missionaries in postcolonial realities like Uganda. In addition, insights into white privilege, though emerging from the United States, invite a reflexive self-awareness among those accorded such privileges, such as missionaries seen as white, and this self-awareness is essential in ethical reflection.

### A Missionary's Invisible Knapsack

The kind of experience I had that morning in the minivan is common for white missionaries working elsewhere in the world, especially in places where their whiteness distinguishes them from the majority population. It is a privileging of sorts connected with skin color, but not because whiteness operates as a normative and thus invisible racial identity. Instead, whiteness inserts itself unevenly and situationally into postcolonial realities; these have their own logics of social formations that rank people with certain possibilities and disabilities, depending on how others perceive them. Missionary settings thus vary widely in the way whiteness operates, and whiteness can alternately open and close doors, create and remove possibilities, while other racial markers operate as well.

Despite such variations, one can generalize about what kinds of things tend to lie in the “invisible knapsack” of expatriate white missionaries in countries like Uganda. They are many, and often they cannot be distinguished from other aspects of privileging, associated, for example, with citizenship, linguistic facility (especially in English and occasionally French), money and all it can buy (such as good health care), and external relationships. Abstracting whiteness in this mix is not easy—the example of the minivan ride to Kampala was normal in that I received an overt advantage, but unusual in that whiteness could be so isolated from a host of other privileging factors. But the collection of privileging factors that unevenly accumulates around white missionaries abroad enables many

<sup>33</sup> Leith Mullings, “Race and Globalization: Racialization from Below,” in *Transnational Blackness* 11–18, at 11. See also Manning Marable “Blackness beyond Boundaries: Navigating the Political Economies of Global Inequality,” *ibid.* 1–8; and Howard Winant, “The Modern World Racial System,” *ibid.* 41–53.

<sup>34</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: The Twentieth-Century Completion of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”* (Washington: Austin Jenkins, 1920) 30.

advantages, such as ease in moving through airports and other places of entry, the acquisition of work permits and visas, preferences in market settings due to perceptions of readiness to spend, and connections to local and international networks that bring material and other advantages. Living in Uganda, I never had to convince a bank guard that I was there on the right business, as Africans sometimes have to do; similar ease of access came my way in hotels and restaurants. It is easy to get used to these advantages, especially in unfamiliar places. Over time white and other forms of missionary privilege can surely become an unconscious habit, not unlike the way whiteness operates in the United States.

### RACIAL PRIVILEGE AND THE ETHICS OF MISSION

Racism's deleterious effects on mission have been immense, and self-conscious missionaries today seek to reject its insidious presuppositions and avoid its unfortunate consequences. Yet racialization—the now nearly irresistible impulse to use perceptions associated with skin color and other physiognomic markers to place people in races—happens everywhere the gospel is proclaimed, and organizes human action in complex ways. It is part of the assumed set of practices of differentiation and categorization that today organize human perceptions of other humans. Most languages have a term for outsiders with racialized and often pejorative connotations: *gringo*, *goy*, *farangi*, *mzungu*, *oyimbo*, *bule*, *gaijin*.<sup>35</sup> Practices of mission, never escaping the broader sociohistorical forces impinging on human agents, cannot escape the realities of “othering,” which often depends on racialization. This means that mission takes place where privilege based on perceptions of race operates. Given these realities, how should Christian missionaries face the reality of white privilege and other privileges accorded missionaries?

Unsurprisingly, ethical reflection associated with white privilege has, like most discussions of the phenomenon itself, primarily addressed racial realities in the United States or other places where whiteness exists as the default invisible racialized identity. Observers thus speak of the need for whites to get a “privilegectomy,” and Robert Jensen speaks of the “white people’s burden,” not to civilize the world as Kipling once wrote, but to civilize themselves out of their taken-for-granted advantages.<sup>36</sup> Margaret Pfeil urges white conversion toward the standpoint of the margins of the poor, away from what Shawn Copeland calls the “ocular epistemology” that prioritizes vision as the way to define and then rank difference.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> These terms are, respectively, Spanish, Yiddish, Hindi, Swahili, Yoruba, Indonesian, and Japanese.

<sup>36</sup> Jensen, *Heart of Whiteness* 96.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Pfeil, “The Transformative Power of the Periphery: Can a White U.S. Catholic Opt for the Poor?” in *Interrupting White Privilege* 127–46.

Similarly, Perkinson invokes a “hermeneutics of contraction,” urging beneficiaries of racial privilege to refuse acquiescence to the subtle ways advantages come their way.<sup>38</sup> “What is required in place of denial,” he writes, “is a continuous self-confrontation, slow exorcism, and careful revision in a conscious resolve to live ‘race’ differently.”<sup>39</sup>

### The Subtleties of Missionary Privilege

As we have seen, however, the realities of white privilege in missionary settings differ considerably from white privilege in the United States, and this difference renders problematic a simple application of ethical principles from one setting to another. After all, “to act justly in the world, we need to know how the world works”<sup>40</sup> and how racialization operates differently in different places—rendering whiteness visible in the front seat of a minivan in Uganda, for example, and often invisible in the United States. The first ethical challenge, therefore, in light of the various social privileges accorded missionaries, lies in simply understanding the complex ways that social differentiation sets many missionaries apart from and in preference to others, depending on where they serve.

Taking this challenge seriously means ongoing attention by missionaries to the manifold ways race and other factors operate in local settings. In Uganda, for example, default racialization is carried out by nearly everyone, with Africans, “Asians” (usually understood as people from the Indian sub-continent), and “whites” as three nearly universal categorizations with longstanding, sometimes tragic, social force.<sup>41</sup> Yet each of these can be dissolved, modified, or subdivided, given the right situation, by factors such as ethno-linguistic group (a particular feature of the subdivisions of Africans), religion (seen, for example, in the occasional distinctions between Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims operating among “Asians”), and nationality (regularly invoked to distinguish among various “whites”), not to mention family ties and a host of other potential discriminating factors. In addition, a growing number of Eastern Asians and Latin Americans fit uncomfortably into the older typologies.

Given the abiding nature of such social dynamics, missionaries do not have to create or embrace racialized missionary privileges, or even to be aware of them, in order to benefit from them. Complex modes of racialization and other ways to construct difference precede them and will outlast them, and understanding their subtleties takes time. The cultural formations creating

<sup>38</sup> Perkinson, *White Theology* 226.      <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 148.

<sup>40</sup> Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000) 14.

<sup>41</sup> The expulsion of Uganda’s “Asian” community in 1972 by the order of Idi Amin is a well-known example.

such privileges can be opaque since local worlds have their own logics and histories, their codes and barriers. Making such modes of differentiation even harder to understand are the realities of globalization that shape how racialization works, realities like those that made a Ugandan driver want me up front in his minivan. Yet a preliminary understanding of how privileges come their way needs to become part of the cross-cultural training that missionaries receive as they prepare to move into the field.

Perhaps more importantly, collecting and organizing such insights should become part of the accumulated lore and wisdom that active missionaries gather and share with those coming to join them. As Anthony Gittins has suggested, missionaries in new settings come as guests in order to evangelize, and thus they invariably encounter some strangeness in their new settings. Gradually they must pursue an understanding of their new environment in order to mitigate that strangeness and evangelize effectively.<sup>42</sup> Gaining an understanding about how they receive privileges that they might want to resist demands a keen historical and cultural awareness built up through sharing of insight-producing anecdotes among missionaries and honest conversation with Christian communities.

### **Racial Privileges and Contemporary Theologies of Mission**

Awareness of how privileges accrue to whiteness and other analogous factors is a necessary condition for ethical reflection on missionary privilege, yet it is only the beginning. Having become aware of their privileges, how should missionaries react to them? Two tempting—and diametrically opposed—alternatives might be identified, each of which, in my opinion, fails to responsibly address the issue. And each is connected to what I would identify as one of the two emphases found in contemporary missiologies. The first consists in accepting whatever privileges help the spread of the gospel; the second presumes that any such privileges would pollute mission and must therefore be renounced.

The first coheres with the very powerful and traditional missiology that has emphasized the goal of proclaiming Christ's salvation, and the need for people to embrace Christ to achieve eternal life, as the overriding purpose of missionary evangelization. Those holding such a view and prioritizing explicit embrace of Christ over other facets of mission might find white missionary privilege not at all important. In fact, one might thereby consider any privilege that fosters conversion a gift to be used. Mission, in such a conception, pursues a mandate to save souls and/or establish the church, and encourages anything that furthers those goals. Eternal life, after all, is

<sup>42</sup> Anthony J. Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers: Meeting the Challenge of Inculturation* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 111–38.

at stake. This approach endures; it still motivates sincere missionaries and remains the image of mission many opponents of mission hold. Even if the means to save souls might be dubious, for some missionaries the end justifies the means.<sup>43</sup>

There are certainly ancient warrants for this approach, according to which the potential to offer salvation in Christ legitimates nearly any means to preach the message. Yet this approach has usually been tempered even in the past, and contemporary missiology features a variety of guiding approaches, most balancing the traditional call to proclamation with other concerns.<sup>44</sup> Recognizing that any typology dramatically oversimplifies a complex set of positions, I see missiology today as poised between two impulses: *proclamation* and *dialogue*, denominating two ideas seen as correlative by the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue in their 1991 document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*. In various ways, missiologies across denominations recognize the demands of both impulses: the very traditional and ancient call to proclaim the Christian message of salvation in Christ; and a corresponding call to be attentive to the ways Christ himself operated in dialogue with the evangelized.

A variety of paradoxical labels try to capture the necessary and (for many missiologists) desirable tension between these two impulses: David Bosch's "bold humility," for example; or Stephen Bevans's and Roger Schroeder's "prophetic dialogue"; or Francis Oborji's recognition that mission must be proclamation and communication.<sup>45</sup> Such twinned terms try to capture the paradox that Christian mission holds together, awkwardly in many cases, two realities: on the one hand, the unconditional love of others that lies at the heart of Christ's own witness and also undergirds the ethical insights of the many who see the recognition and embrace of Otherness as the key ethical issue facing the human race today;<sup>46</sup> on the other hand, the conviction that Christ alone offers the fullness of life to those who accept him.

<sup>43</sup> For a study of the national roots of U.S. religious zeal in this vein, see Robert Jewett, *Mission and Menace: Four Centuries of American Religious Zeal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2008). Despite their reputation, most Christian missionaries who claim to be either Evangelical or Pentecostal (or both) do not act in this manner. See, for example, Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999), as well as the more comprehensive discussion in Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*.

<sup>44</sup> For a summary of contemporary missiological reflection, see Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context* 281–395.

<sup>45</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990); Bevans and Schroeder, *Constants in Context*; Oborji, *Concepts of Mission*.

<sup>46</sup> Petersen, "Racism, Restorative Justice." Influential recent philosophical work in this area has been done by Emmanuel Levinas. For a theological reading, see

Most prominent missiological approaches today agree that mission must both offer something distinctive to non-Christians and recognize them as having dignity beyond their instrumental value as potential Christians, indeed that they have absolute value as formed in the image and likeness of God. In addition, most missiological approaches accept that God's grace operates outside the formal bounds of Christian belonging. One might say that contemporary missiologies usually combine a hermeneutic of deprivation with a hermeneutic of plenitude. The former imagines that Christian mission can deliver something not yet achieved in non-Christians; the latter pursues understanding of the evangelized not simply to convert them more easily, but because they represent irreplaceable instantiations of ways to be human deserving of the highest dignity, ways that can build up the Body of Christ.

Pushing one of these hermeneutics at the expense of the other shapes how one approaches white or other forms of privilege. On the one hand, as noted above, if Christ alone confers salvation, and if the job of the missionary is to gather as many to Christ as possible through proclamation, then privileges of any sort should be used to that end. On the other hand, a one-sided embrace of dialogue can make eschewing such privileges essential to mission, as the missionary renounces privilege in order to await the right conditions for mutual dialogue: circumstances, for example, in which no damaging and objectifying racialization occurs at all. Thus in the interest of dialogical openness one might argue that missionaries should develop Perkinson's hermeneutic of contraction, analogous to what Martha Fredericks calls the *kenosis* appropriate in a Christian approach to the religious Other.<sup>47</sup>

The difficulties with such a unilateral approach to forms of privilege in typical missionary situations are at least twofold. First, circumstances absent privileging of some sort are hard to foresee, since racialization exists prior to missionary presence and persists without conscious support from missionaries. In many cases, in fact, the very possibility of missionary activity in the first place depends on privileging of sorts, even if not specifically based on skin color. Income, education, and a variety of relationships allow missionaries to end up spreading the gospel far from their homes. It can be tempting to adopt a zero-tolerance approach, to refuse anything smacking of privilege, but if missionaries seek to extricate themselves from

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Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> See Martha Fredericks, "Kenosis as a Model for Interreligious Dialogue," *Missiology* 33 (2005) 211–22; Peter Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003) 139–42, makes a similar point.

such privileges entirely, mission might never occur. Indeed, to unilaterally renounce all privilege in pursuit of an ideal communicative setting for mission-as-dialogue might well vitiate intercultural contact, not to mention missionary evangelization. Second, any such self-willed decision could undermine the goal of renouncing such privileges, since to do so unilaterally presumes the prerogative of antecedently determining the structure of the situated missionary encounter. Unilateral divestment of privilege thus risks ignoring the ways people can and must engage missionaries on their own terms, which often means that missionaries receive unwanted privileges.

Determining when to use one's privileges, however reluctantly, and when to reject them, demands mature self-awareness, in particular a capacity to recognize when such privileges come one's way undeserved, without gradually taking them for granted. Such self-awareness in most missionary settings, however, is linked with rather profound cultural and social insight. After all, certain forms of the privileging that missionaries typically receive in some settings resemble the hospitality accorded guests of any sort; still others depend on racialization deeply rooted in local, often opaque, cultural formations. In many such cases, an unwillingness to act as expected due to a unilateral decision could easily be experienced by local people as rejection or condemnation. Rejecting unwelcome privileges out of hand can offend, while taking them for granted can generate a seductive acquiescence to social injustice.

### The Priority of Cultural Understanding

In light of such complexities, I believe that the proper approach to the tension of dialogue and proclamation prioritizes an awareness of cultural mores, including those that privilege white (or other) missionaries, *before* a premature self-contraction, or a self-determined renunciation. Accepting both proclamation *and* dialogue as integral emphases in mission requires missionaries to understand precisely how privileges they receive operate in the region of their evangelization; otherwise their evangelization could be counterproductive. Such learning resembles that of strangers who come slowly and painfully to grasp the realities in which they find themselves, not simply from intellectual awareness of difference, but often through making mistakes that might bemuse and even offend their hosts.<sup>48</sup>

One helpful way forward comes from McIntosh's discussion of the "invisible knapsack," where she distinguishes between two sorts of white privilege: (1) *positive* advantages accruing to whites that can work to the benefit of nonwhites; and (2) *negative* advantages that, unless rejected, will

<sup>48</sup> Anthony Gittins (*Gifts and Strangers* 115–28) thoughtfully reflects on the way missionaries can move from the status of stranger to guest, but only by allowing their hosts to set the terms for that transition.

always reinforce current hierarchies.<sup>49</sup> One example of what McIntosh calls a positive advantage might be the immunity my white face in the front seat gave the minivan on the way to Kampala: police do not shake down everyone—my presence provided an assurance all should have. A related negative advantage, however, could be that my face in that minivan might allow the driver to speed or drive recklessly with impunity. In that case, white skin enables something that should not be allowed in any case.

What McIntosh calls the positive advantages accruing to whiteness—and not to be eschewed out of hand—have benefited many peoples, for instance by opening doors to needed resources for local communities. Consider the privileges enjoyed by Paul Rusesabagina, the manager whose heroic actions were made famous in *Hotel Rwanda*. His advantages did not derive from skin color per se, but certainly depended on his identity as a Hutu, his international connections, his multilingual facility, and his learned capacity to engage a variety of customers in person and over the phone with ease and grace.<sup>50</sup> Lacking any of those capacities and the attendant privileges, he would not have been able to save lives.

Analogously, many white missionaries have brought resources to local communities (medicines, books, money, wells for water) by reason of privileges owing to their skin color, foreign citizenship, and associated “connections.” Such markers bring positive advantages. Ties, often to North America or Europe, allow the brokering of resources, or international attention, to a particular setting or situation. Missionaries can exercise globalized relationships, enabled by unearned privileges, often with laudable results.

Yet to do so is risky, especially over time, for unconscious habits of privilege can harm mission. Exercises of privilege invariably change missionaries’ relationships with the evangelized—indeed with all they encounter—emphasizing the differences that set them apart. Too, the disparities between local resources and those at the disposal of missionaries can be vast, so that immense needs become an occasion of unexamined missionary paternalism as seductive short-term benefits buoy a missionary’s role and self-esteem.

Unconsciously assumed privileges distance missionaries from those among whom they work in ways analogous to how access to income can create inequalities. Jonathan Bonk sees such inequalities creating what he calls “relational costs” that harm mission,<sup>51</sup> and the relational costs of

<sup>49</sup> See McIntosh, “White Privilege” and “White Privilege and Male Privilege”; and Haight, “Dysfunctional Rhetoric.”

<sup>50</sup> Paul Rusesabagina, with Tom Zoellner, *An Ordinary Man: An Autobiography* (New York: Viking, 2006). Note Rusesabagina’s frank acknowledgement of his advantages, which though rather modest were decisive in protecting many from certain death (xi–xiii).

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Missionary Problem*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2007).

unconscious privilege are not hard to imagine, even if they are difficult to calculate. Many missionaries do not learn local languages well, for example, because of this sort of privilege. Their skin, bank accounts, and other aspects of their “invisible knapsack” allow them to negotiate the scattered hegemonies in which they live without much discomfort in their native tongue.<sup>52</sup> Unearned privileges can also render missionaries inattentive to local realities that impinge on ordinary people. Immeasurable injustices have thus gone unchallenged by missionaries who do not feel the burden such injustices inflict. Immune by entitlements to the distress of those they serve, missionaries do not—indeed, cannot—feel the urgency of combating perverse or sclerotic political regimes, crippling local corruption, profoundly unequal economic orders, or dangerous criminality.

### **In the Direction of Accountability: A Missionary “Privilege Tax”**

A few years back, Terry Muck called for the development of an ethical code for missionaries—what he called “fair mission practices” that might deflect criticism of missionary activity.<sup>53</sup> Developing such ethical guidelines would be a step toward the kind of accountability Mary Elizabeth Hobgood calls for in relation to privilege. Admitting that “privileged groups are not responsible for systems we did not create,” Hobgood writes, “nonetheless we are accountable to others for the unearned advantages these systems routinely accrue to us, as well as for how we contribute (often unwittingly) to the reproduction of these systems. We are also accountable to ourselves for how these systems distort our human potential and erode justice even for us.”<sup>54</sup> Such accountability for missionaries means an embrace of both dialogue and proclamation as impulses that characterize evangelization, and a mindfulness of how racial privilege can enhance the tension between them. Awareness of how such privileging works means developing a missionary ethics that resists McIntosh’s negative types of advantages but uses her positive advantages fittingly, with the goal of expanding them. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to distinguish in advance between privileges missionaries ought to exercise and privileges they ought to avoid. Removing the ambiguity between the two types of privileges, which McIntosh recognizes is difficult for white privilege in the United States, becomes nearly impossible in cultures where one is a stranger.

<sup>52</sup> This is ironic given the way missionary translations of the Bible have so often been instrumental in catalyzing what Lamin Sanneh calls “mother-tongue aspirations” held by Africans and others. See his *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Terry C. Muck, “The Missiological Perspective,” *Missiology* 34 (2006) 3–4.

<sup>54</sup> Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege* vii.

No doubt an ethical approach to negotiating missionary privileges of all sorts will require concerted efforts by many, especially efforts to accumulate wisdom from lessons learned. I propose here one ethical principle or guideline for negotiating such privileges, a principle that seeks to make missionaries accountable for their privileges both to themselves and to their missionary vocation. Given that it is impossible to forego privileges completely, since they exist prior to our choosing them, I suggest that missionaries treat the privileges they receive as debts they accumulate. By considering them as debts, I contend that we should see them as promises to redress the balance in the future. That is to say, unearned privileges should be seen as benefits accepted only for the purpose of remediating, over time, such imbalances within advantages. And missionaries should strive to live with what might be called an implicit “privilege tax” analogous to the carbon tax currently discussed around the emission of greenhouse gases. Just as polluters agree to pay into an account to fight pollution in amounts related to the pollution they produce, so too should the missionary work carried out by missionaries dissolve the inequitable bases of privileges they enjoy. And the measure of such targeted dissolution should be comparable to the measure of privilege received. Only then, I believe, can such privileges be morally defensible.

Placing the burden of such a privilege tax on oneself—or, by extension, on a missionary group or society—coheres with contemporary missionary thinking that emphasizes the need for missionaries to acknowledge their status as guests who need to learn the expectations of their hosts and live within those expectations.<sup>55</sup> Missionaries cannot control how they are perceived, and they risk offense by refusing out of hand the privileges that come their way. At the same time, embracing a privilege tax also invites missionaries to commit to a deepening cultural awareness that would allow measured consideration of strides toward a more just social order, one in which unearned privileges that disempower others are undone. To accept privileges uncritically and without seeking to undo them is a dangerous temptation. As Peter Phan argues, missionaries today as always are called to cross new borders to evangelize, and to do so in weakness like Christ himself. The ongoing embrace of privileges without any effort at challenging them only reinforces the missionary’s position of strength, something inimical to the gospel’s message.<sup>56</sup>

Of course such costs and benefits cannot be easily calculated, but aspiring toward some equivalence between the privilege received, on the one hand, and the undoing of the implicit structural injustice reinforcing the privilege, on the other, seems a reasonable start. In my own trip in the

<sup>55</sup> Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers* 115–18.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Phan, *In Our Own Tongues* 139–50.

minivan, for example, once I learned about the basis for my privilege, one way for me to move toward accountability would have been to alert appropriate Ugandan officials about the driver's perceptions of the ubiquity of bribe-taking by police on the Jinja-Kampala road. Or I could have written a letter to one of the national newspapers of the country about the incident and what I learned through it. I could also have pursued more effective governance in Uganda, so that its citizenry would feel more empowered and its dependence on foreign aid would not make its officials so timid in the face of international pressure. In a more long-term perspective, I hope my teaching and other ministry embodied a different way to be "white" in a place like Uganda, where undeserved privileges came my way all the time. Since I was teaching Africans, I also hope that what I imparted at some level began to mitigate the converse disprivileging that Africans experience—when driving, for example.

Perhaps a more difficult task facing white American missionaries who seek integrity before the realities of white privilege lies in becoming aware of their own particularities, especially those that distinguish them from the evangelized and reinforce privileges by keeping missionaries blind to them. In recent books, Stan Nussbaum and Duane Elmer draw attention to the distinctiveness of U.S./American identity, partly in order to encourage self-awareness among U.S. missionaries.<sup>57</sup> Such self-awareness seems essential if destructive aspects of the unconscious habits of white privilege are to be avoided. This means that expatriate missionaries in particular will have to embrace as a goal the kind of "double consciousness" that Du Bois said was the curse—and also the privilege—of being black in the United States. Without losing one's sense of self, one can become aware that one is always being "signified upon" in racializing ways. The more one understands how that happens, the better one can understand the world in which one lives.

The ongoing life of white racism and related social currents that confer privileges unequally due to differentiating factors like race continue to disfigure the church's mission in ways both hidden and obvious. Ethical reflection is needed to discern and combat it. For it is certainly the case that there is much more at stake than the kinds of seats one's skin color can obtain on public transportation.

<sup>57</sup> Stan Nussbaum, *American Cultural Baggage: How to Recognize and Deal with It* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2005); Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2006).