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FOREWORD

The late Rev. Dr. E. K. Bailey, an author and peerless biblical expositor, and his friend Rev. Dr. Warren W. Wiersbe, who is renowned as a preacher-scholar, released a delightful book in March 2003 called *Preaching in Black and White*.¹ Both of these men, the first black and the second white, helped us to see how God has richly blessed two distinct and valuable preaching traditions.

In this new book, Dr. Joel Gregory and Dr. William Crouch Jr. take us to new and essential levels by discussing the practical aspects of black-church congregational life, from their observations and preaching experiences in black churches and with black pastors coast to coast. Their perspective as white clergy is not meant to denigrate the practices of white congregations or to elevate black congregations above the level of criticism. They are simply sharing how the black church has helped to shape their teachings, their ministries, and their interactions with God's people.

Drs. Gregory and Crouch preach and serve in a bicultural Christian community, a world where very few white pastors preach and serve. White pastors who are a part of the dominant culture have fewer experiences preaching in black churches and have few opportunities to engage black preachers in serious discussions about preaching styles, faith traditions, and congregational life. It is as if black culture is a subculture with minority

status in the traditional white culture. And the black church experience is one of which the majority culture has little knowledge or understanding.

Drs. Gregory and Crouch are ambassadors of reconciliation for building bridges of communication that cross cultural chasms within the body of Christ. We all have been scarred by our struggles and have been deprived by living on our own islands of cultural isolation. God appears to be using these two pastors as “bridge-people,” both to promote healing in the body of Christ and to inspire the church to present a unified witness of the healing power of Jesus Christ in a broken world.

Drs. Gregory and Crouch are learning what black preachers have been required to learn, and that is to be bicultural in America. But Crouch and Gregory are saying something more—that there are values in the life of the black church that are invisible to the white church, and those qualities need to be shared and celebrated. Just as the white church has much to offer the world, the black church also upholds values white pastors can use to enrich the life and ministry of their congregations.

For the sake of survival, African American pastors have had no choice but to learn the folkways and mores of the dominant culture while speaking to the particularity of their own people in a church that was born in slavery. In *The Heart of Black Preaching*, Rev. Dr. Cleophus J. LaRue reminds us that, “at its core the black sermon is not about what blacks have had to endure in America or their peculiar place as a people of color in this country. It is the sovereign God at work in and through those experiences that characterize the essence of powerful black preaching.”² Drs. Gregory and Crouch understand that the effects of this preaching evoke powerful insights worthy enough to be shared with white clergy and laity.

In this magnificent work, Drs. Gregory and Crouch are bicultural people in the sense that they may be described as being “comfortable and at peace with black church styles or norms, while at the same time they do not abandon their own whiteness. They can appreciate cultural differences without the surrender of their identity in their own primary culture.”³

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois speaks of the preservation of the primary culture identity:

He [the Negro] would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius.⁴

As I read critically and reflect prayerfully on the musings of Drs. Gregory and Crouch, I cannot help but see the presence of Jesus Christ, our Reconciler, birthing a reversal of history. Instead of a new Martin Luther King Jr., who reached out to white clergy from the black-church side, Drs. Gregory and Crouch, as sons of the white church, reach out to their white peers with a book that offers blessings in blackness.

Let us, with unity in our diversity, use this book for the glory of God and a world that needs the healing of Jesus Christ, who transforms all cultures with the lordship of his presence.

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NOTES

1. E. K. Bailey and Warren W. Wiersbe, *Preaching in Black and White* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

2. Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1999), 115.

3. Marvin K. Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture: A Strategy for Cross-cultural Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 243.

4. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Random House, 2003), 6.

PREFACE

The unprecedented revival of a historic black college on a white college campus, an international movement teaching homiletics to working pastors, and the immersion of two white ministers into the black church happened as a stroke of Providence on a moonlit ride across Kentucky horse farms.

The heaviest weights sometimes hang by the thinnest wires. Dr. Eric Fruge, director of The Marshall Center for Christian Ministry, had attended Gambrell Street Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, while Joel was the pastor in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They had had no contact for twenty years. Bill invited Dr. Fruge to join Georgetown College as capital campaign director in 2001. Dr. Fruge later asked Joel to teach a homiletics seminar to Georgetown pastoral alumni in September 2004. That led to an invitation to return to the college and a subsequent meeting with Bill in April 2005. The two of us first met that April on the Georgetown campus: Joel spoke at the annual pastors' conference, and Bill attended as president of Georgetown.

At the end of that particular stay, Bill took Joel to the Lexington, Kentucky, airport in the predawn dark. Joel was surprised a college president would awaken in the middle of the night to

usher him to an early flight. As they drove, the white fences of the thoroughbred horse farms reflected moonlight on the Kentucky bluegrass, and a destiny-laden conversation took place.

Bill was intrigued with Joel's involvement in the black church. As a child in the 1950s, Bill had been saddened by watching his father, a noted pastor, coping with the ugliness of racism in Jackson, Mississippi. Bill had vowed as a child to do something about discrimination, if he ever had the power and position to do so. Bill also had a vision to diversify Georgetown College, which was located in the midst of the fifteen whitest counties in Kentucky. The vision he had for his school, a predominantly white college founded in 1787, was that it was to become a campus of diversity. That was some kind of vision.

Joel had some similar interests. The late Rev. Dr. E. K. Bailey had acted in grace to aid in renewing Joel's ministry after a difficult passage in Joel's life. Dr. Bailey had invited Joel to preach at his International Expository Preaching Conference, an act that was actually an endorsement of Joel's ministry. From that experience, Joel, a white, southern preacher, began to be invited to hundreds of black churches and conferences, and that, for the most part, was unprecedented. Joel wanted to create enduring ways to commemorate the ministry of the late Dr. Bailey, who was an innovative leader. Joel also wanted to lead diverse, small-group seminars on preaching that were certified by an accredited educational institution.

So, that is the story of how this journey began. Bill had a legacy dream from his childhood and a vision to diversify his college. Joel wanted to memorialize Dr. Bailey and find a way to conduct preaching seminars with a certifying academic partner. Neither could have imagined what would develop from those dreams and an early-morning car ride on the dark side of dawn.

Five years later, Bill has led a diversity effort at Georgetown College with stunning results. The percentage of students of color at the college had increased from 3 percent in 2005 to 10 percent by the fall of 2009. The college has set a goal of 20 per-

cent by 2015. The dream to remember Dr. Bailey has morphed from naming a room after him at Georgetown College to a full-blown project to renew the spirit of his alma mater, Bishop College, a historic black college that closed in Dallas, Texas, in 1988. The Bishop College Alive project is designed to keep the spirit of Bishop College through a Bishop College Legacy Scholarship program, the creation of the Bishop College Heritage Homiletics, the establishment of the Bishop College Hall of Fame, and the celebration of annual homecomings.

That dream now has national support and represents the first time in American educational history that a predominantly white college has honored the alumni of a historically black college. Bill plans to build the Bishop College Center for Educational Excellence to perpetuate the spirit of Bishop College on his school's campus. Beyond that, Bill has spoken about his diversity efforts at the United Nations and to the Disney Corporation.

Joel's dream of leading accredited preaching seminars has come to fruition in the form of Proclaimers Place, a nationally recognized, continuing-education event for working preachers. Joel has led forty-four Proclaimers Place Seminars in eleven states and, significantly, at Regent's Park College of Oxford University, which has hosted nine of Joel's seminars over the course of five years, with a combined attendance of 160. This is believed to be the largest predominantly African American group to do an educational event in the history of the college. Participants have published three books of sermons based on the experience.

All of this began with a ride in the dark to the airport. Late in his career, Carl Jung wrote of synchronicity, that coming together of random events that appear to have nothing in common but are in fact profoundly related.¹ We have touched one another in a surprising constellation of events that have unfolded over decades. The destiny of a college almost as old as the United States has changed profoundly; Proclaimers Place continues to teach hundreds of preachers; a beloved black institution, Bishop College, has a new incarnation. And 160 black brothers and sis-

ters have walked the venerable streets of Oxford. Who would have imagined?

And along the way, we experienced a growing conviction. The black church has a great deal to offer white churches. For much of America's religious history, whites have taken a patronizing attitude that they have a corner on the "right stuff" and need to help black churches with money, programs, and organization. Our journey has led us to another conclusion: black churches have strengths that would greatly enrich white churches. Hence this book, which celebrates some of those qualities.

Most books need some disclaimers, and here is ours. This book is not a research piece. It is the simple testimony of two white men of God and our experiences with the black church. One should look elsewhere for empirical or scientific conclusions. Neither is the book a blanket commendation of everything in the black church, no more than it is a wholesale condemnation of everything in the white church. Each church culture can learn from the other. One cannot appreciate another culture by disowning or demonizing one's own. We simply write as two seasoned ministers who affirm our own personal histories in the white church, yet we have become more fully human and effective ministers because of our experiences in the black church.

This book is not exhaustive. The qualities addressed do not tell the whole story of the black church experience. We could have written more. But at some point, we had to stop and simply publish the book.

Essentially, this book attempts to flip the script. The sometimes patronizing attitude of white Christians toward black Christians assumes superiority of method and ministry. So, this book parts the curtains and opens the window to a church world still foreign to the majority of white Christians.

The denomination that nurtured Bill and Joel began in 1845 when white Baptists from the South wanted to take their slaves with them to the mission field. The larger Baptist family would not permit it. The descendents of those folks formally apologized

a few years ago, but too many whites still have a long, long way to go. Bill and Joel are no longer welcomed in that denomination, but our religious roots and heritage belong to it. Therefore, our hope is that this book takes another step on the historic road toward reconciling black and white Christians. We have witnessed strengths in the black church that whites need and testify here to those strengths.

—Bill & Joel

NOTES

1. Carl Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973).