

Harding University

Scholar Works at Harding

Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers

Harding School of Theology

9-11-2019

Footnotes:The Color of Compromise + Gender in Churches of Christ

Bob Turner

Harding School of Theology

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-footnotes>

Recommended Citation

Turner, B. (2019). Footnotes:The Color of Compromise + Gender in Churches of Christ. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/hst-footnotes/28>

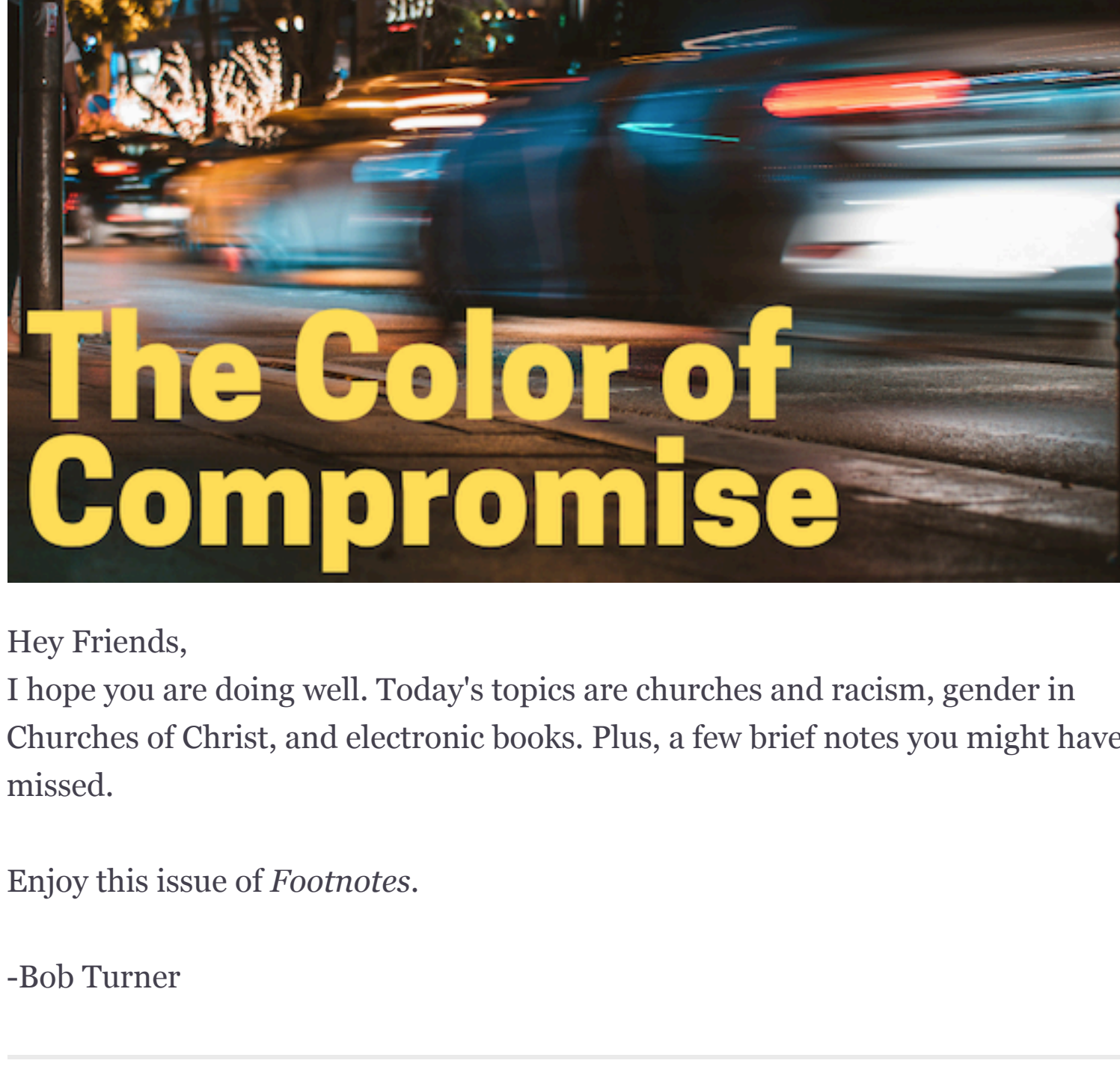
This Newspaper is brought to you for free and open access by the Harding School of Theology at Scholar Works at Harding. It has been accepted for inclusion in Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers by an authorized administrator of Scholar Works at Harding. For more information, please contact scholarworks@harding.edu.



HARDING
UNIVERSITY

Footnotes¹

¹Curated Resources for Ministers



Hey Friends,
I hope you are doing well. Today's topics are churches and racism, gender in Churches of Christ, and electronic books. Plus, a few brief notes you might have missed.

Enjoy this issue of *Footnotes*.

-Bob Turner

The Color of Compromise

The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism

JEMAR TISBY (Zondervan, 2019)

Our leadership team at [White Station](#) recently read Jemar Tisby's significant work together. While authors like Ta Nehisi Coates and Michelle Alexander have addressed criminal justice, education, and public policy, Tisby frames his work around how American churches have perpetuated racism. This is helpful since the obvious response by many church leaders to authors like Coates and Alexander will be, "Okay, but what does this have to do with the church?"

The word *complicit* is critical to this work. One problematic assumption about racism is that racism is about racial slurs or visiting websites published by white nationalists. Most white people I know don't use slurs and don't visit such sites. But that shouldn't end the conversation; it should start it. The question then becomes simple: if most people are not blatant white nationalists, how did we arrive at a place where there is such a tremendous racial discrepancy relative to wealth, power, etc? Tisby's answer is pretty simple: *complicity*.

Tisby attempts to uncover ways that well-meaning Christians have surrendered their obligation to be courageous in the pursuit of racial justice---and instead became complicit--and watched as racial discrimination entered governments, schools, courtrooms, and every other institution (including church). *Or worse, they ushered it into those places*. This focus on complicity helps many of us who grew up trying not to be personally racist, but who admit in hindsight (and in the present) that many of our institutions haven't been fair to people of color. Sure, our communion trays weren't being passed by men wearing Klan robes. That said, my childhood youth camp had an innocent evening tradition of lighting hundreds of candles, putting them on a floating styrofoam cross, and pushing it out into a small lake so we could watch it burn as we sang songs (*It only takes a spaark...*). This had zero racist intentions...but now I might recommend we skip the cross thing, hold hands, and sing a few more rounds of *Someday*. Well, maybe not.

Back to Tisby, in Chapter 7 he tackles one of the obstacles that has been a barrier to improved race relations: the insistence on making racism a Southern issue. Racism's effect is nationwide, and making it a Southern matter becomes the laziest possible way out for those of us who prefer unsweet tea and aren't quite sure macaroni and cheese counts as a vegetable. As one who lives in the South, but did not grow up on it, I can feel this temptation. But the facts are clear: there is economic and social disparity between black and white populations nationwide. Regions outside of the American South might have coded their discrimination in terms other than Jim Crow, but it was still there--and can be seen in every major American city today. The larger point is that churches can get very sidetracked in the same way that a country can when one group positions themselves as the righteous savior while assuming that those who disagree with them must be the racists. This sort of intramural bantering only hurts the larger cause.

In the concluding chapter, Tisby offers some solutions for Christians who want to move from complicity to courage. Some of his solutions are different than others, but I'll let you decide which ones work for you. The book is definitely worth reading, and is written with a tone that is helpful to a wide audience and at a popular reading level. I highly recommend it for work in congregations.

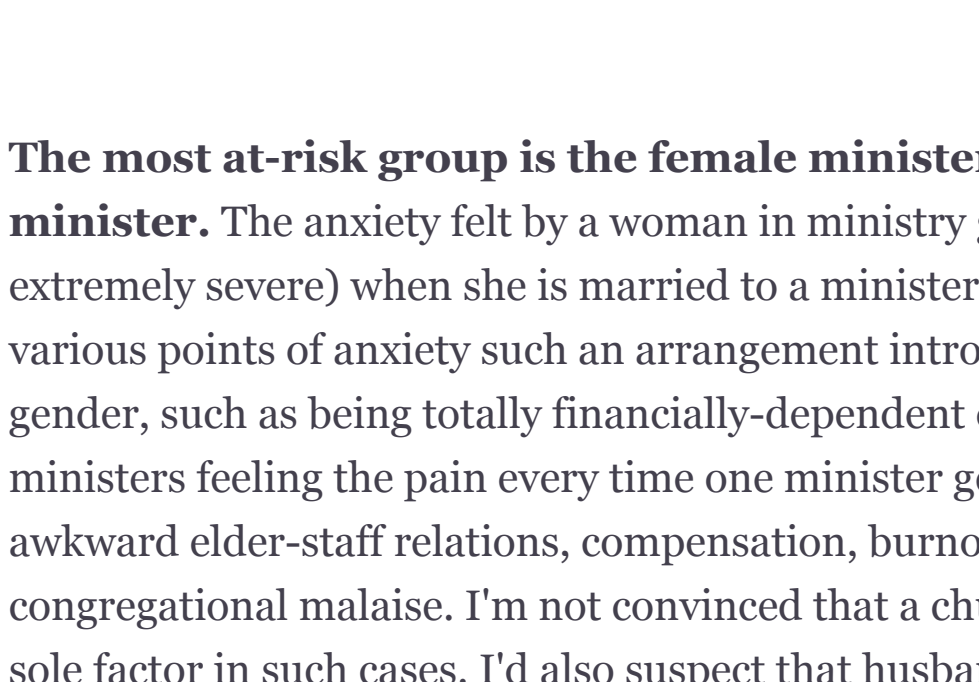
Daniel K. Williams [reviews the book here](#). Dorothy Littell Greco [at Englewood Books](#) called it an "authoritative masterpiece."



Women, Ministry, and Trauma

Heather Heflin Hodges released [a second installment of reports on trauma and women in Churches of Christ](#). She has done some serious research into this topic, which is good since so much of the study on this matter has been anecdotal. Our research should match the things we care about, so I'm grateful for her work here. I do have a few thoughts, though. The first regards how respondents feel anxiety relative to their vocational situations.

Respondents by demographic groups.



The most at-risk group is the female minister who is married to a minister. The anxiety felt by a woman in ministry goes up 12% (severe to extremely severe) when she is married to a minister. We can speculate on all the various points of anxiety such an arrangement introduces that go beyond gender, such as being totally financially-dependent on one church, two ministers feeling the pain every time one minister gets criticized, awkward elder-staff relations, compensation, burnout, or other issues of congregational malaise. I'm not convinced that a church's view of gender is the sole factor in such cases. I'd also suspect that husband-wife teams who own small businesses would see similar patterns. There is no emotional outlet. You work, worship, socialize, and live in the same fishbowl.

It is significant that we are asking about people's experiences in church. Many of us forget to ask others how they feel because we inadvertently assume they must have a similar experience as we do. Of course, one person's friend circle is another person's clique and one person's joke is another person's westbrogression. So, we are wise to hear more voices. I'd recommend [Anessa Westbrook's study](#) that showed that women in Churches of Christ youth groups were more likely to be engaged in high school religious programs and showed more interest in growing spiritually than did their male counterparts, yet these women found themselves less likely to have teachers and mentors who took an interest in helping them to grow. I think that's a problem everyone can get behind fixing.

Longevity has limitations. Ministers who stay longer have less negative stress. Happy people stay and miserable people leave. This is true for just about every single group of people except for heroin addicts and Cleveland Browns fans. That said, longevity has its limitations--since it can ignore voices who haven't stayed as long (and aren't quite as happy). Longstanding elders asking other elders what they think can often turn into an echo chamber.

Some may have reservations about whether or not this harm should be classified as PTSD--or whether a PTSD tool should be used. The study of PTSD has been [controversial since its inception](#). Earliest definitions considered [traumatic events \(related to death or threats of death\)](#) to be those that were outside the range of normal human experience. Later definitions [modified that understanding of trauma so that it included one's personal response to the event, not simply the event](#). Even then, in the most liberal of definitions, the event still must include harm or threat to the body or the physical integrity of the person. I'm not sure that is the sort of harm this study is addressing. In fairness to Hodges's study, she does not claim that women who report symptoms of trauma should be diagnosed as having PTSD. I'm just entertaining the idea that this might not be the strongest instrument to answer the larger questions she has in mind.



Electronic Book Usage

Amey Fry [published a study](#) a few years ago suggesting that when given the option, many undergraduate students were more likely to come to a library to check out a print book than to check out that same title as an electronic book. The word I noticed most in that article was the word *undergraduate*--showing that digital book usage does not have the traction among younger audiences that we might assume.

Well Fry has published a new piece that suggests [more of the same](#). "Ebook Rate of Use in Ohio:LINK: A Ten-Year Study of Local and Consortial Use of Publisher Packages in Ohio," *College & Research Libraries* 80, no. 6 (2019): 827-842.

TABLE 7 Rate of Use for Print and Electronic Books at BGSU, by Imprint Year													
Imprint Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Other Years	Overall
Use of Print Books Acquired 2008-2009 through 2016-2017, by Imprint Year													
Owned	3487	4444	7338	7024	7300	6874	4551	2869	5068	4298	1748	727	52,577
Used	2257	3333	5529	5281	5183	4491	4764	1412	2424	1750	586	453	32,341
% Use	66%	75%	75%	72%	71%	67%	61%	49%	48%	41%	34%	62%	71%
Use of Ebooks Acquired 2007-2017, by Imprint Year													
Owned	14,840	15,026	16,472	16,859	17,414	19,230	11,371	12,174	10,333	12,547	11,819	26,639	128,114
Used	1,956	2,144	2,063	2,003	2,037	2,404	2,624	1,991	1,214	832	324	6,013	25,605
% Use	36%	36%	32%	29%	27%	26%	23%	16%	12%	7%	3%	21%	20%

In the most recent year (2017), students used 3% of the ebooks purchased vs. 34% of the print books acquired. That's a significant difference.

Her summary:

"The literature has clearly established that users prefer print monographs to electronic monographs, especially for certain kinds of uses, but recent surveys show that a growing minority of users have no preference for one format over the other for some uses and most are amenable to using electronic books when print is unavailable."

Our experience is that patrons want both. When they cite Philo in a paper, they want to read him in the print version of the Loeb Classical Library. When they want to do a word search for how many times he uses the word "Law," they are happy to have the digital version.

For now, ebooks and print are not Mac vs. PC where people are forced to choose, but Netflix and Amazon Prime, where people often want (and have) both. I suspect readers will continue to ask for both as long as they have that option.



A Few More Footnotes

- David Brooks lit the internet on fire by [mocking social media extremists](#). I checked his mentions on Twitter and found a lot of blue checkmarks who didn't exactly appreciate the piece. One line in the final paragraph gets past some of his cuteish mockery of reactives and proves really substantial: "Somehow politics doesn't fill my soul, bring me peace or end my existential anxiety. I have helped create a harsh world in which vulnerability is impossible and without vulnerability there can be no relationship. Relationship is the thing that I long for the most and that I make impossible." Or, as Jesus said, "with the measure you use it will be measured to you."
- "What I do mean by political is that the Christian community is an alternative way of being in the world, an alternative way of ordering relationships, an alternative "body." Actually, it is not only an alternative. It is the alternative--a sign of the new creation that God has inaugurated in the death and resurrection of Jesus." Fantastic piece by Michael Gorman, "[A Letter from Paul to Christians in the US](#)."
- Disciples of Christ [declining at rapid pace](#).



[Subscribe to Footnotes](#)

[Back Issues of Footnotes](#)

FOOTNOTES helps church leaders discover the resources that will improve and sustain their ministries. It will regularly feature interviews, book recommendations, site reviews, and editorials. It is a project of Bob Turner. You can direct any questions or feedback to rjtturner@harding.edu. Complaints can be sent to his [Juno account](#).

UPCOMING
September 22
Failure of Nerve

Copyright © Bob Turner 2019 All rights reserved.

Our mailing address is:
Footnotes: Curated Resources for Ministers
1000 Cherry Road
Memphis, TN 38117

Want to change how you receive these emails?
You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

This email was sent to <Email Address>
[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)
Bob Turner · 1000 Cherry · Memphis, TN 38117 · USA

